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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS
PROCESS IN CHINESE AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
(TITLE)

BY

Xiaoran Xu

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

April 2004

YEAR

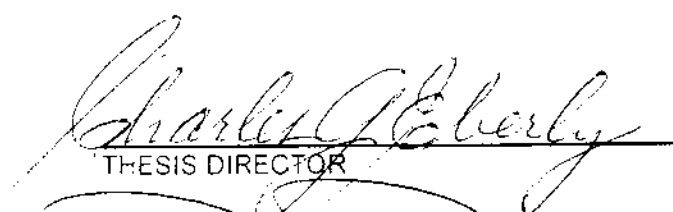
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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS IN
CHINESE AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Xiaoran Xu

April, 2004

Committee:

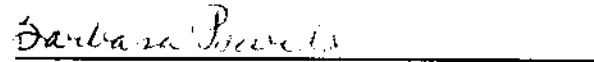
Dr. Charles G. Eberly, Chair

Dr. Barbara M. Powell

Dr. Richard L. Roberts



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Charles G. Eberly", written over a horizontal line.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara Powell", written over a horizontal line.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard L. Roberts", written over a horizontal line.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love to my husband and my parents in China.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Charles Eberly, committee chair, for his continued support, encouragement, and helpful suggestions throughout the study.

To Dr. Barbara Powell, committee member, for her kindness and assistance on the arrangement of tables used in the thesis paper.

To Dr. Richard Roberts, committee member and department chair, for his leadership and willingness to provide suggestions on conducting this research project.

To Beth, Lisa C., and Lisa T., for their friendships and help in my work.

To my family members in China, for their unconditional love and support.

To the many students who were willing to participate in the study.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the similarities and differences between the college admissions process and related academic and social areas in China and the United States so that both U.S. admissions officers and Chinese students have a better understanding of the admissions and recruitment process. This study attempted to increase the provision of adequate support for Chinese students to study abroad, such as information about immigration policy, financial aid, culture shock, and living facilities for Chinese students who study in the United States.

Interviews with the participants were conducted to compare cultural backgrounds, collegiate experiences, family influences, and values between China and the United States. Five Chinese participants were recruited to participate in this study by means of email and telephone contact in the United States. The researcher collected data through face-to-face interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The overall findings of this study suggested several themes associated with recruiting and admitting Chinese students in colleges in the United States. Students' experiences on campus indirectly demonstrated their needs for cultural awareness and understanding on the part of admissions officers in the United States. One theme was dealing with the differences between the admissions process in China and the United States, and the second major theme was educating students about the cultural issues associated with study in the United States.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the study	6
Research questions	7
Significance of the study	7
Limitations of the study	8
Definition of terms	8
Summary	10
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
History of higher education in U.S	11
History of higher education in China	16
Summary	22
III. METHODOLOGY	23
Design of the study	23
Participants	23
Data collection	24
Interview	25
Data analysis	26

Summary	27
IV. RESULTS	28
Research Question # 1	28
Research Question # 2	32
Research Question # 3	35
Research Question # 4	37
Summary	39
V. DISSCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	40
Discussion	40
Recommendations	43
Conclusion	44
REFERENCES	46
APPENDIXES	52
A. Interview Protocol.	52
B. Informed Consent (English)	55
C. Informed Consent (Chinese)	57

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of the admissions process in selecting the most qualified students for undergraduate education has been important within higher education for many years. Admissions, one of the student affairs functions, introduces prospective students to the history, academic programs, and student life of an institution. Kuh (1977) defined admissions as

those policies and procedures which provide for students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education. All admissions policies are based on the inherent belief that the educational experience offered by the institution will benefit certain individuals (p. 6).

One principal issue admissions officers must manage is how to best select eligible applicants from high school graduates. The admissions officers' responsibility is to promote the institution's undergraduate program, verify application packets, and make admissions decisions wisely by assessing that an applicant will become a successful student. Admissions officers are aware that applicants are anxious to learn about undergraduate academic and social experiences; therefore, they introduce applicants to information about student services and activities, as well as academic programs. Admissions officers relate all the elements of undergraduate life, including a rich description of college life, to any applicant in a brief introduction.

In addition to managing undergraduate admissions, admissions officers strive to create an optimal learning environment which includes multicultural exposure. As a result, admissions officers communicate with international applicants to facilitate their

enrollment. Since international students are of special interest to admissions officers, these professionals must develop oral and written multicultural communications skills to assist international applicants who typically contact admissions personnel via email or telephone. To describe and illustrate life in the United States to all the international applicants before they apply to an undergraduate school is truly challenging. One university that has made significant progress in recruiting international students is the University of Michigan, where more than 4,000 international students are enrolled. The University of Michigan admissions website contains specific information to assist international students in overcoming the challenges of admissions and enrollment (<http://www.admissions.umich.edu/prospective/international/index.html>, 2004). To realize the meaning and importance of admissions procedures helps international students play cooperative roles with admissions officers in the college selection process.

With the rapid growth of college enrollment numbers in the United States since World War II, admissions officers have placed increasing importance on an applicant's academic proficiency and personal interests. In order to increase the pool of qualified candidates, one of the techniques used by admissions officers, particularly since 1960, has been to apply marketing and recruiting strategies borrowed from the business sector to educational institutions (Hossler, Bean, & Associates, 1990). In 1900 roughly one percent of eligible traditional college age students were enrolled in higher education. But a century later, more than fifty percent of high school graduates now go on to higher education. In that time, higher education in the United States changed from a privilege for the few to an expected right for the many (Komives, Woodard & Associates, 1996).

Origins of American Higher Education

Higher education in the United States began with the seventeenth century founding of Harvard University. Although the original concept of the American college reflected the model of Oxford and Cambridge in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, American higher education evolved into a unique collegiate enterprise that serves both elitist and egalitarian objectives. In understanding the history of higher education in the United States, it is necessary to realize that “quantitative changes have signaled qualitative changes” (Komives, et al., 1996, p. 4). American higher education includes both highly prestigious elite institutions with selective admissions, and open enrollment institutions meant to provide mass educational opportunities for all applicants.

According to a National Education Association report (in Bouge & Aper, 2000, p. 24), the purposes for higher education in the United States can be defined as follows:

1. to provide opportunity for individual development of able people;
2. to transmit the cultural heritage;
3. to add to existing knowledge through research and creative activity;
4. to help translate learning into equipment for living and for social advance;
5. to serve the public interest directly.

In order to serve these five purposes, every year admissions officers strive to select qualified applicants among high school graduates based on test scores, high school achievement, and personal interests. The advising skills, programming activities, and advertising strategies used in recruitment directly affect the success of admissions efforts. Not only admissions, but retention of students throughout their college experience is now a benchmark of a successful institution. Therefore, the concept of enrollment

management has emerged as one of the most important strategic issues for institutional planning. Bean (1990) stated that enrollment management influenced other areas within an institution, such as budgets, financial aid, student services, career planning, and so on. "Enrollment management is a central part of institutional strategy, and the strategic planning of enrollment management exists under the umbrella of institutional strategic planning" (p. 36).

