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The Studying Abroad Fever: A Case Study of the Rise of the Middle Class in China and
International Education

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree master of arts
in Education

by

Shanshan Jiang

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Studying Abroad Fever: A Case Study of the Rise of the Middle Class in China and
International Education

by

Shanshan Jiang

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Carlos A. Torres, Chair

The economic prosperity and socialist education reform in China have bred a new social group of middle class in recent decades. The Chinese middle class, increasing in economic power and having well-connected social networks now joins the tide of international education by sending their children abroad. This thesis investigates the motivations behind the fervent education investments of the emerging middle class, and discusses the possible implications of this trend for the future of China. Through an extensive literature review of previous works and a qualitative study of Chinese middle class students at UCLA, this thesis concludes that the lower quality of China's higher education, credential inflation in the job market of China, and the international recognition

of overseas institutions are the main reasons for the “studying abroad fever”. This scenario, as is predicted in the thesis, will contribute to the social reproduction of the middle class families in the future.

The thesis of Shanshan Jiang is approved.

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2013

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Introduction

International education has been a buzz-word for centuries around the world. Originating from the European tradition of replicating the French university model in other countries, international education began in the Medieval Ages on the European continent (Altbach 1998, 3-4). During European colonial expansion, the Paris model of higher education was adopted by other continents and its legacy persists up to today (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Entering the Twenty First Century, the internationalization of education witnesses an aggressive expansion alongside the globalization process. The inevitable trend of globalization is marked by the integration of research from different countries, the popularity of English as the *lingua franca* for scientific communication, as well as the growing international labor market for scholars (Altbach and Knight, 2007). This trend, argued by Altbach (1998), “reflects the emergence of the knowledge society, the rise of the service sector, and the dependence of many societies on knowledge products and highly educated personnel for economic growth” (290). Responding to the knowledge economy of the contemporary world, global capital is now overwhelmingly invested in knowledge industries such as higher education. Bearing the economic, political and societal forces of globalization, the internationalization process incorporates policies, practices of academic institutions, and individuals. These transformations have contributed to the growing number of international students in the U.S. From 2000-2001, 547,867 international students entered the U.S for education, and the number jumped to 764,495 in the academic year of 2011-2012 (Institute of International Education, 2013). Currently, student mobility stands out as the most prominent factor of the internationalization of higher education.

However, the landscape of the student origin in the trend of internationalization of higher education has undergone a dramatic change. As European and North American countries recede in exporting students abroad, Asian countries have stolen the stage in terms

of student emigration. Before 2009, India was the biggest student emigration country with 94,563 students going to the U.S for higher education, and together with China and South Korea, they comprise nearly half of the total international enrollments in U.S. higher education institutions (Institute of International Education, 2013). Eventually, China dethroned India in 2010, when the country sent 285,000 students overseas. Accounting for nearly 22 percent of the total international student population, China now has the biggest student diaspora abroad (Institute of International Education, 2013).

This “study abroad fever” in China has attracted attention from numerous scholars worldwide. Many scholars concede that the “fever” is triggered by multiple factors, such as the general economic prosperity in China, the global internationalization trend of education, the marketization of higher education in the host countries, and the less satisfactory education quality in home country (Biao and Shen, 2009; Hvistendahl, 2009; Zha, 2012). Economic growth, without a doubt, is one of the most important impetuses of international students mobility. Between 1980 and 1990, only a small number of government-supported Chinese students went abroad. But now, self-funded Chinese students account for over 90 percent of the total diaspora. An important reason behind this phenomenon is the recent expansion of the Chinese middle class. According to the *Annual Report on the Development of China's Study Abroad* (2012), big changes in family background of overseas Chinese students have taken place and international education is no longer a privilege of the elite families. In the early 2000s, international students from non-elite families only accounted for 2 percent, but in 2010, the number rocketed to 34 percent (Wang and Guo, 2012). The burgeoning middle class in China is gradually transforming the landscape of international education with their fervent educational investments on overseas studies. This new social group, with its increasing power in economics, politics, and social status, deserves an in-depth investigation of its expansion and its pivotal role in the future of China's society as well as the rest of the

