WHAT MOTIVATES CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO APPLY TO AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES?

A STUDY OF STUDENT MOTIVATION AS CONNECTED WITH CHINESE EDUCATIONAL HISTORY AND COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE U.S. AND CHINA

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By
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Abstract

Why do so many Chinese students want to study abroad instead staying in China for their college degrees? Why do so many choose to study in the United States instead of other English-speaking countries or other economically developed countries? This thesis will analyze this situation as well as look at aspects of the different study environments between traditional public high schools and private high schools in China as a way to better understand what motivates so many Chinese high-school students to seek admission to colleges in the United States and to explore how this trend has changed over the past ten years. It will study student motivation as a product both opportunity and Chinese educational history.
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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the information used by the U.S. State department and most study-abroad professionals in the U.S., the Open doors Report on International Student Exchange, the United States is the number one destination for students who study abroad, and Chinese students “far outnumber” those from other countries, accounting for 31.2% among all international students in the United States in 2015. The aim of this study is to analyze why more and more Chinese students choose to study in the U.S. instead staying inside of China after they graduate from high school or studying in some other country, and how this trend broadly connects to historical educational trends in China, especially to the ideals of Confucianism. Also, how well are the factors that motivate Chinese students understood by those in the United States? This study will contribute to knowledge in the research field of study-abroad education and also provide a comparative study of Chinese college entrance examinations and American college entrance requirements, thus providing a better understanding of Chinese students’ expectations and needs for post-secondary educational systems.

After a review of the literature on this subject, we will look at the continual growth of Chinese students studying in U.S. every year and how this situation is influenced by Chinese higher education in the past and present and by the U.S. education system.

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1 As the reverse cover of their 2015 report asserts, Open doors is “the only long-standing comprehensive information resource on international students and scholars in the United States and on American students studying abroad for academic credit.” Their information and analysis, published by the Institute of Higher Education and funded by the U.S. department of state, is published in book form; its data analysis is also available on-line in several languages at: www.iie.org/Opendoors/

This guide, the most commonly used by study abroad professionals in the U.S. (Anderson 2016), is also relied upon by Chinese study-abroad professionals advising college-bound students in China (Han 2016). The Chinese site may be found at: http://learning.sohu.com/20160404/n443286875.shtml
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In 2004, Yao noted that China was “the largest source country of overseas students in the world.” By 2015, that situation had not changed. *Opendoors* reports that in 2014-2015 “China remains the top country of origin of international students in the U.S. increasing by 11 percent to 304,040.” This academic year also marked the first time that Chinese undergraduates in the U.S. outnumbered Chinese graduate students (*Opendoors* 16). The number of undergraduate students from China has tripled in the past five years. How far back does this trend go, and what motivates these students?

Bodycott (2007) discussed the rapid increase of Chinese students studying abroad from virtually none in the early 70s to large numbers today:

In 1978, the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping promoted the sending of 860 students and scholars to study abroad. Since then there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of Chinese students studying abroad. In 2007 [sic], there were over 700,000 [sic] Chinese students and scholars studying in countries and regions all over the world (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 353)

Bodycott’s statistical inaccuracies in his article shows another problem: he quotes the Chinese Ministry of Education as saying that “in 2007,” there were over 700,000 students from China studying abroad in institutes of higher education. A closer look at the source he cites shows that it says *from 1978 “through 2003”* there were this many students. That’s an extremely large error to make in a juried scholarly article, and is perhaps indicative of another problem: how to get trustworthy numbers. That’s why resources such as *Opendoors*, which are available in English and Chinese and whose statistical information is available to study abroad professionals

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2The Chinese Ministry of Education document cited by Bodycott is no longer on-line at the same web address but can be accessed via the Wayback machine as well as at its new location. Both are cited in the reference section.
on-line, is so important. From 1978 to 2015, according to the Chinese Ministry of Education (2016), the total number of Chinese students who had studied abroad had increased to 4,042,100 total students with an annual growth rate of 19.06%.³

In his forward to one of the first comprehensive studies of this topic, Rui Yang’s Third Delight: The Internationalization of Higher Education in China (2002), Anthony Welch raises the question of motivation:

What induces students from one culture to leave home and family, and travel to an often distant, and usually unfamiliar setting, in order to further their education? Is it, as was historically often the case, the lure of an excellent teacher, or an illustrious institution? The prospects of securing better living conditions in a more prosperous part of the world, a chance of a better life? Or the means to secure a better job, upon return home? Perhaps all three may be involved, but there is little doubt that the sacrifices, personal as much as financial, made by such individuals are often immense. (xi)