Because of the worldwide reputation of higher education in the United States, more and more international students are attracted to and willing to study there. According to "Open Doors 2003," the Institute of International Education's (IIE) annual report, about 586,323 international students currently attend colleges and universities in the United States (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=35931>, 2003). During the period assessed in the report, Asian students consisted of over half (51%) of all international enrollments, and among them, about 64,757 students were from China (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=36523>, 2003). The focus of the present study was to learn about the similarities and differences in the college admissions process that Chinese students applying for undergraduate education experience in China and the United States.

Origins of Chinese Higher Education

China, one of the world's first great civilizations, has encouraged education since the feudal ages. The preliminary Chinese concept of higher education was established over three thousand years ago. In ancient China, the first school was founded by Confucius, who had a great influence in education. Du (1992) described Confucius as "the leading thinker and educator of the time" (p. 2). China experienced over sixty dynasties from 221 B.C. to 1911 A.D. when the end of the Qing dynasty eliminated imperial rule. Beginning

in the early part of the twentieth century, Chinese higher education started to imitate modern western university models to establish a new educational system. According to Duan (2003), Peking University was the first modern institution, founded in 1895, and it became one of the top universities by the 1950s. After the modern Chinese government was established officially in 1949, the number of colleges and universities grew quickly. For political reasons, Chinese higher education gradually moved toward the "former Soviet Union's model"

(<http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2003/03nd/03ndduan.htm>, 2003). Many comprehensive universities were segregated into "single disciplinary universities such as universities of literature and arts, universities of engineering, medical colleges, and so on" (<http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2003/03nd/03ndduan.htm>, 2003). With the open door policy in Chinese society, the most crucial innovation in Chinese higher education was a new process for admitting students. The four modernizations supported by the People's Republic of China after 1949 were modern agriculture, modern industry, modern science and technology, and modern national defense. To meet the needs of a developing society, changes were made in the admissions process of colleges and universities to allow for greater expansion in enrollment. The National College Entrance Examination became the official way to enter into universities in 1978. Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader, emphasized that "education must meet the requirements of our country's economic development"

(<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1190.html>, 2004). According to the Ministry of Education in China, there were 1022 regular colleges and universities in 1998, excluding 965 institutions for adult students. Chinese high school graduates have

more opportunities to enter into higher education institutions as the result of the Ministry of Education's decision to increase admissions numbers. Approximately 2,750,000 students were enrolled in 2002, and enrollment increased to 7,500,000 in 2004 (<http://www.edu.cn/20010101/21828.shtml>, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

Analyzing the admissions process a student must undergo is one of the first steps needed to compare and contrast post-secondary education in the United States and China. The primary goal of the present research is to encourage interest in study at U.S. institutions of higher education by understanding the similarities and differences between the college admissions process and related areas in China and the United States, so that both U.S. admissions officers and Chinese students have a better understanding of the admissions and recruitment process. A secondary goal is to increase the provision of adequate support such as information about immigration policy, financial aid, culture shock, and living facilities for Chinese students who study in the United States. To accomplish these objectives, individual qualitative interviews were conducted with five Chinese undergraduate students currently enrolled at three different campuses in the United States. All of the interviewees were graduates from high schools in China, and were admitted by American colleges as first-time, first-semester undergraduate students in recent years.

Research Questions

The following research questions were related to the purposes of this study:

1. What are the major differences and similarities between the undergraduate college admissions process in China and the United States?
2. What cultural issues must U.S. admissions officers respect as they recruit Chinese students?
3. What is the relative involvement of Chinese international students in U.S. college academic and out-of-class student life?
4. What information do Chinese students studying abroad need from U.S. college admissions officers?

Significance of the Study

This study illustrates a general picture of the college admissions process both in the United States and in China. The results of this study should provide Chinese high school graduates, who are encouraged to study overseas, with specific information about the significant differences in the college application process in the United States and in China. Additionally, results of this study should promote Chinese cultural and educational awareness among college admissions officers in the United States.

The qualitative methodology used in this study provided a first-hand resource for further discussion about facilitating the college application process for Chinese students who want to study abroad in the United States. Analyses of the participant data should help to increase the number of Chinese students applying for undergraduate admission to U.S. colleges. Specifically, individual difficulties and cultural barriers that hinder the college application process were addressed and approaches to their solution were

suggested in the discussion chapter. Finding the means to overcome these difficulties and barriers will be important to college admissions officers as they recruit international students from China in the coming years.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the higher education admissions process in the United States. Other processes of institutional and academic administration, such as curriculum development, counseling services, diversity, and finances were not addressed, as they were beyond the scope of this study.

The limited number of interviewees does enable the researcher to understand the particular problems and cultural issues these students experienced as they made the transition from Chinese secondary education to higher education in the United States. No attempt should be made to generalize these results to the potential pool of Chinese students interested in study abroad in the United States. This study demonstrates the importance of professional admissions staff awareness of admissions procedures, recruitment strategies, and methods to attract more Chinese high school students to take their undergraduate education in the United States.

Definition of Terms

Several terms used in this study require definition.

SAT: The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a measure of verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities used by colleges and to assess an applicant's readiness for college (Hossler, Bean, & Associates, 1990).

ACT: The American College Test (ACT) is a standardized college entrance examination that measures knowledge and skills in English, mathematics, reading,

and science reasoning and the application of these skills to future academic tasks (Hossler, Bean, & Associates, 1990).

HSGPA: The High School Grade Point Average (HSGPA) presents a summary of a student's overall academic record in secondary school (Komives, Woodard & Associates, 1996).

Recommendation Letters: Letters of recommendation indicate applicants' classroom performance in terms that are not represented by grades. Teachers may comment on the type of contributions applicants make in class, the written and oral work applicants have presented, and applicants' potential for studying at a particular college (<http://www.umich.edu/~icenter/intlstudents/finaid/ugfinaid.html#III>, 2004).

Statement of Purpose: A statement of purpose is an essay that is intended to acquaint the admissions committee with applicants' experiences, strengths and weaknesses, and writing ability (<http://www.statementofpurpose.com/>, 2004).

TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required for all international students. The TOEFL helps institutions make better decisions about prospective students' English language proficiency and readiness for academic coursework (<http://www.ets.org/toefl/overview.html>, 2004).

National College Entrance Examination: The National College Entrance Examination is a standardized test for high school graduates in China. College admissions decisions are made based on total scores of this examination (Ma, 1997).

Eras in U.S. Higher Education: Cohen (1998) organized the history of U.S. higher education into five eras:

Colonies Era (1636-1789)

Emergent Nation Era (1790-1869)

University Transformation Era (1870-1944)

Mass Higher Education Era (1945-1975)

Contemporary Era (1976-1998)

Summary

The goal of this study was to determine the perceptions of Chinese students about similarities and differences in the higher education admissions process between China and the United States. A second goal of the study was to assist admissions officers in the United States to understand various aspects of cultural differences, particularly as they apply to college students, between the United States and China. Understanding cultural differences should help to encourage successful student college searches and helpful student recruitment strategies.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Higher Education in U.S.