world. In this thesis, I will mainly explore the reasons for the expansion of the Chinese middle class, and the “studying abroad fever” among this burgeoning social group, as well as the possible influence of their educational investment on the social stratification in China’s society. To fulfill this goal, I will first develop a theoretical framework, which concentrates on the definition of the middle class, the transmission of the cultural capital, and the push-pull variables in international education. Then, I will propose my problem statement, followed by four specific research questions. Next, the significance of the study will be analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives. The succeeding section of methodology discusses the primary and secondary sources that I used to answer the research questions. Findings from historical documents and the qualitative study will then be analyzed in detail in the Findings Section. Finally, I will discuss the implications that are drawn from the research, which aims at unveiling the middle class’ education expectations and the possible future impacts on China’s society.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I rely on three theories to illustrate the expansion of the Chinese middle class and their choice on international education. First, I will provide an extensive review of some prominent theories of the middle class. Different theoretical orientations from sociologists in the West and the East will be presented with their merits and limitations discussed. The second theory that joins the framework is the cultural capital theory, which is closely related to the social stratification and education issues. The rigor of cultural capital theories, particularly its insights on the middle class and education equity, lend great significance to the framework building in this thesis. Finally, I will provide a review of the Push-Pull theory, a well-known paradigm in the analysis of the international migration and student mobility. The three theories, with their strong validity and significance in the field of social stratification and international education, will lay the foundation for my thesis.

Theories of the Middle Class

Theoretical orientations of social classes have undergone constant changes since the nineteenth century. As the market economy thrives with capitalism, social stratification began to change and discussions of classes soon followed. Classical Marxism leans towards the exploitative essence of capitalism and develops a class model which is primarily based on the relationship of social groups and the means of production. The Marxian class model draws capitalists, who are the owners of the means of production, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor force as commodity in order to survive, as two hostile camps (Marx, 1867). The middle class which is the class below the ruling class and above the proletariat, is supposed to consist of small trade people, shopkeepers, retired tradesmen, and so forth. According to Marx (2009), the middle class will gradually merge with the working class, or the proletariat as industrialization proceeds.

Max Weber is another prominent figure of class model. Weber unveiled the decisive influence of the economy on class stratification, and argues that the class is constructed by the market system (Hans and Wright, 1958). For Weber, the term “class” refers to “any group of people. . . [who have the same] typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences, insofar as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the same of income in a given economic order” (Hans and Wright 1958, 181-182). Hurst (2007) offers a lucid explanation of Weber’s class paradigm by articulating that “class, at its core, is an economic concept. It is the position of individuals in the market that determines their class position. And it is how one is situated in the marketplace that directly affects one’s life chances” (202).

Later scholars, relying on the Weberian “life chance concept”, provide a variety of revisions to the classical Weberian class paradigm. Among the Neo-Weberism theorists, British sociologist John H. Goldthorpe marks one of the greatest figures whose middle-class paradigm is highly influential on the research of middle classes across the world. The middle class, as Goldthorpe (1982) argues, is the “service class” consisting of professionals, managers, and self-employed petite bourgeois. Different from the traditional serving class or working class who sell labor power for salaries, the “service class” is “not in a wage relationship with capital, but rather in a contractual one for which a salary is awarded” (Goldthorpe 1982, 162-185). In other words, the members of “service class” are neither the capitalists since they are not the real owners of the capital, nor the workers because they do not directly create value by their work. Their position at the intermediate level serves the employer’s best interests and at the same time, control values created by others. It is “the trust to carry out their role faithfully for the employing class both in terms of delegated authority and as providers of specialist advice” that form the unitary system of the middle class (Butler 1995, 29)

Goldthorpe's Neo-Weberian class model has received wide recognition and support in the twentieth century. Proponents of Goldthorpe, advocate his insights into the market capacity of the middle class and the well-articulated "quasi-ownership" of job rights among this group. But a major critique of Goldthorpe's middle class theory cites its homogenization of different occupations into a unitary system (Wright, 1999). The negligence of the existing distinctions within this group, such as the disparities in income, different preferences in lifestyles and personal values, is regarded as one of the greatest limitations of Goldthorpe's scheme.

Unlike Goldthorpe, Erik Olin Wright, a major Neo-Marxian sociologist, frames his middle class model based on an exploitation approach. Tracing the legacies of classical Marxism in class conflicts, Wright (1999) argues for the "contradictory locations within the middle class relations" (64-65). For instance, the managerial personnel could be the capitalist and the worker at the same time. Endowed with the delegated power of the owners, the managers resemble the role of capitalists due to their supervision rights over the workers. Still employed by the owners, the managers could also be regarded as workers. The dual identities of the exploiter and the exploited is therefore, dubbed "contradictory locations" by Wright.