Welch says that internalization also “immediately raises the question of culture, and cultural interaction, in relation to knowledge” (xi). Yang, chief writer in the above-mentioned study, has continued his study of the effects of internationalization and culture in a 2011 article, “Self and the other in the Confucian cultural context: Implications of China’s higher education development for comparative studies.” In that work, he describes how China’s higher educational system tries to “combined Chinese and Western elements at all levels,” and warns “that without an infusion of traditional education values, universities in China risk losing touch with their cultural contexts in their quest for world-class status (p. 337). In other words, he

³ All translations from Chinese are by the author unless otherwise noted.
implies that what motivates so many students to study abroad may have negative cultural consequences, and provides several in-depth examples as later chapters of his book.

Most other studies talk about the tension felt by individual students rather than upon broader cultural consequences. According to Mazzarol (2002), a great number of mainland Chinese students who leave the country for their higher education were influenced by “push and pull” factors. The “push” factors relate to the economic, social and political forces within the source country that make them decide to study abroad and the “pull” factors are associated with the characteristics of the host country that the student selects as a final study destination (Mazzarol, 2001).

According to Belinda V. de Castro & Allan B. de Guzman’s more recent (2010) article looking at motivation and Filipino students, “push” factors refer to the students’ motivation and influences in their personal and family profile, such as their parents’ educational attainment and socioeconomic status and the environmental factors such as peer pressure, examinations, and grades, while pull factors pertain to the education service provider’s attributes such as good service provided by the teachers and features made available through mass media promotion and word-of-mouth activities. Bodycott (2007) points out that with extremely high competition for university places in mainland China, and with the only “one child” policy to accommodate, there is a considerable social if not a highly “familial” push to achieve the very best for that child in the way of gaining a place in a higher education institution.

In 2013, Ashley and Jiang noted that students who choose to return home with a foreign degree or who stay on and work in the host country will both have better prospects and a bright future. As Bodycott said in 2007, Confucian ideals and family’s perspectives are the main factors for students to study abroad. Nowadays, education reform in China still keeps going, but the
background of education has not changed. More and more students decide to study abroad instead of staying home. What motivates Chinese high school students to study abroad has been paid more attention to because American universities have become the most popular destination for Chinese students and the numbers have rapidly grown. In this article, those factors to motivate high school Chinese students to apply to American universities will be stated by introducing the background of education in China, comparing college entrance requirements and processes in China and to those in the U.S., and analyzing Chinese students’ trends in the United States.
Chapter Three: The Background of Testing and Higher Education in China

Yasheng Huang, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology born in China, is one of many educators who have criticized China’s Standardized High School Test. "The entire system is geared toward that one goal – taking a test," said Huang, in a feature article about flaws in the Chinese educational system (Pham 2010). Bodycott (2007) says that Chinese students were critical of the higher education system in mainland China and the most common views were that the programs are “too rigid,” the teaching approaches and learning style are traditional, they “lack a student focus” and the programs do not have “international experiences” (p. 354).

Since many educators have raised concerns over traditional Chinese education, could a failed testing system be considered a part of the consequences of a failed system, or should we expect other reasons? Yang (2011) said China is facing serious challenges such as disparity and quality in education, and questions the success of trying to graft together eastern and western methods of education. But in addition to seeing flaws in the current testing system (or in any system as a whole or in part), shouldn’t one also review where that system originally came from? Doing so will tell us much about Chinese education and what motivates Chinese student to study abroad. Studying abroad may be considered part of one’s cultural history rather than a threat to it. Because of this, we need to look very briefly at the history of education in China as it relates to both testing, Confucianism, and student motivation.

Since recorded history in China began during the Xia Dynasty (1523-1027 B.C), we find records of the importance of education. Throughout this period, school was regarded as a luxury product and only allowed for the royal family and the children of government officials, thus equating education with high social status. Later on, when the teachings of Confucius and Confucianism appeared during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221
access to education began to spread and gradually the beginning of a public education system. But it has still been argued that the Confucian tradition of teaching method was disrupted after his death. This history is extremely well known by all students in China and broadly speaking, Confucianism may be considered simultaneously a philosophy equated with Chinese values, a motivation for those values, a philosophy that encourages open inquiry, and which values learning about other cultures. Chinese writers tend to not discuss this philosophic background as much because it is such common knowledge that excessive citation or reference to Confucianism, in China, would be considered disharmonious to Chinese readers.