During the Colonial Era (1636-1776) in the United States there were no written tests required for college admission. Because of chronically low enrollments, unqualified students were encouraged to attend universities and exempted from some admissions requirements. Admissions requirements were not widely used for admissions purposes until the Emergent Nation Era (Cohen, 1998). During the Colonial Era, admissions requirements included a knowledge of written and spoken Latin and Greek; whereas knowledge of algebra, history, geography, and English were added as requirements gradually. Cohen (1998) stated that "toward the end of 19th century the United States Bureau of Education collected data on admissions requirements from 475 institutions and found that of the 432 institutions offering bachelor of arts degrees, 93% were requiring Latin and 73% Greek" (p. 116-117).

With the appointment of the first Deans of Admissions in the 1920's, the systematic admissions system still in use today emerged. The modern admissions office, with the help of computer technology, can do more analysis and research about identifying the potential markets available to an institution for recruiting purposes (Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988).

The Emergent Nation Era, the period from 1790 to 1869 was viewed as "territorial expansion" when North and South opposed the national policy toward "agrarian or manufacturing interests" (Cohen, 1998, p. 55-56). The number of colleges increased at a faster rate in the Emergent Nation Era than in the Colonial Era. Cohen

(1998) described a change of models for the college system, which was from French and British ideas to the German university model. The reasons were that “the German universities tended to attract major thinkers, while in France and England few of the intellectual leaders were associated with the colleges” (p. 63). Students from different family backgrounds started attending colleges and universities in this era, especially students from lower and middle socioeconomic classes.

At the beginning of the Emergent Nation Era, college admissions criteria still included Latin, Greek, and arithmetic. Algebra was preferred by some of the prestigious colleges and universities in the eastern region of the United States. Geography was not added until it was first required by the University of Michigan in 1841, and Harvard followed in 1847. Although the general list of subject requirements in admissions did not relate to specific interests of applicants, “most of the colleges did not strictly enforce the requirements” (Cohen, 1998, p. 66). College admissions requirements broadened during the early years of the Transformation Era (1870-1944). Combining certain subjects expanded the difficulty of being admitted by some leading colleges. An essay to assess adequate proficiency in English was used in the process of admissions for the first time during this era.

After World War II, the total higher education enrollment “doubled its prewar level, as over two million veterans attended in the six years following the war” (Cohen, 1998, p. 182). From 1945 to 1975, called the Mass Higher Education Era, the widely accepted belief was that everyone had equal opportunity to go to college. The turning point in the ratio of enrollments in public and private higher education emerged in this

era. Cohen illustrated the “ratio of public to private institutions changed from 35% to 44% of the total; that of enrollments went from 49% to 79%” (p. 187).

During the Contemporary Era (1976-1998), one goal of selective undergraduate admissions programs was to create a balanced class that was academically able yet sufficiently diverse to promote a stimulating environment (Kinkead, 1961; Greene & Minton, 1975). Tests such as Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) scores, rank in class and grade point average (GPA) became the general objective standards for assessing admission qualifications in most U.S. institutions of higher education. The objective of the admissions process was to attract high school students to enroll in the colleges, and then to provide the best academic and living environment for students so they were retained to college graduation. Several schools adopted sophisticated enrollment management strategies in order to obtain the best enrollment and retention rates (Dennis, 1998). Bogue and Aper (2000) stated that the application of affirmative action in college admissions caused conflict and argument in admitting minority and non-traditional students.

Choices of Prospective Students

Hossler, Branxton and Coopersmith (1989) discovered few studies that analyzed how prospective students recognized “institutional characteristics” (p. 38). A variety of issues influenced the choices of prospective students during the beginning of their search for colleges. In the process of searching, students from a low socioeconomic family background may not be able to obtain as many resources as those from a family with high socioeconomic status. Hossler et al. (1990), based on the work of Cibik (1982), stated that “the information desired from such sources includes indications of academic quality,

cost, career availability, criteria for awarding financial aid, and the helpfulness of instructors” (p. 59). Although financial aid was listed as one of the most important issues in selecting a college for families low on the socioeconomic scale, Cibik’s research indicated that this influence, as a whole, was modest across all students.

Student academic proficiency was also associated with college selection. Students with high ability are likely to prefer attending selective and prestigious colleges where most matriculants are out-of-state students (Dahl, 1982). Students with low assessed ability in learning, on the contrary, are likely to enroll in in-state colleges that may not be competitive or selective. Another possible influence is family educational background. Hearn (1984, cited in Hossler et al., 1990) stated that “as parental educational level increases, students are likely to apply to and attend more selective colleges” (p. 60). Students with highly educated parents thus tend to select private institutions as their first-choice college.

Enrollment Management

Dennis (1998) defined enrollment management as “forecasting trends that will likely affect higher education and using effective research to effectively plan for the future” (p. 7). Enrollment management includes a large number of subunits, and “international recruitment and international educational collaborations” were stated as two admissions issues that admissions officers should know well (p. 10). In enrollment management, such as activities as collecting data for effective research and doing analyses help admissions officers acquire adequate planning statistics and serve as a connection with other student affairs professional offices. Among them, international education and financial aid offices should play major roles in planning strategies for

recruiting international students

(<http://www.admissions.umich.edu/prospective/international/index.html>, 2004).

International Recruitment

The increasing number of international students enrolling in U.S. higher education challenges the way admissions officers carry out recruitment strategies. International students who study and get involved on campuses in the United States typically experience cultural shock, lack of support, living in an unfamiliar environment, and some forms of discrimination. How admissions officers recognize the level of international students' social discomfort in studying abroad, how admissions officers demonstrate the advantages of their institutions to international students, and how they assimilate strategies used in recruiting domestic students are keys to successful international student recruitment (<http://www.admissions.umich.edu/prospective/international/index.html>, 2004).

In order to understand cross-cultural differences, admissions officers must define and differentiate the following concepts properly: culture shock, acculturation, and assimilation. Tran (2001) explained, based on the work of Hener and Weller (1997), that culture shock was "a normal process of psychological adjustment to an abrupt transition for one culture to another" (p. 247). Brink and Saunders (1976) divided culture shock into four phases which included the honeymoon phase, disenchantment phase, beginning resolution phase, and effective function phase. Brilliant (2000) defined acculturation as "the process of becoming acclimated to a new culture" (p. 579). The definition of the third concept, assimilation, is related to successful acculturation and was defined by James (1997) as "a mode of acculturation associated with lower levels of stress" (p. 99).

One example of changing an international recruitment strategy is the name switch from “college” to “university” among small U.S. liberal arts schools. One of the reasons that Arcadia University personnel stated for changing the institution’s name from Beaver College was to reflect “a peaceful environment for thought and learning” (<http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/11/20/embarrassingbeaver.ap/>, 2004); however, such behavior indicates the awareness of reputation in global higher education, since international students usually determine academic quality by scrutinizing the names of institutions in the United States. Schools with “university” in the name are likely to be preferable and considered much more comprehensive or prestigious than those with “college” in the name (<http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/11/20/embarrassingbeaver.ap/>, 2004).

