Who Should Use this Guide?
This guide is intended as a reference for people going to China on a student (x) visa for a period longer than six months. It is particularly relevant for advanced social science graduate students who will conduct field research, though the guidelines and procedures for obtaining permissions apply more broadly. The information included here is based on the author’s personal experience in October of 2009. It should be noted that rules and regulations are subject to change at any time. When applying for a visa, please refer to official guidelines from the Chinese embassy or consulate, and use this guide only for supplemental advice and reference.

Part I: The Student (X) Visa (学生签证)
The first step in the process of obtaining approval to study and reside in China is to apply for a student visa. Whether you will be an officially enrolled student at a Chinese university, or an independent scholar with a research affiliation, you must have a host institution to sponsor your student visa. Start making connections with your host as early as possible to ensure timely approval and delivery of the necessary documents. Please refer to the official guidelines for obtaining this visa at the website for the Embassy of the PRC in the United States: http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/hzqz/zgqz/t84243.htm.

Checklist
- Passport
- 2x2” photo
- Visa Application Form (Q1)
- Foreign Student Visa Application Form (JW201 or JW202) issued by a relevant Chinese government unit (your university host should arrange this for you)
- Admission notice from the Chinese university that will sponsor your visa

You will submit the JW201 or JW202 form with your visa application. It will then be returned to you, and should make the journey with you to China.

**In general, never throw a form away, and keep all of your forms in a safe place. You never know when you will be called upon to present a particular document!
Part II: The Residence Permit （居留许可）

Visitors coming to China on a student visa who wish to stay for a period longer than 6 months are required to obtain a residence permit within 30 days of arrival in the country. Do not take this requirement lightly, as failure to obtain a residence permit within the allotted time will result in daily, and generally quite heavy, fines. Additionally, you will also have to sign a document stating that you broke the law and stayed in China illegally.

There are several steps involved in this process, many of which will require assistance from your host institution.

1. **Register**
   All foreigners who arrive in China must register with a local police station within 24 hours of arrival, and must re-register each time they change residences. If you stay at a hotel initially, the hotel will scan your passport, which automatically registers your arrival and the duration of your stay with the government. If you stay with friends or family or rent an apartment, you must go to the local police station yourself to register. When you go, make sure you have the following documents:

   **Checklist**
   - Passport with valid visa
   - One copy each of your passport information page and your visa page
   - Your lease agreement (if renting)
   - Copy of the landlord’s ID card
   - Landlord contact information

   Once you submit these documents, you will receive a "Registration Form of Temporary Residence". Notice that because you have a student visa, this permit expires 30 days from the date of your arrival in China.

2. **Health Check**
   In order to get a residence permit, you must have an obligatory “foreigner health check” that includes an EKG, chest x-ray, blood test (HIV and Syphilis), and vision and hearing screening. In Beijing, you must go to the new clinic in Haidian. Depending on when you go, you can expect to spend 30 minutes to more than an hour. The clinic hours are 8:30-11:00 am Monday-Friday. Go early for the shortest wait time, and make sure to bring cash with you. You can choose to return to the clinic two days after the check to pick-up the necessary documents, or you can have them mailed to you for 30 RMB.

   **Checklist**
   - Passport with valid visa
   - 2x2" photograph
   - Cash – the check may cost up to 700RMB, and you will pay an additional 30 RMB to have the results mailed to you.
Getting there: The clinic is about 35 km north of the Central Business District, so expect a long commute. You can take subway Line 13 to 西二旗 (xi’erqi), and then take a taxi to the clinic for around 15RMB.

Haidian Clinic
10, Dezhenglu
Haidian District
Beijing
Tel: 82403675; Fax: 58648544

Address in Chinese:
北京国际旅行卫生保健中心
北京市海淀区德正路10号

3. Public Security Bureau （公安局）
The next step is to go to the Public Security Bureau (PSB) that has jurisdiction over your host university’s locale. Before making this trip, you must ensure that the university has registered your arrival and your status as a student with the PSB. In my experience, a representative from my university had to accompany me to the PSB and submit a letter from the director of the school’s Office of International Exchange.

Checklist
- Passport with valid visa
- 2x2” photograph
- "Registration Form of Temporary Residence" issued at the local police station
- Foreigner health check documents
- Original JW201 or JW202 form – not the one that was sent to you for your visa application, but the original form on file at your host university
- Letter from the university attesting to your status as a student there
- Representative from the university
- Resident permit application – fill this out at the PSB
- Cash – at least 800RMB for the permit application fee

When you have all of the correct forms and approvals, the clerk will give you a form to take to a specified bank where you will pay the permit application fee. You must then return this form to the PSB and wait 5-7 days while your permit is being processed. The residence permit takes the form of a passport page, and will replace your student visa.

Note about multi-sited research: If you are conducting research in more than one location (city, province, etc.), you must apply for your residence permit at the PSB associated with your host university, regardless of your initial residence in China. There is no way around this requirement, and you will likely need someone at your host university to help you obtain the correct forms for the permit application, especially if you are living in a different jurisdiction.

4. Re-register at your local police station
With your residence permit in-hand, you must return to your local police station to re-register. You will get a new "Registration Form of Temporary Residence" with an
expiration date that matches your residence permit. Keep this form, as you will need it in the future if you want to apply to extend your stay in China.

**Checklist**
- Passport with residence permit
- One copy each of your passport information page and your residence permit page
- Your lease agreement (if renting)
- Copy of the landlord’s ID card
- Landlord contact information

**Part III: Research Permission**
Students conducting their own research in China – particularly social science research that involves conducting interviews – must also apply for research permission from the appropriate government administrative unit. This permission must be arranged through your host institution. It requires that you submit a Chinese version of your research proposal that includes a brief explanation of project goals and the research plan with study dates and locations. In my experience, I also had to explain how my study was relevant to the work being done at my affiliate research unit. Your host university must submit letter of support along with your proposal to the appropriate government office. The permission document must be carried with you at all times when you are conducting research.

**Note about multi-sited research:** For each study location, you must obtain research permission from the appropriate administrative unit office, including provincial, municipal, autonomous region, and special administrative region units.

**Guidelines and Further Information**

**Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the USA**
http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/default.htm

The embassy’s website provides forms, instructions, and rate information for visa applications.

**FXZL – Up-To-Date Visa Information for China**
http://fxzl.blogspot.com/

This blog provides excellent and up-to-date information about obtaining visas and permits. It also includes discussion sections and FAQs.