S. H. Tan (2011) is one writer who describes for English-speaking audiences how the open-ended pedagogy that Confucius practiced during his time was replaced in the 7th century by the Imperial Civil Examination, a test based upon prescribed classics, writing that followed predetermined styles and ideals that would meet the Emperor’s favor (p.593). Chinese higher education within that period laid stress solely on the training of scholars with an encyclopedic knowledge based on Confucian values, which in practice served only the aristocracy (Yang 2002). This imperial examination system began to take shape around AD 400 and reached its full institutional development in the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907).

During the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279), imperial exams crystallized into patterns that were to last right up to 1911 (Hayhoe, 2004). This exam was given every three years and whomever received the highest scores would be employed by the Imperial Court. The higher a score that examinees received, the more powerful a position they could achieve. Testing well led directly to prestigious positions, for well over a thousand years.

Since those times, success in exams became equated with financial reward, increased prestige, and greater power and fame. Those honors even extended to your family and ancestry.
Chope and Consoli (2007) are among the many writers who have noticed that for traditional Chinese students, confronting or disagreeing with parents can be seen as a sign of disrespect. The family plays the most important role in making decisions for an individual’s career. Similarly, authorities and older individuals are respected, as Leong and Serafica (1995), among others, point out. It’s said in ancient China, “为父兄者，以其子与弟不文为咎；为母妻者，以其子与夫不学为辱” or “Fathers and senior siblings are embarrassed if their children or younger brothers abandon education; women feel insulted if their husbands or sons quit schools.” While the United States may stress individual decision-making by college-bound students, China does not.

Since the imperial exams, like the college entrance exams which followed them, were so high-stakes and the competition was so intense, the process has often been viewed as cruel, one which even could lead examinees into a series of psychological and behavioral problems before and afterwards. Many stories have been written which reflect candidates’ abnormal psychological states caused by these exams. For example, the famous book entitled Rulin Waishi (儒林外史) or The Scholars, written by Jingzi Wu in the eighteenth-century Qing Dynasty, tells a story about a poor scholar, Fan Jin, who took the Imperial Exam lots of times, but failed each of the times. He was jeered and people always made fun of him. At the last time, he finally passed it and achieved the government officer title Juren which meant he was eligible to take the next exam in the national capital. When he heard this news, he couldn’t control his extremely excited feeling and became mentally ill.

Today, China continues to experience the effects of an exam-induced educational system. As a result of the “one child” policy in mainland China, the whole family is ready to sacrifice their lives to make sure their child gets a high score in Chinese College Entrance Exam. According to
Deutsch (2006), studies of single child families in China have shown that the child feels especially responsible for their parents’ happiness and well-being. The child is expected to perform well on the test to ensure success in desire and expectation. Chinese students, faced by their parents’ wishes, suffer huge anxiety from preparing for the exam and desperate disappointment if they do poorly on it. According to the Annual Report on China’s Education (2014), or the Blue Book of Education, statistics released concerning teenage suicides have raised concern among people after dozens of such cases were reported in 2013. Most of the students who killed themselves were in middle school, and they did so mainly because they could not bear the heavy pressure of the test-oriented education system, reported the China Daily on May 14, 2013.

Under this situation, more students and parents begin to compare the Chinese educational system with foreign educational systems and change their perspectives to become more globalized. While the tests may be ingrained in Chinese culture, they are a part of the culture many people find fault with, especially when compared to entrance requirements to colleges in other parts of the world.
Chapter Four: College Entrance Requirements Comparison between China and U.S

College Entrance Requirements in China

I. Chinese College Entrance Exams (Gaokao)

Chinese College entrance exams in China (also called Gaokao) were established in 1952 as a product of the development in college admission tests (Liu & Wu, 2006). To pass the fierce competition of the national college entrance examination is the only way for a student to gain a university place (Yang, 2007). This exam always is taken in summer and it takes about nine hours over a period of two days in most Chinese provinces. All students must take required exams in Chinese literature, Mathematics, and (in most provinces) the English language, and then select an exam in either Humanities or Natural Sciences. The 2015 exam schedule is shown in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Exam Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>June 7th</td>
<td>9:00-11:30</td>
<td>Chinese literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15:00-17:00</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 8th</td>
<td>9:00-11:30</td>
<td>Humanities/Natural Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15:00-17:00</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>June 7th</td>
<td>9:00-11:30</td>
<td>Chinese literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15:00-17:00</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 8th</td>
<td>9:00-11:30</td>
<td>Politics\History\Geography\physics\chemistry\Life sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15:00-17:00</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>June 7th</td>
<td>9:00-11:30</td>
<td>Chinese literature</td>
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<td>15:00-17:00</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Chinese College Entrance Exam Schedule in 2015