History of Higher Education in China

Confucius, a famous Chinese philosopher and educator, first established the private school system over 2,500 years ago. His sayings and dialogues dominated Chinese learning and influenced modern Chinese higher education in many aspects. His belief and political ideas became one of the dominant rules in ancient Chinese feudalistic society. His idea of education was that “comprehensive education made a complete man” (<http://www.confucius.org/lunyu/edbio.htm>, 2004). His main thoughts about education heavily influenced the major principles and administration of society as well as the thinking of the ancient Chinese people. In the following dynasties, scholars in the private academies were restricted from discussing and debating in public, therefore, self-study and individual research were highly encouraged (Du, 1992). Confucianism was recognized as one of the most important philosophies in the world. After the death of

Confucius, Chinese education strictly followed Confucian disciplines during over sixty dynasties until the early twentieth century.

Three thousand years ago, the Chinese civil service examination, which was the only examination for all scholars, became popular in the ancient Chinese empire. Chinese scholars had the opportunity to take this examination, and were honored with official titles by emperors in Peking. The early rules of the examination seemed not to focus on testing proficiency until about the year 2200 B.C. "The emperor of China is said to have examined his officials every third year" (Anastasi, 1982, p. 30). Dubois (in Anastasi) stated that a large number of men "prepared for the tests, often for decades, and relatively few achieved final success" (p. 30). Anastasi (1982) developed a statement, based on the work of DuBois (1960), that at the beginning of the Chan dynasty, formal examination procedures were established, and test subjects were limited to certain areas, such as music, archery, writing and arithmetic. This form of examination was adopted by most of the emperors and lasted for over 1300 years. However, like many other forms of examination, the civil service examination eventually encountered reforms about 1370 A. D. The well-established examinations were divided into three levels, whose locations were district, provincial capital, and Peking. Dubois quoted Martin's explanation of the names of final contestants, who were "Budding Geniuses [district], Promoted Scholars [provincial], and Ready for Office [Peking]" (p. 31). Several European countries improved their political bureaucracy by using Chinese Civil Service testing as a model. Dubois pointed out that "the Chinese examination system was abolished as a reform measure in 1905" (p. 31). When the imperial examination system was completely abolished, a new higher educational system began to blossom.

During the Opium War from 1840 to 1842, Chinese culture was invaded by the Western powers, which enhanced the renovation and reform of Chinese traditional concepts of education, especially higher education. The immediate change was to promote Chinese learning as the essence of education and to include Western knowledge as a means to its utilization. Western ideas influenced Chinese higher education in various ways, such as helping to establish the institutions, guiding the management of education, and encouraging Chinese scholars to study in western countries. Many of these scholars graduated from institutions in the United States and started to actively participate in educational reform movements after they returned to China. Two of these reforms were the introduction of a choice of major and a system of course credit which were adopted mainly from American higher education (Du, 1992). However, Chinese adoption to foreign collegiate systems in China involved colleges in countries other than the United States. According to Hayhoe (1984), Chinese higher education borrowed selectively from various collegiate systems such as English, German, French, and Japanese.

Chinese modern higher education started at the beginning of the twentieth century at the end of the last dynasty of feudal Chinese society. Beijing University, originally called Peking University, was officially founded in 1898 by the imperial government in the Qing Dynasty. Peking University changed its name from "Jing Shi Da Xue Tang (the Metropolitan University) of the Qing Dynasty" (<http://www.pku.edu.cn/eabout/pku-history.htm>, 2004). With the contributions of a famous scholar as President, Mr. Cai Yuanpei, Peking University "developed into the country's largest institution of higher learning by 1919, with 14 departments and an enrollment of more than 2,000 students" (<http://www.pku.edu.cn/eabout/pku-history.htm>, 2004).

Gao (1985) reported that an "education system was established officially in 1922 and 1924, which required 6 years of primary school, 3 years of secondary school, 3 of high school, 4 to 6 of undergraduate school" (p. 28-29). These regulations were maintained until P. R. China was founded in 1949. In 1952, a tremendous change in the Chinese higher education system resulted in the establishment of academic departments and specialized institutions following the Russian model of higher education.

During the time of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, Chinese higher education experienced severe conditions and social deconstruction. Students quit school, "roamed the country disseminating Mao Zedong thought", and became involved in "factional fighting" (Gao, 1985, p. 14). The admission criteria for higher education changed from the unified entrance examinations to recommendation on the basis of class. Applicants whose family members were peasants, soldiers, and workers were to be considered first as candidates in college. The length of schooling was shortened, and high school students were required to reeducate in rural areas for two years before they graduated. In general, the initial concept of higher education was distorted during this period of time till the recovery of the college entrance examination in 1978 (Du, 1984).

Compared to the evolutionary changes in higher education admissions procedures in the United States since the eighteenth century, Chinese higher education officials made their major policy decision about the admissions system in 1978. From that time, a new country-wide College Entrance Examination procedure was developed, and is still in use today. This College Entrance Examination is the only standard applied to evaluate the eligibility of applicants into the Chinese college admissions system (Ma, 1997). Not only

Chinese admissions policies changed following the period of Cultural Revolution.

Hayhoe (1996, p. 122) explained two vital changes in the early 1980s. One change was a new freedom over the content of academic programs and the latitude to establish new academic programs; the other change was the restoration of research as a central mission and responsibility of the university. Many changes also took place in the internal management of the curriculum, including the development of a modified credit system.

Gradually some universities have sought alternative ways to recruit new students for special majors, such as evaluating high school GPA or developing a different comprehensive examination. Several advantages of the national college entrance examination can be noted. First, admissions officers did not need to travel to all the schools and persuade students to apply. Their jobs were primarily to select the excellent students from high schools according to their entrance examination scores and to help them enroll in the university. Second, this admission system encouraged only the highest scoring students to enroll in the universities. Since the competition was intense, every year approximately twenty percent of Chinese high school graduates obtained admission to universities in China. Therefore, only highly qualified students as reflected on the admissions test scores can be admitted into Chinese higher education, and most of them cherish this opportunity for further study. Some of the students within the top twenty percent will be interested in study abroad, as will many in the remaining eighty percent of higher education applicants who will also apply for study abroad.

Chinese Student Adaptation to U.S. Higher Education

In the higher education environment, Charles and Steward (1991) discussed adjustment problems that many international students had to deal with such as “loneliness, homesickness, language difficulty, discrimination, financial problems, and depression” (p. 173).

Chinese students deal mainly with problems of adjusting to the demands of academic performance and a new cultural environment in the United States. Cultural differences are reflected in tasks such as opening a bank account, signing an apartment lease, and applying for credit cards. Performing such daily tasks successfully help to enhance cultural sensitivity. Cultural sensitivity (Charles et al., 1991) includes “opening of the mind to different worldviews, as well as seeking a deeper understanding of one’s own worldview” (p. 174). Given this fact, international students must maintain close contact with their academic adviser, professors, and American students in order make better adjustment in their lives abroad. It is necessary and helpful for international students to acquaint themselves with various student support services available on campus and in the university community and know how to use these services as well. Unfortunately, many Chinese students seldom seek the assistance of student support services staff members even when the students encounter troubles on campus. According to Yeh and Inose (2002), the reason Chinese students were reluctant to use mental health services was that “discussing personal problems with others may be deemed culturally stigmatizing” (p. 70) to their families.