The Neo-Marxian middle class model sheds much light on the research of the exploitative nature of capitalism. Prying into the class locations in the market, Wright and other Neo-Marxist theorists offer a rigorous framework of the micro-explanations of individuals in the class. Generally speaking, Wright's framework stresses the "causal interdependencies and antagonisms of life chances" (Wright 1999, 65). However, the Neo-Marxian class scheme is not immune to limitations. Because of its ambiguities in class identification, it renders great difficulties for some social scientists to locate their respondents in the scheme. Consequently, the model is less sufficient in some studies when "mapping the

fates of individuals along various dimensions and understanding how their immediate conditions of life shape their identity and opportunities” are the research goals (Wright, 1999, 64).

At the end of the twentieth century, the major battlefields of the middle class models shifted from the West to the East. With the aggressive expansion of the middle class in Asia, countries such as South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and regions like Taiwan all witness dramatic changes in social stratification shortly after domestic economic reforms. The transformations of socioeconomic contexts then aroused the research interests of a great number of Asian sociologists. In 1999, The Institute of Ethnology at the Academia Sinica in Taiwan developed a collaborative EAMC (East Asian Middle Class) research project with its counterpart universities in Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Hawaii. A total of 13 researchers from these 5 areas exerted great efforts in the comparative analysis of middle class in Asian countries. The EAMC project, grounding on Goldthorpe’s Neo-Weberian class model, turned out to be an extraordinary work, with a new EAMC class scheme developed to illustrate the typical social status in East Asian Countries.

Table 1. EAMC Model of Class Stratification

Goldthorpe's model	EAMC model
Higher-grade professionals	Capitalist (employers hirer 20 or more employees)
Lower-grade professionals	New middle class
Small employers with employees	Old middle class
Small employers without employees	
Routine non-manual employees	Marginal middle class
Personal service workers	
Technicians and supervisors	Working class
Skilled workers	
Semi/non-skilled workers	
Farmers	Farmers/farm labor
Agricultural workers	

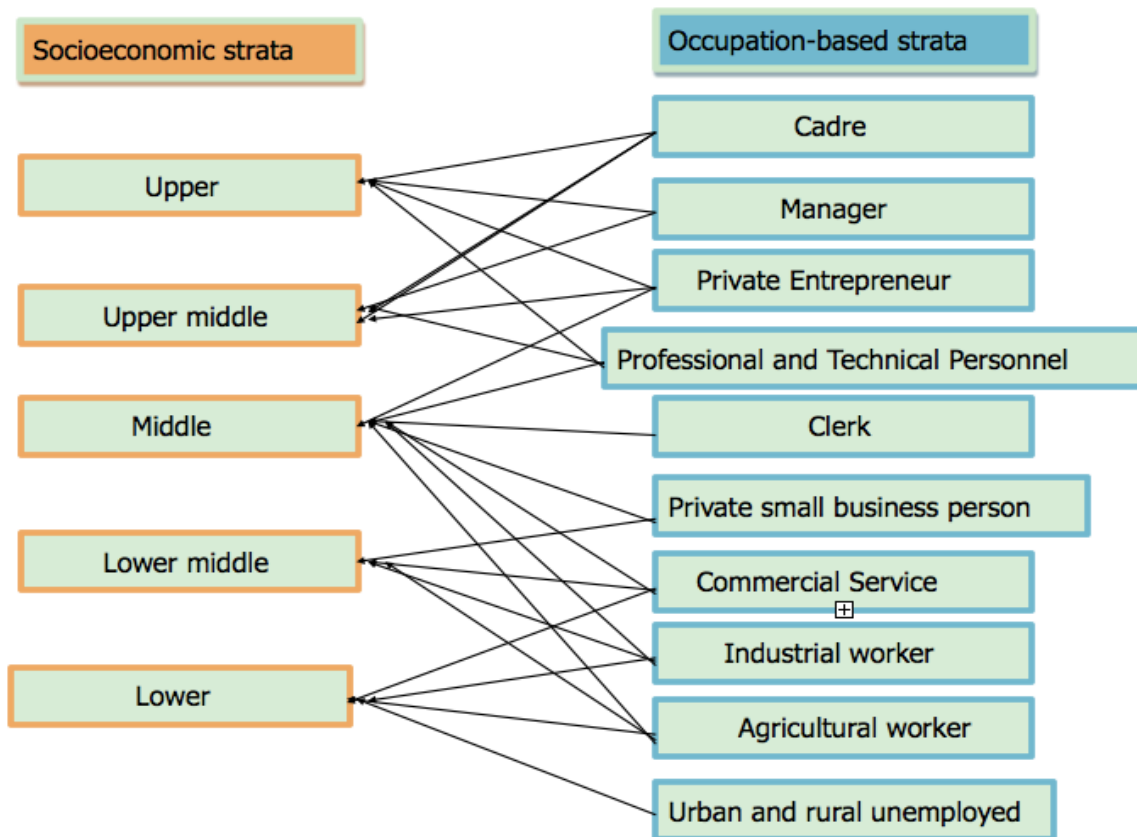
Source: Hsiao, 1999, 9.