For most students, the only thing that can decide if they can enter college in China is the score on the College Entrance Exam. The chart below (Table II) shows the college admission score lines from 2011 to 2015. The full score for Chinese literature, math and foreign language is a 150 score for each, and for humanities and natural science is a score of 300 for each, so 750 total.

Because of this, parents pay a lot of attention to what scores particular schools have, and when possible parents try to send children to schools with better scores. For example, Table 2 is from part of a presentation given by the Director of the Guidance Counseling Office of Beijing Royal School at the Grade 10 Parents’ Meeting in November 2015, and used with permission. Consider if it would be typical for a 10th grade U.S. guidance counselor of a very prestigious school to present national test scores from across the country at a parents’ meeting. In fact, receiving such information is expected in China.
Table 2: College Admission Score Lines from 2011 to 2015, as cited by Han Bing (2015).

According to this table, we can see that scores in Beijing are even higher than other cities and science scores show a greater disparity between cities than in the Humanities. Because Beijing is the home of the most famous universities and the center of education in China, students in Beijing are in a more competitive environment and under more pressure. Of course, it also means that if students attend a premier high school in Beijing they will more likely gain entrance into a good university. Stanley Rosen (2004) points out that “in the past, the standard route to success for the brightest and most ambitious students included entrance to a key high school (and perhaps a key primary school as well), followed by entrance to a key university” (p. 38). But as the economy blossomed, that route changed, so that today “because of the differential effects of economic reforms on different localities, there is no longer a ‘standard route’ up the educational ladder” (p.38). Rosen also has written (2003) on the tensions between internationalization and nationalism among Chinese students, as I do here, and we both agree that for students, the greater concern is pragmatism: what will give the student the best chance at a good future?
I still remember my own studying experience when I was in a public high school in Beijing. Since the first day I stepped into our classroom, our teacher told us we only had one mission during all those 3 years: passing the college entrance exam. Then I started the toughest preparation in my whole life: I separated from television, got up in the early morning and kept studying until midnight, had no holiday, no vacation and no weekend rests. Tests came one after another during every period. The pressure was so heavy that I felt like I was a fish without oxygen. Without any entertainment and social events, the only thing I could do was study, though I don’t know how much of that information I still remember. When the day came that I finished the exam, I finally felt released. At that moment, I thought that no matter what my scores were, I would not try it again.

Since there are more and more voices against Gaokao. China is ready to carry out Gaokao reform: in 2013, for example, the Ministry of Education released a draft reform plan for Gaokao making it known to public that English will be excluded in the future (Peng & Xie 2014). But Gaokao’s market of test-takers still shrinks. According to Beijing News (2015), which is one of the most mainstream newspapers in Beijing, there are fewer and fewer students in Beijing taking Gaokao each year since 2007. See Table 3, which is based on that data. The number of Gaokao students in Beijing has been declined every year.
Table 3: The Number of Students Sitting for Gaokao Exam in Beijing, 2009-2015

That article also analyzed the reason why the number of students has decreased, and concluded: 1) student enrollment in Beijing has reduced; 2) the college admission score line in Beijing is getting higher and higher; 3) studying diversity; 4) the 3rd tier college diploma has gradually become acceptable.

II. College Entrance Requirements in the U.S. (for Chinese Students) and an Example of How One School Helps Students Prepare

Beijing Royal School (BRS), where I work, is a private school in Beijing. There are over 300 hundred students in each grade in senior high school. After they graduate in Grade 12, all of these students will study aboard and most of them will go to America. Compared to traditional testing-based courses in most public high schools, BRS has its own characteristic curriculum designed to meet the requirements of college entrance application system in U.S. Yan Jun, the Associate Director of Teaching Affairs Office of BRS, made a curriculum presentation in Grade 10 Parents’ Meeting in November 2015 and showed: BRS includes traditional courses which have Chinese literature, Politics, History and P.E.; English courses which take teaching with layers that measure and improve every student’s English skills; and academic courses which
cover 21 Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Besides this, to meet students’ needs, BRS also provides another two more dynamic courses: the EtonX modern leadership course from the UK and American K-12 system courses, which not only enrich students’ knowledge, but also get more points for college entrance application.