Another potential barrier to the academic performance of Chinese students is language. If their comprehensive English skills are not strong enough, students will

struggle academically. Luzio-Lockett (1998) reported that “language restrictions and other situational factors are seen as being detrimental to academic performance, having a knock-on effect on the ‘self-concept’, and on the overall educational experience, respectively” (p. 209). Differences in educational systems, learning styles, and teaching methodology may influence student preparation for classes and examinations. Chinese students eventually need to learn the pattern of communication skills between students, administrators and professors that conforms to the typical academic culture on U.S. campuses.

It is recommended that not only officers from international programs should be aware of potential adjustment problems but admissions officers should also anticipate potential problems and provide adequate advising and support before perspective Chinese students are enrolled in colleges in the United States.

Summary

This chapter reviewed aspects of the history of higher education both in China and the United States, and identified adjustment problems Chinese students normally encounter after they enroll in colleges in the United States.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study used a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research, according to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1996), “seeks a complete understanding of a social phenomenon through the researcher’s total immersion in the situation” (p. 20). One of the categories used in this study was participant observation, which included interviewing, observing, and participating with the interviewees. In this qualitative study, the role of interviewer was the typical research role identified in Macmillan and Schumacher (2001). A focused interview technique was used. The advantage of a focused interview is that it is more flexible and open to researchers than distributing survey questionnaires.

The main objective of this study was to examine, compare, and contrast the different admissions processes to undergraduate schools in China and the United States. In addition, an important goal of this study was to inform admissions officers in the United States about the experiences of Chinese high school graduates in the process of application to institutions within the United States.

Participants

This study was conducted by interviewing five Chinese students enrolled in undergraduate schools in the United States during the fall semester of 2003 and spring semester of 2004. The distribution of institutions where interviewees enrolled consisted of three public schools and two private schools. Some of them had already been admitted by universities in China before they enrolled in college in the United States, while some

of them had never experienced the Chinese admissions process. Three participants had graduated from college, the fourth was still working on her Bachelor's degree, and the fifth currently was admitted by the graduate school for advanced study.

All five participants for the study came from large urban areas in China. Three students were from Beijing, the capital of China, with a population of fourteen million. One student was from Shanghai, the economic center of China, with a population of seventeen million. The remaining student was from Shenyang, a city of four million people in Northeastern China.

Table 1

Location of Students

Students	Gender	Location
Jan	Female	Beijing
Linda	Female	Shenyang
Michael	Male	Beijing
Sara	Female	Shanghai
Tom	Male	Beijing

Data Collection

The procedure for contacting the participants was as follows. First, an email explaining the topic of research and asking for participation was sent to each of the participants, who were selected from an available list of Chinese students studying in the United States. Second, the researcher contacted all of the participants after they replied to

an email request for research volunteers. When each participant expressed a willingness to participate, a face-to-face appointment was made. The interviews were scheduled separately at a time and location convenient to each participant. The consent forms (Appendix B) and protocol interview questions (Appendix A) were distributed to the participants before the interviews were conducted. All interviewees were introduced to the purpose of this study and asked to sign an informed consent document in which they agreed to participate in the study. The document emphasized that respondents' participation in this study was voluntary and they could choose to withdraw at any time. In order to clarify any confusion about translation, Chinese language versions of consent forms and protocol interview questions were also available in the process of interview.

Interview

Interview protocol questions were designed according to the purpose of this study. These questions involved student personal background, admissions standards differences, language proficiency, choice of major, curriculum interests, contact with admissions specialists, and needs of financial aid. Data were collected using a "standardized open-ended interview" (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2001, p. 444). All the participants answered the same questions in the same order, which reduced the flexibility of the interviewer to probe and ask follow-up questions. However, the fixed questions and order enhanced the consistency of each interview. The interview consisted of twenty-six questions, including personal background questions, and a description of the questions. Most of the interviews lasted from one to two hours. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed afterwards. Each interviewee received a copy of their interview transcript and provided feedback with suggested changes. The final version of the transcript contained "accurate verbatim

data and the interviewer's notation of nonverbal communication" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 450).

Ethical issues were considered at the beginning of the data collection, when the purpose and methodology of this study was explained to each participant. A consent form was distributed to each respondent, and the anonymity of their names, schools, and personal information in the final document was guaranteed.

Data Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) stated that data analysis is an "ongoing cyclical process integrated into all phases of qualitative research" (p. 462), and "coding is the process of dividing data into parts by a classification system" (p. 467). The data from transcribed interviews were coded as soon as the interviews were completed. The second step of data analysis was comparing the codes according to their categories. This process required arranging the codes into similar settings. The final step was accumulating thoughts and explanations from the data, and determining themes emerging from the data.

During the data collection procedure, initial drafts of transcripts were sent to each interviewee for member checking. However, because of their academic schedule, few suggested further questions or provided thoughts about the data. Therefore, follow-up in-depth questions based on their initial interview responses were created to obtain more detailed information. This part of data analysis was critical because these interviewees were challenged to clarify any ambiguity in their answers.

Summary

A qualitative interview methodology was used to collect data on the college admissions experience of five Chinese students who enrolled in undergraduate higher education in the United States. Appropriate themes related to the admissions process were developed from an analysis of the verbal data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter contains the themes that emerged from in-depth interviews with five Chinese students who enrolled as first-time, first-year undergraduate international students in a U.S. institution of higher education. Some of the themes that emerged were beyond the process of admissions itself, and addressed family influence, cultural background and personal values.

Research Question # 1: What are the major differences and similarities between the undergraduate college admissions process in China and the United States?

Admissions Application Experiences

These students' responses indicated that most of them had experienced or understood the Chinese admissions process after they graduated from high school. All of them could generally summarize the two different admissions processes between Chinese and U.S. higher education according to their personal experiences.

The first difference was the academic requirements. Linda pointed out that "U.S. undergraduate schools had strict requirements in English while Chinese schools usually did not." She also considered English proficiency as her biggest challenge when going through the admissions process in the United States. Chinese institutions of higher education base admission on scores of the National Entrance Examination, while American institutions base admission on academic grades, entrance test scores, and English proficiency as reflected in the TOEFL scores. For international students, proficiency in English was the most important criterion, or admissions hurdle, that they faced.

The second difference was selectivity. Since the Chinese National College Entrance Examination is quite competitive, only a small percentage of high school graduates are admitted by Chinese colleges, so more students are pursuing opportunities to attend college in the United States. Michael emphasized this point in the following way: "In most public schools (United States), in my opinion, admission is not that competitive. Students will have chances to go to college no matter if they are smart or not." Michael did not take the National College Entrance Examination in China because his parents believed that this would distract from his energy in preparation for the TOEFL examination.