The EAMC model developed by East Asian scholars is of special reference to the discussion of the middle class expansion in China. Li Chunling (2008) championed this EAMC model and articulates that this model, compared to other Western-based schemes, demonstrates more applicability to China. For instance, many Western middle class studies heavily lean towards the new middle class, a social force emerged as the result of knowledge economy and technological advancement. However, in most of the East Asian countries, the burgeoning industrialized economy will first boost an expansion of old middle class. This deviation from the conventional middle class expansion in most Western countries is largely due to the specific economic situation in post-war periods (Li, 2008). Since the industrialization and modernization did not really take place until the 1970s, a number of self-employed businessmen or entrepreneurs with a small number of employees emerged.

According to Li (2008), China, as a member of newly industrialized nations, also follows this pattern of middle class expansion.

Different from Li, who defends the EAMC middle class paradigm, Lu Xueyi (2002), the then director of the Institute of Sociology at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, integrates the Neo-Weberian and Neo-Marxian models and formulates a new version of middle class model. Inspired by the Neo-Marxists' concepts of contradictory locations of middle class, Lu articulates that the class location of a single occupation should not be static. Rather, people of the same occupation could belong to different socio-economic statuses. Also, noting the Neo-Weberian concepts of "life chances" and opportunities, Lu warmly includes some occupational orientations in his framework.

Figure 1. *Overlap of Socioeconomic Strata and Occupation-Based Strata in China*



Source: Lu, 2002, 9.

Lu (2002) believes that contemporary Chinese society could be divided into ten strata in terms of occupations, and into five strata from the perspective of socio-economic status. Each socioeconomic strata could match several different occupations, and the vice versa. Lu's study of social stratification is significant because it offers a comprehensive paradigm which takes socioeconomic and occupational status into full consideration in the articulation of the expansion of middle stratum groups in China. However, Lu's model imposes some controversies in the membership of middle class. His categorization of middle class includes nearly all types of occupations. Taking upper middle, middle and lower middle classes as a whole, only urban and rural unemployed are excluded in the middle class group. When applying this classification to the China's society, the whole middle class group is very likely to account for more than fifty percent, the result of which is highly questionable. Besides,

Lu's model also shares the limitation of Wright's micro-explanations of individuals in the market. Without set criteria for class identification, Lu's comprehensive paradigm still imposes great challenges for some social sciences to locate their subjects into the class scheme.

Cultural Capital Theory

Capital theories find themselves emerging alongside modernization theories in the 1950s. Primarily focusing on human capital, social capital and cultural capital, capital theories were championed by a great number of social scientists since their debut. In the field of sociology and education, cultural capital, a term promoted by Pierre Bourdieu, is the most well-known orientation. Initially, the notion of cultural capital was presented in research as a theoretical hypothesis that explained the disparity of academic performance of students from different social classes (Tzanakis, 2011). Later, Bourdieu delves into class stratification and develops his prominent cultural capital theory.

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, refers to the "cultural advantages [that] an individual enjoys which are acquired through education, family, and other sources that confer social power and status upon that person" (Bourdieu 1986, 241-258). Cultural capital takes time to accumulate, "as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form" (Richardson, 1986, 241-245). Bourdieu's theory divides cultural capital into three categories. Among the three forms of cultural capital, the first type is embodied cultural capital, which exists in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. The embodied cultural capital is usually "inherited or internalized and generally accumulated unconsciously during the period of socialization" (Richardson, 241-258). In the explanation of cultural capital, Bourdieu grounds his theory on the notion of "habitus", which refers to the distinctive cultural dispositions and the habits of members of the same class

(Bourdieu, 1971). The “habitus”, shared by the same group members, encapsulates attitudes, manners, preferences, and linguistic competences. This type of cultural capital is mainly transmitted through family socialization. Intergenerational communications naturally transmit the embodied cultural capital, such as manners, linguistic orientations, tastes, habits as well as some objectified cultural capital. For the younger generation in the family, the accumulation of embodied and objectified cultural capital starts from the very beginning of their life and continues without delay or wasted time. This “effortless” transmission of cultural capital within family only requires time as the precondition.

