



# Integrating U.S. and China Views Can Build Bridges

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My mother was right. I should have paid attention in Chinese school.

People with hyphenated backgrounds are the unique strength of the United States. We are able to build bridges across cultures, enhancing the competitive abilities of our American homeland.

Growing up in the Midwest in the 1970s, I did my best to assimilate. Nobody had heard of multiculturalism. My brothers and I wanted nothing less than to be the same as our neighbors, to eat the same meatloaf they had at dinner and to wear the same sneakers and jeans, as if such things would have ensured acceptance.

On Saturday mornings, we would rather watch cartoons on television than learn about the language and culture of our ancestors in daylong lessons. Yet the world around us changed more than anyone could have imagined.

Nowadays kids of all backgrounds study Mandarin in their regular classes as part of a new global curriculum. The upcoming Olympics in Beijing will confirm the Chinese capital has again become a leading global metropolis.

This week, a nonprofit group called the Committee of 100 released an unprecedented mirror survey of American attitudes toward China and Chinese attitudes toward America. Founded by prominent Chinese Americans such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma and architect I.M. Pei, C-100

promotes good relations between China and America, along with participation of Chinese Americans in public life.

This new study reveals a paradox of hope and fear.

On the one hand, both sides see common interests in trade relations. Americans are more likely to blame their own government, rather than China, for the U.S. trade deficit with China, which hit \$232 billion in 2006. That's the difference between what we buy from China and what the Chinese buy from the United States.

Both sides have largely positive views of one another's culture. Americans also have favorable views about adoptions of Chinese babies, Chinese immigration and intermarriage.

On the other hand, Americans believe trade ranks as the most likely source of conflict, and recent controversies over product safety have lowered consumer confidence in Chinese goods. The potential loss of jobs due to Chinese competition and Chinese human rights issues are issues, too. Three-quarters of Americans believe China is a potential military threat. Almost half of Chinese people believe America is trying to prevent China from becoming a superpower.

Whether by choice or circumstance, those of us who look as if we belong half way around the world must play a leadership role. The day has already come when people from the

United States emigrate to China, not just vice versa. Mutual understanding is not easy, with the different traditions and competing interests. There is no doubt, however, that education incorporating American and Chinese perspectives improves our societies' abilities to work together and our individual opportunities for success.

Well, my mother tells me she's confident I could learn Chinese quickly if I ever wanted to. She says, "You aren't afraid to open your mouth and make a fool of yourself."

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