The third difference was the individualized evaluation procedure typically used in U.S. higher education. Jan noted that the "admissions process in the United States evaluated a student's ability and potential in various ways, such as high school performance, extra-curricular activities, recommendation letters, personal statements and SAT scores." The admissions procedure in China depends almost entirely on the results of the National College Entrance Examination. In sum, the interviewees viewed the differences in the admissions application experiences based on standards of admission and provided specific examples of the differences.

College Choices

Each interviewee's journey to study abroad began in their Chinese high school when they started considering the United States as a location for their higher education. Almost all of them admitted that higher education in the United States had a good reputation in the world. However, the actual process of application was one of the most complicated and difficult procedures they had ever experienced. When Sara recalled the

reason why she chose a public school in the United States, she said: "The bachelor degree from the United States was more appealing than other countries although I had two admission letters from one of the European countries."

Among five interviewees, Tom made a direct statement that "studying in the United States seems like my family tradition" because his three cousins studied in prestigious schools in the United States. All five interviewees made a direct connection between the quality of higher education and their college choices.

Academic Background

In terms of academic background and major choices (see Table 2), two students had studied in private schools, and three of them attended public schools in the United States. All students were enrolled in majors involving heavy use of mathematics at institutions with prestigious reputations.

Table 2

School and Major of Students

Students	School	Major
Jan	private	Computer Science
Linda	public	Accounting
Michael	private	Computer Information Systems
Sara	public	Engineering
Tom	public	Enginering

Students selected their U.S. academic major by considering their Chinese high school experience, language proficiency, and future career plans, and they limited their U.S. college search to schools that offered their major choice. These students applied for admission at more than one institution in all cases, and one person applied to as many as ten colleges and universities.

Each of the interviewees had a strategy for applying for admission according to their academic strengths. For example, Michael stated: "I did not apply for the Tier 1 colleges because my English scores are not high enough. I applied to seven institutions and I finally got admitted by two private institutions and one public institution." In comparison with Michael, Sara was admitted to all the schools she applied simply because of her outstanding language skills and high scores in mathematics. She reported that among the ten institutions to which she applied, two of them were prestigious public schools. She made her final selection based on the relatively safer environment of an institution located in a small town rather than a large city. For Sara, safety issues were an important element in her choice of institution.

When students talked about the reasons for selecting their majors, they expressed a preference to work both in the United States and China. Linda stated her plan in this way: "I had a few years of accounting experience when I was in China. Therefore this is probably the main reason I chose Accounting as my major. Another important reason is that there is a broad job market in the United States for accounting people to select where they want to go." Michael, a computer information systems major, said: "The primary reason I chose it [CIS] was that it incorporates computer knowledge with a good business foundation."

Another finding was that most students understood how to evaluate their ability in studying different subjects. For Jan, choosing computer science was because "it is very easy for computer science majors to get a well paid job after graduation and I know I could do a better job in a computer science major than a humanities major."

Research Question # 2: What cultural issues must U.S. admissions officers respect as they recruit Chinese students?

Family Background

Parents' Education. Both Tom's and Jan's parents had obtained Master's degrees in China. These two participants stated that their parents expected them to earn at least a bachelors' degree either in China or the United States. Sara's parents did not go to college, but her parents always encouraged her to be involved in higher education. Michael's father had a bachelor's degree from a famous university in China; thus Michael knew that he was going to college from the time he was in elementary school. The fifth student said that her parents "did not have a very well educated background," but she did not elaborate on her comment.

Financial Support. When asked who financially supported their education in the United States, all five students responded with similar answers, which were parents and themselves. Three students had part-time jobs on campus; however, their earnings were not enough to cover either tuition or fees. Michael worked in the campus dining center because his employment benefits included his meals. He said: "I knew that it was not easy for my parents to pay such a high tuition and fees, so I decided to earn some extra money to pay my living expense."

Sara identified herself as a busy and social student. She quit her job as a tutor after one semester. She explained her reasoning as, "I did not earn much money as a tutor because of my busy schedule; I decided to give up after one semester. I think my parents can understand it." Thus, she decided to depend entirely on her parent's support. Like Sarah, Linda depended on her parents for financial support.

Jan found various ways to support her education in the United States. She said: "I paid my tuition by financial aid, student loan and part-time job salary. My parents paid my living expenses." In Jan's case, both she and her parents came to the United States, so she was able to access financial aid information easier than the other participants in this study.

Tom, whose cousins were also studying in the United States, suggested that he received financial support not only from parents, but also from his extended family.

Parental Influence

Interestingly, students did not use their parents as a primary source of information about their decision to study abroad. Three students asserted that their desire to study abroad was based on personal interests and the social trend to study abroad in Chinese society. Linda stated, "I decided to study in the U.S. to improve myself." According to Sara, her parents did not pressure her to study abroad. She said, "My parents told me that they could support me to study abroad, but they cannot give me further information about it. I must find resources on the internet and public library." Michael's parents also supported his idea to study abroad.

However, Jan and Tom did not have a free choice to study in the U.S. For Jan, she "didn't choose to study abroad" and "came to the U.S. with my parents without any other

options.” Tom had a similar experience and commented that his cousins “studied in prestigious schools in the United States”, thus his parents believed that Tom “can perform well in a prestigious school in the United States.” So, Tom was expected to study abroad by his family.

Personal Values

These students reflected that their personal values included the influence of family of origin, education, relationships, and the impact of Western cultures. Table 3 showed a list of values expressed by the interviewees.

Table 3

Cultural Values

Students	Values
Jan	Education in China, family, relatives
Linda	Parents, friends, American roommate
Michael	Interpersonal relationships, friends, culture heritage
Sara	Personal belief, Chinese tradition, western culture
Tom	Parents, religion, friends, Chinese culture

One notable finding among these students was their focus on Chinese traditional values that were acquired from their parents, friends, and others. They expressed their struggles over whether to accept Western cultural values in the United States or try to keep their own heritage. This struggle was particularly apparent during their first year of study in the United States. Tom said: “Sometimes I played with my American friends,

sometimes I felt comfortable to celebrate holidays with Chinese friends.” This kind of confusion existed among all of the interviewees. Since most of their parents never studied in a different country, it was difficult for them to discuss this topic with family members.

The following comment by Jan could summarize some of their feelings: “When I talked with Americans I tried not to think about those conflicts. I would act naturally.” No matter how difficult it was, all of them stated they were proud of keeping traditional Chinese values in their mind.

Admissions officers must be aware of these cultural, personal and family values when they recruit students from China. As admissions officers become conversant with cultural issues, specific strategies addressing student needs can be designed to recruit students more effectively.

Research Question # 3: What is the relative involvement of Chinese international students in U.S. college academic and out-of-class student life?

Curriculum Interests

The results illustrated in Table 4 showed that five students chose elective courses according to their personal interests and the need to improve their language abilities. They also selected elective courses in order to develop a better understanding of Western culture.