The second type is objectified cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital is represented by cultural goods such as paintings, instruments, books and other cultural objects. The third division is institutionalized cultural capital, namely, institutional acknowledgement of an individuals' cultural capital, such as the recognition of academic qualifications and credentials. Unlike embodied and objectified cultural capital, institutionalized cultural capital is not available for intergenerational transmission. Instead, as a demonstration of the cultural competence of a person, it is only possessed by individuals who had been recognized by certain academic institutes (Richardson, 1986). Education, as Bourdieu argues, plays the role of social alchemy that “produces a form of cultural capital which has relative autonomy vis-a-vis its bearer and even vis-a-vis its cultural capital” (Richardson, 1986). Unlike the hidden intergenerational transmission, the acquisition of institutionalized cultural capital requires investments of time, money as well as energy. Family members could sacrifice economic capital by sending their children to school, with the expectation of helping their children accumulate cultural capital. This strategy of capital conversion provides academic qualifications, and meanwhile, compensates for the lack of inherited cultural capital within a family.

Projecting the cultural capital concept into the field of higher education, Bourdieu

further develops his theory on social reproduction. Higher education is “a field consisting of cognitive and structural mechanisms that mediate sociopolitical and economic forces while simultaneously reproducing fundamental principles of social stratification” (Bourdieu 1993; Naidoo 2004, 457). It represents a social field in which various forms of power circulate. Cultural capital accumulated through higher education, in fact, is the field-specific resources in the hierarchical structure (Bourdieu, 1993). According to Bourdieu, the more cultural capital one obtains in higher education, the more power he or she will have in this field in the future. Bourdieu also argues that this power-building process could not begin without the prerequisite cultural capital in one’s family. Those who are “academically talented” in elite universities are very likely to be endowed with the cultural capital that inherited from their family (Bourdieu, 1993). Termed as a “sorting machine,” higher education is expected to select students based on implicit social classification and later reproduce this social structure through an explicit academic evaluation (Naidoo, 2004, 458-459).

Grounded on Bourdieu’s theories of cultural capital and social reproduction, other sociologists have developed a variety of theoretical models in the discussion of social stratification and education inequality. The maximally maintained inequality (MMI) model and effectively maintained inequality (EMI) model are the most illuminating of these models. In the MMI model, Mare (1987) provides a comprehensive explanation of the correlation between social background and education equity, through the comparison of the demand and supply of education opportunities. Mare articulates that students from lower social class will obtain more schooling if enrollment exceeds the demand (Mare and Chang, 2006). In other words, if higher education becomes universal to the socio-economically advantaged class, then social background recedes to be less influential and education inequality will decrease.

Different from Mare, Lucas (2001) foregrounds a revised theoretical framework, termed the “effectively maintained inequality (EMI) model.” In the EMI model, effects of social

background are assumed to be significant at any level of education, even if enrollment in schools becomes universal to the privileged group. EMI posits that “socioeconomically advantaged actors secure for themselves and their children some degree of advantage wherever advantages are commonly possible” (Lucas 2001, 1652). Tracing the legacies of Bourdieu’s, Lucas concedes that “if quantitative differences are common, the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage; on the other hand, if qualitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage” (Lucas 2001, 1652). Immersed with studies of the track system in the U.S education, Lucas further points out that two telling characters of this EMI model are illustrative in the education transition process. First, upper and middle class parents are more proactive in maintaining tracking and securing for their children the best positions in schools. Second, socio-economically advantaged parents are able to secure advantaged places for their children since they have a wide array of resources and personal experiences that “make it more likely they will be able to recognize the pivotal ‘given instance’ to which they may want to bring those resources to bear” (Lucas 2001, 1652). In stark contrast, students from lower social class might cheer their success in reaching college due to the lack of cultural capital and well-connected resources.

To conclude, Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory and the MMI and EMI paradigms foreground further studies concerning higher education, social stratification and equality issues. As a major tool of cultural capital accumulation, higher education is now highly emphasized by almost all social classes. However, its obtainment and quality assurance also stand out as crucial issues in the studies of social sciences. In the investigation of the higher education condition of Chinese middle class children, theoretical foundations of Bourdieu’s theory as well as the two models are greatly illuminating.