This different method of preparation has a clearly pragmatic reason: the students who attend BRS intend to study abroad, mainly in the U.S., so the curriculum has that focus. It also allows us to see how Chinese students from elite backgrounds prepare for higher education in English-speaking, as opposed to Chinese, college systems with a focus on the U.S. higher education process.

Unlike the Gaokao application period, which takes only less than one month to apply for universities in China, the period for applying to universities in America is longer and more flexible. Bing Han, Director of the Guidance Counseling Office of BRS, gave an example to parents in his presentation: for new freshmen who will enroll in U.S. colleges and universities in September 2017, the regular application period is normally from September 2016 to January 2017, while the Early Decision/Early Action period is from October 15 to November 15 and Regular Decision Period is from November 30 to January 15. Those dates broadly match what you find on the admission sites of most U.S. college, including UW-Platteville, and though it is not a national policy, college placement tests like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) as well as Advanced Placement (AP) tests are all matched to this timeframe. So we can see the application period for universities in U.S. is from September to January. If students missed one period, they still have chances to apply for it in next period or even the next year.
But what requirements do overseas students need when applying for universities in U.S.?

Han introduced parents to the idea that BRS students need to hand over two critical requirements: Grade 9-Grade 11 Grade Point Average (GPA) and standard language test scores. Also there is another selective requirement: recommendation letters, which may refer to special talents, hobbies, social events etc. Keep in mind that these types of requirements, especially recommendation letters and application essays, are unusual in China.

In fact, when Bing Han spoke to the parents of students at BRS, he reviewed U.S. entrance requirements in a way similar to how I’m comparing and contrasting here. For instance, why would a student want to take an AP (Advanced Placement) course? According to the College Board (2015), with AP, students can get a feel for the rigors of college-level studies while they still have the support of a high school environment. Compared with courses in a traditional Chinese high school, AP classes (of which there are 37 possibilities) provide more flexible and optional learning experiences for students. More importantly, an AP course is like a bridge connecting between high school and college which means taking AP exams can earn college credit and placement.

Nearly all colleges and universities in the United States grant credit and placement for qualifying AP scores. Students can save money and get a head start on their degrees when entering college with credit they have already earned through AP in their high school. For foreign students, applying while having already earned AP credit is also a way to ensure the potential university that the student can do well when the language of instruction is English.

Foreign students applying to U.S. colleges must also take a standard language test, meaning the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Testing System (IELTS). According to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) website, there were altogether 40
TOEFL tests in 2015 in China and they were all arranged on the weekend and covered the whole year. See Table 4.

### Table 4: TOEFL Testing Schedule in 2015

The table was cited by Bing Han, Director of Guidance Counseling Office of Beijing Royal School at Grade 10 Parents’ Meeting in November 2015.

The TOEFL test offers many test periods for students which makes them feel less pressure. If students fail it once, after their hard-studying and effort-making, they still have chances to pass it later during the year. In the Grade 12 Parents’ Meeting in November 2015, Jiutian Cai, the lead teacher for BRS Grade 12, gave a presentation and showed a sample of BRS Grade 12 students TOEFL scores achieved. (See Table 5.)

### Table 5: BRS Grade 12 Students TOEFL Scores in June, September and November 2015

The table was cited by Teacher Cai at Grade 12 Parents’ Meeting in November 2015 and is used with permission.
In this table, we can see there were only 14 students who achieved TOEFL scores above 100 and 140 students below 60 in June 2015, but these numbers were gradually changed in September: the number of students who scored above 100 more than doubled between November and June 2015. Through taking TOEFL tests, students can check their own study methods and find the right way to improve themselves. After making efforts through practice, they will receive success and achieve their values. This system is much more flexible, but it too takes time: so an elite student will still likely have in mind that she or he wants to go to school abroad and probably in the U.S., or else that student would not focus so much on this test.