Table 4

Elective Courses

Students	Elective Courses
Jan	American History, Sociology, Psychology and Economics
Linda	Astronomy, Finance and Business Law
Michael	Spanish, Organizational behavior, Business speech
Sara	Speech, Sociology
Tom	Speech Communication, philosophy

Linda described the difficulty level of elective courses in the following way: "My personal challenge is all sorts of English tests." Jan said, "The reason that I chose these elective courses is because I would like to have a better understanding of all humanities subjects and I did not want to limit my knowledge only in my major subject. I liked these courses because after taking these courses I had a better understanding of the world and the society we are living in. These courses helped me develop a more knowledgeable and well-rounded personality."

Desire for Class Involvement

Interviewees were asked about whether they were willing to participate in class activities. Most of them reported feelings of desire to participate actively in class discussion.

Linda described her first experience of group work in her freshman year as "unforgettable feelings." She said: "At the beginning, I was anxious to giving any idea to

our project. I never had such motivation of learning in my high school because I am a shy girl." Some interviewees specifically mentioned an interest in a leadership role in college.

Reasons for their participation in class activities included wanting to learn about interpersonal communication skills, to better understand cultural differences, to reduce the stress and frustration of language barriers, and to make some friends in college. Speaking about understanding American culture, Jan said, "For example some lecture materials involved discussion of U.S. TV programs, community events and famous public figures, which was difficult for foreign students to understand. I tried to ask or answer questions in my classes whenever it was possible in order to get more information." Referring to interpersonal relationships with American students, Tom noted that one of the reasons that he decided to attend fraternity activities was as a good learning experience about campus life in the United States. Michael stated two reasons that he became a member of his campus international student organization: "One is simply an interest in making more friends on campus. Secondly, I think leadership skills, which are also valuable among new generation students in Chinese universities, help me establish self-confidence and self-esteem in the United States." Sara was not very involved with student organizations, but her dream was starting a new association with a group of Asian or Chinese female students on campus.

Research Question # 4: What information do Chinese students studying abroad need from U.S. college admissions officers?

Consultation

Students in this study showed a high level of desire to contact admissions officers in the United States before they applied for admissions. In order to gather information

about study abroad, most of them described Internet searches as the most important way to access application information from institutions in the United States. Linda and Jan agreed that online resources and library print resources were adequate to help them understand the entire application process. Students knew about the *U.S. News and World Report* website that lists the prestige ranking of U.S. institutions of higher education (<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/cohome.htm>, 2004). The students went online to find out the rank of undergraduate institutions in the United States, and then they narrowed their search down to ten schools where they thought they might be admissible. Tom was the only participant who contacted U.S. admissions officers during his college search process. His cousins suggested to him to email admissions officers in order to obtain the latest admissions policies. He mentioned that the reason he applied for his current school was because of an admission officer's suggestion from a nearby institution. He said: "One admissions officer mentioned several schools close to his that also met my interest in engineering. I applied to one of them and was accepted."

Michael did not get through the process by himself. He went to a private study abroad consultation company in China to seek help. He noted, "When I first decided to study in the United States, I had no clue how to apply to undergraduate school. Thus I paid for a consultation and they could evaluate my academic status, and provide me with a lot of information." Such study abroad consultation companies have been operating in China for about five years, and advertise their services on Chinese high school and college campuses.

All of the participants tried to email Chinese student associations in each school for additional information about student academic and social life. While each institution's

website contained data about living expenses, tuition, and housing costs, these web pages were not developed for the needs of international students. Many international students prefer to do their own cooking, and so they prefer to live in off-campus apartments rather than on-campus residence halls. The Chinese student association websites helped the applicants in China to contact persons within their own culture that could explain campus social and academic life on their own terms. For example, the students maintained there is a difference between the room and board expenses on many campus websites, and the actual expenses that Chinese students experience. Many frequently asked questions about life in the United States are answered in the Chinese language on such websites (http://www.eiu.edu/%7Ecssa_eiu/, 2004).

Sara agreed that communicating with both Chinese students and admissions officers helped her process of application. After she came to the United States, her parents and she went to the nearby undergraduate school to seek help in admissions. She said, "It was my first time to speak with a staff member in a college in the United States. I even did not know what kinds of questions were appropriate to ask. Normally, we seldom spoke with admissions officers in China. So I thought they could not provide me any information because it might be confidential."

Summary

This chapter discussed the results of in-depth interviews with five Chinese students about their study abroad admissions application experiences. Four research questions were addressed and examples of student experiences in their voice were provided.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

This qualitative interview study examined the experiences of five Chinese students who went through two different cultural environments in their higher education. The results of this study, as discussed in chapter four, have explained not only admission process differences between two cultures, but other aspects related to the application procedure such as language proficiency, parental influence, communication skills, and personal values. Due to cultural differences, Chinese students must work to learn about American culture, lifestyles, campus setting, safety issues, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class before they apply to undergraduate schools in the United States. The following is a summary discussion reflecting the researcher's findings.

First, this study indicated that parental expectations were no longer the key element in study abroad decisions for most of the Chinese students. In the traditional Chinese family, parents always make important decisions for their children, especially when high school graduates apply for college. Currently, many Chinese high school graduates have several options to enter higher education. Institutions overseas have started to attract more Chinese students to study abroad. The first Sino-foreign campus of a European university will be established in a small city in southern China next year (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/91226.htm>, retrieved April 16, 2004).

All Chinese students who participated in this study preferred exposure to the Western lifestyle by studying abroad after they graduated from high school since their parents were able to provide both financial and emotional support. Their decision-making

was based on their interests in academics and their future career plans in China. All participants expressed a willingness to work as a liaison between Chinese culture and western culture. They were able to evaluate their own academic performance in high school and make careful plans before applying for admission.

Secondly, effective interpersonal communication skills during the admissions application process allows Chinese students to conquer their confusion and difficulties. All participants communicated with both admissions officers and other Chinese international students in the United States during their college search. Their technology skills allowed them to explore sufficient resources via the Internet. For instance, in the year Sara applied for admission, she was the first and only Chinese high school student who took the SAT test in her hometown. She obtained this chance by calling and arguing confidently with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) center in the United States. These students learned how to gather information from and ask appropriate questions of admissions officers and members of the various campus Chinese student associations. One participant explained that he found out the web page link of the Chinese student association from the international admission information website. It would be advisable to include contact information for Chinese student organizations in order to help admissions officers answer questions related to cultural differences.

The major issue all participants agreed with is the importance of English language proficiency in the United States. When the interviewees were asked to describe their challenges of studying in the United States, everyone remarked about the importance of English language skill. Jan stated two challenges she faced in the admissions process:

One is two-thirds of the SAT scores are heavily dependent on English vocabularies and I couldn't get a high SAT score. Secondly, I had to write a personal statement in English, with my limited English writing skill, I was not able to write a very attractive statement that could catch reader's attention.

In addition lacks of language proficiency hinders their confidence in class involvement, subject understanding, and communication among American students.

One factor to consider in this study was the relationship between "value orientation" and "psychosocial adjustment" among Chinese undergraduate students in the United States (Florsheim, 1997, p. 146). These Chinese students enrolled in U.S. undergraduate institutions after the graduated from high school in China, and due to the cultural differences between their country of origin and country of study, they required continuing emotional support from family and friends at home (Chiu & Ring, 1998; James, 1997). In the United States, the general academic excellence of Chinese students has gained them a reputation as a "model minority" (Yeh & Inose, 2002, p. 69), however, due to the myth of the model minority, students' psychological support needs are often ignored by researchers, institutions, and admissions officers in the United States.

To illustrate the influence of cultural values, all five interviewees indicated that their parents served as their role models for their direction in life. Tom described his goal of becoming an engineer because his father was a successful engineer and owned his own business company in China. Since Linda's mother was an accountant in China, Linda decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in accounting. Jan's talent in learning computer technology came from her parents' contribution to support computer program systems for the Chinese government. Another significant finding of this study was the connection

between the value for Chinese students of their academic life and their involvement in U.S. campus social life. Because of the need to develop leadership skills, interpersonal communication experiences, and western cultural understanding, it was crucial for these students to explore and balance traditional and modern values of Chinese undergraduate students. This study examined how conflicting Chinese and western values impacted the academic and career performance of Chinese students.

Although specific recruiting strategies used by admissions officers were not addressed in these findings, application of these strategies still must be considered according to students' major choices and academic interests. Admissions officers can help Chinese students to evaluate their academic credentials and provide practical information about how to select courses in college. Most Chinese students seldom use campus services to consult academic and life problems. For example, the results of this study showed that none of the interviewees knew how to participate in student associations and Greek life. Only one of them tried to join fraternity activities at the beginning of the freshman year, but he soon gave up because the social life interfered with his need to study. It was hard for all participants to balance well their academic life and social life on campus at the same time.

Recommendations

A longitudinal study of adjusting to college life in another country for Chinese students might be useful to identify other factors which are correlated with the application process. Areas not addressed in this study, such as social life and problems on campus, may need to be considered in the future. Thus, the following recommendations were directed to researchers.

1. This study examined the experiences of Chinese students on campus in the United States. A research design could include the perceptions of admissions officers who had experiences in recruiting a large number of Chinese students.
2. Some participants in this study had already graduated from undergraduate institutions in the United States. Future studies should include Chinese students who are current undergraduate students on various campuses in the United States, in order to more effectively capture developmental differences across time.
3. Little is known about the reason why participants did not get admitted to other institutions. Comparing the successful application and the failed application may help researchers analyze specific recruiting strategies in depth.
4. All five participants of this study were from large cities in China. A research involving students from small cities can be conducted in the future.
5. This study did not explore issues of gender differences in study abroad decision making procedure. Similar studies should be conducted addressing male and female differences in reaction to the admissions application process.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore challenges associated with the collegiate experiences of Chinese undergraduate students in the United States. The results of this study indicated that the number of problems and difficulties most Chinese students went through were not completely considered by admissions officers in the process of recruitment. These five Chinese students provided important resources. From a research perspective, this study contributed not only to U.S. admissions officers in understanding cultural differences, student adjustment problems, and Chinese recruitment policy, but

also helped Chinese students who are interested in study abroad to prepare successful U.S. admissions applications.

This study also attempted to find relationships between parental influence, language proficiency, the idea of study abroad, and the choice of major of Chinese students. Due to the development of technology, Chinese students no longer acquire study abroad information solely from parents and peers. Most of them could directly access the Internet and search for helpful application resources about any institution in the world. These Chinese high school graduates were encouraged to study abroad by their parents. Further, their parents were willing to support them both psychologically and financially.

Lastly, in terms of helping admissions officers and Chinese students deal with student concerns, this study investigated factors that indirectly hinder the effort of Chinese students to obtain admission and study abroad in the United States. Involvement in academic and out-of-class student life reinforces student success in another country. Results of this study, based on an in-depth interview with five Chinese students representing a diverse segment of higher education, should not be extended to all Chinese students studying abroad in the United States. For instance, visa requirements, college admissions regulations, and government policies change frequently, so many questions in preparing to study abroad must be solved on an individual and immediate basis. Global citizenship will be increasingly important in the future, so much research remains to be done in facilitating international educational experiences for all students.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background information questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born and raised?
3. What is your major in the United States
4. What are your parents' occupations?
5. How do you describe your values?

Standard differences:

1. Explain your personal challenges when you applied for admission to university in the United States?
2. Explain the biggest institutional challenges you confronted when you applied for admission to university in the United States?
3. Please explain the application process to enter into higher education if you were in your country.
4. Compare and contrast the university admission process you experienced between your country and U.S.
5. What influenced you to apply to U.S. universities after September 11th?
6. How did you develop a desire to study abroad?

Language:

7. What's your experience understanding and communicating in English in the classroom?

8. Are you interested in doing individual presentations, group discussion, and other projects?
9. How do you evaluate your reading, writing, and speaking skills in English?

Major choice:

10. Explain the reasons why you chose your major, and how you went about doing it.
11. Who helped you to decide your major? Yourself, parents, or teacher ...
12. To how many colleges and in what academic majors did you apply?

Curriculum:

13. Have you ever compared the required courses in your major?
14. Describe the courses that interest you most in your major.
15. Name any elective courses you registered for which are not related to your major.
What were the reasons you selected these elective courses, and in what ways did you like the courses?

Interest:

16. What were your favorite courses in high school?
17. Do you have any hobbies related to your current major in college? Tell me about them.
18. What kinds of books/topics/subjects do you like most? What about these books/topics/subjects hold your interest?

Consultation:

19. Summarize your experience in applying to (name) university.
20. Who helped you in the application process?

21. Could you find enough resources in your country about studying abroad? In what way?

22. In which ways do you prefer to contact admission officers in the U.S.?

Financial Aid:

23. How do you support your study in U.S.?

24. Who supported your study in U.S.? (family burden)

25. Do you have any financial aid now-undergraduate?

26. Do you have any part time jobs on campus? If so, tell me about what you do on campus in your job.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Xiaoran Xu. I am a second year graduate student at Eastern Illinois University. You have been asked to participate in a study concerning your experiences going through the college admissions process in the United States. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to become involved with a one-two hour individual interview.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential, and transcripts will only be available to my Professor, Dr. Charles Eberly, and thesis committee members, Dr. Richard Roberts and Dr. Barbara Powell. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. You may withdraw from or end this interview at any time.

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this project, you may contact Xiaoran Xu at cgxx@eiu.edu. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Xiaoran Xu

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above material and agree to participate in this study.

_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Printed Name	_____ Date

One copy for participant, one copy for the researcher, Xiaoran Xu.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT (CHINESE VERSION)

我是东伊利诺依大学教育学院的一名硕士研究生。我邀请你参加关于美国大学申请入学过程讨论的研究。这份研究是为我的毕业论文搜集资料。如果你愿意参加，你将会接受一到两个小时的采访。

采访内容和个人看法绝对保密，只有本人及答辩委员会成员才能查看有关数据。你的真实姓名不会出现在文章中。在采访过程中，你可以随时终止回答任何问题，也可以在任何时候终止采访。

如果你有任何疑问请联系我本人(cgxx@eiu.edu)。感谢参加此项研究。

许笑然