As mentioned, the process of writing application essays and getting recommendation letters means focusing on individual specialties. Bing Han emphasissed parents should respect student’s own decisions when choosing their major and let students learn and complete their college application process independently instead of helping and managing their children to do everything. Why would he say this? It is apparent if one is from China, but not for those in the United States. Study-abroad students will need to be independent, and not expect that their parents will be able to help.

Next, let’s consider what other ways that Beijing Royal School has researched their students motivation and potentials and how students can map this to the U.S. college application process.

As soon as students enter BRS campus, the Guidance Counseling Office begins to research students’ personalities, develop their interests and explore their potentials. For better understanding students’ spiritual, psychological and physical situation, BRS has created files for every students and keep researching and updating them when students study in BRS. To stimulate interests and develop hobbies, BRS encourages students to actively engage in clubs and activities on campus and inspired students to build more communities. Moreover, school
tends to hold various international events and encourage students to participate in and volunteer them in events, such as a visit from over 300 U.S principals in a delegation organized by the College Board in 2013; over 800 students who attend the International Summer Camp organized by the Beijing Principal government in 2014; and over 800 American students who come to the Summer Camp organized by Confucius Institutes every year.

Besides, to foster leadership development and enhance students experience in cultural, academic, social and political areas, the school collaborates with different and distinguished organizations. BRS invited Nick Bush from the Bush family and Mark Obama, the U.S. president’s brother, to give presentations to students about international politics, economy and cultural experiences; it sent students to participant in international competitions like one hosted by the Royal Society of Chemistry in the UK and another one by Model United Nations; it organized student volunteers to serve in poor areas in western China or to build water supply infrastructures. Of course, this level of opportunity provided to elite students is the exception, but by looking at an exceptional school whose student plan to study abroad, one can see how, within China, Chinese educators help students prepare for college in English-speaking countries. If one looks at a typical high school in the United States, such as Platteville High School, you’ll find lots of student organization. Platteville High School has a Model United Nations, for instance, and many other clubs. Participating in many clubs and extra-curricular activities is “usual” in the United States.

As mentioned, BRS has 100% of its graduates study abroad, and has students accepted at the top tier of international universities. Clearly, its approach to preparing Chinese students to study abroad is successful. Of course most Chinese students do not have such a preparatory opportunity, but as we have seen, more and more students apply to study abroad.
How do U.S. Colleges and Universities Evaluate what Motivates Chinese Students?

When the author asked Donna Anderson, Director of International Student and Scholar Services at UW-Platteville, what she saw as the motivating factor for Chinese students in choosing institutions in the United States, she said “the prestige or rank of the institution … That’s the number one question we get, maybe not from the students, but from their parents. … There is some prestige or benefit to having a degree from the United States when they go back to China, and especially now there is a lot of popularity with the dual degree programs so they have a degree from both places.”

International recruiter Chengwu Xia, who graduated from Wuhan University and now recruits for UW-Platteville, agreed. “Students and their parents see having an international degree as a guarantee of a brighter future. … The biggest motivation is for a brighter future, and the young generation wants to a reliable way to achieve this brighter future, so you see the conviction that a degree from a high-ranking international institution will lead to a brighter future. And compared to all of the universities in the world, for example the UK or Australia or Canada, the U.S. diploma is always highly appreciated and more valued than a diploma from, for example, Canada or another country.”

As a recruiter, Mr. Xia has travelled between the U.S. and China many times. When asked what he sees as the motivating factor for most Chinese students, he answered simply, “a brighter future.” Ms. Anderson added that he was an excellent role model to have as a recruiter because “since he himself is a student who came here from China and go this graduate degree and did his practical training in the U.S., and as someone who is not from an extremely wealthy family and is from a location outside of Beijing. I think having someone who is an example goes a long way.”
Before we return to look at trends in China and return to internationalization as having its roots in Chinese educational history as well as pragmatism, it is important to remember that there is always the exception. Or is there? Is the “exception proves the rule” a more western idea?

When asked if they had ever been asked a totally unexpected question from students or parents when on recruiting trips to China, Ms. Anderson clarified: “Specifically, from students in China? From all the places we have been?” She thought for a moment, then said: “I can’t think of any. I feel like we always get anticipated questions.”

This contradiction is an important one. We’ve talked about how BRS emphasized to parents that students must become more individualistic. But that is because U.S. colleges expect that and expect students to take care of themselves. Chinese colleges, as we have discussed, have a very long and intense history of valuing education, but that is not the same as valuing individualistic expressions.
Chapter Five: Chinese Students’ Trends in the United States

According to Ministry of Education of China’s website, the number of Chinese students studying abroad raised to 523,700 in 2015, which increased by 63,900 at the rate of 13.9% from 2014. From 1978 to 2015, a total number of 4,042,100 Chinese students and scholars studied in 108 countries and regions all over the world, covering almost all disciplines, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Total Number of Chinese Student Studying Abroad 1978-2014
Recreated from Error! Hyperlink reference not valid., compiled from data from the Ministry of Education of China.

The trend of Chinese students study abroad has been one of increasingly growth and the number of Chinese students already has doubled in this decade, especially for younger students. According to Open Doors 2014 carried out by Institute of International Education in U.S., students from China now make up 31 percent of all international students in the United States, and the increase has been particularly at the undergraduate level. Chinese student enrollments increased by 17 percent in total to more than 274,000 students, and increased by 18 percent at the undergraduate level. In 2014/15, China still remains the top country of origin of international
students in the U.S., increasing by 11 percent to 304,040. The increase in undergraduate students from China in 2014/15 was the first year ever that Chinese undergraduates outnumbered Chinese graduate students. The comparison can be seen in Table 7. Meanwhile, the U.S. remains a favorite destination for Chinese students.

![Comparison between Chinese undergraduates and Chinese graduate students in U.S.](chart.png)

**Table 7: Comparison of Chinese Undergraduates and Graduate Students in the U.S.**

In Table 7, we can see the growth of Chinese graduate students has been getting slow since 2013, but undergraduate numbers are still increasing rapidly. The trend for younger Chinese students to study in U.S. gets more and more popular.

The first options for Chinese students when picking major in U.S. (as shown in Table 8) are Global Economic Integration, Business and Management, Engineering and Math, and Computer Science.
Meanwhile, some potential fields related to energy sources have become popular, such as Physical and Life Sciences and Social Science, because environment protection and energy savings has been put on the table for global development.

But why are universities in the U.S. so attractive to Chinese students? As already mentioned, it goes back to the idea of equating education with a bright future. The U.S. owns an advanced international educational system. American universities occupy a large proportion of the places in world university rankings and it also fosters the most Nobel Prize winners. Also, according to the Institute of International Education, the United States offers a diverse array of top quality higher education options and scholarship opportunities can be found in over 4,000 accredited colleges and universities, ranging from large research universities to small private colleges, state universities, community colleges, specialized and technical institutions and everything in between. Also, and different from other countries, the major doesn’t need to be decided during the first and 2nd year in many American universities and it gives students more time to think and
plan what they are interested in and which major are more suitable for them when entering universities.

According to Bodycott (2007), students who study abroad want to ensure future “economic” security as a result of improved employment opportunity and with the possibility of immigration (p. 363). After graduation, there are more options for students to choose and they also gain a higher educational background than those inside China.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to show the key factors for Chinese high school students in the decision to study abroad in U.S. by comparison of the similarities between Chinese parents in an older time and a new China influenced both by a history of exam-taking that increasingly has lost favor, and by a philosophic history of Confucianism that is still much embraced. We then looked at the contrast between college entrance processes between China and U.S.

On one hand, Chinese children are encouraged to honor and respect their parents and their wishes since the time of Confucius. Students who are under huge pressure from the Chinese college entrance examinations are encouraged to study abroad by their parents to get a higher quality education and international experience. As Confucius said: “Walk 10,000 miles, read 10,000 books.” Studying abroad can open students’ eyes, allow them to experience different cultures and build their quality of independence and persistence.

On the other hand, the U.S., as one of the most powerful countries, owns top universities and one of the strongest academic environments in the world. Studying in the U.S is considered as a way of gaining a better education and ensuring future economic security. By illustrating college entrance systems between U.S. and China, we can see education in the U.S. provides a more flexible, freer and more open atmosphere for students. Studying in the U.S. also meets parents’ expectations for their children’s needs. Students who study abroad will have a brighter future, whether they work abroad or return to China.

Meanwhile, since China is practicing a “Going Out” policy in the twenty-first century, education reform has sped up its steps. Many choose to work abroad for awhile and then return, because to most Chinese students, China will always be home. Students are encouraged to going outside to enhance their social competitiveness and contribute to be international talents and they
are also expected to introduce more advanced ideals and high-quality educational resources back to China. In this way, studying abroad has become part of the Confucian ideal of an excellent education.
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