Push-Pull Theory

Originating from the “laws of migration”, the “push-pull” model has been widely used in the explanation of international student mobility. Push factors, according to Dorigo & Tobler (1983), are the “adverse conditions in one place which cause an individual to be dissatisfied with that place, and which push him or her to relocate to a new place”, while pull factors are “favorable conditions or other attributes which are appealing and pull the individual toward relocating there” (1-17).

In the discussion of student flows in higher education, the push-pull model lends itself to great significance. When applying this paradigm to international studies, push factors are likely to be unfavorable or undesirable elements, which downplay the willingness to stay in one’s home country for education. Pull factors, moreover, are those favorable elements in the host country that attract international students to go abroad (Mazzarol & G. Soutar, 2002).

Early research on international student migration mainly focuses on the macro-level variables such as economic globalization and internationalization of higher education (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Li and Bray, 2007). With respect to the push factors, economic, socio-cultural and political environments within students’ home countries were most frequently discussed (Rounsaville, 2011). De Wit (2008) perceives the internationalization of higher education as a response to globalization. He argues that as knowledge becomes internationalized with the trend of globalization, universities need to follow the pace of internationalization not only in curriculum design, but also in its faculty and student bodies. Knight (2009) probes internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education.” According to her, four common rationales stand out as consequential in the discussion of the international higher education: the economic rationale, the academic rationale, the cultural and social rationale, and the political rationale (Knight, 2009).

First, the student migration trend is greatly stimulated by the free trade context occurring throughout the globe. Higher education has transformed from a traditional, public responsibility to a lucrative industry. With the expanding privatization of higher education in many industrialized countries, especially in the West, higher education becomes a commodity or a private good which could be traded freely (Altbach, 1998). Economic benefits are one of the primary motivations of internationalization of higher education as some universities adopt this strategy to fix their financial problems. Higher education, as a lucrative industry in globalization, brings great benefits to the host countries, and helps states to counter global economic recessions. As Altbach (1998) notes, “full-fee paying international students have become a major source of additional revenue for higher education institutions, accounting for a significant portion of their budgets and providing revenue needed to subsidize other facets of the institution such as research output and improvements to service for domestic students” (291). As it is reported in the *Open Doors*, international students contribute more than twenty-one billion dollars to the U.S economy, making higher education the top service sector export in the country (Institute of International Education, 2013). International students not only “help increasing the revenues to the host campuses, but also to local economies of the host states for living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, and support for accompanying family members” (Altbach, 1998, 290).

Other macro-level factors are also illustrative. Academic rationale, including scholarly exchanges, internationalizing curriculum, and the attainment of standards of international excellence in research are considerations (Altbach, 1998, 32). Some academic institutes welcome international students as a method to enhance research capacities and cross-cultural understandings. Besides, transnational experiences and cultural understandings obtained through overseas studies are also a noted asset. Moreover, government policies are important

macro-level factors in the push-pull paradigm. As far as sending countries are concerned, government's lenient policies which allow its citizens to go abroad as long as they can acquire the necessary support, contribute greatly to the migration (Gribble, 2008).

However, recent studies on international education have shifted their focus to the micro-level factors. Individual characteristics, including family background and perceptions of international studies, induce detailed analysis from scholars. This trend is reinforced with the growing number of self-funded international students. Little subject to governmental and institutional policies, studying abroad is a choice that evolves from combined family needs and expectations (Altbach, 1998). Peter Bodycott (2009) argues that individual push-pull variables are predominantly significant in the current trend of international student flows. In his articulation, four individual variables are the most telling in the decision-making of international education: better job opportunities with a foreign degree, limited capacities of higher education in home countries, the return rates of foreign studies, and the immigration chances after graduation (Bodycott, 2009, 354).

In sum, both the macro and micro explanations of "push-pull" theories lend great significance to the discussion of international education and the motivations behind magnificent student mobility. They provide an important framework for this thesis to explore the specific "push" and "pull" factors that contribute to the international mobility of Chinese middle class students.

Gap in Knowledge

With the ongoing trend of internationalization of higher education, the Chinese student diaspora in the West has attracted attention from scholars both in China and abroad. Research on Chinese international students has mushroomed with the intent to explain the reasons behind this phenomenon. The investigation of the “studying abroad fever” in China is highly valuable since it offers a picture of what is actually going on in the field of education in China. However, despite the increasing concern about Chinese international students, there exists a vacuum regarding the newcomers to the student diaspora---Chinese middle class students. As the descendants of a new social force, middle class children are now actively involved in the tide of overseas education. Their increasingly active participation in the academic institutions of the West breaks the monopolies on education by the upper class. “Studying abroad fever” in China, consequently, sees a transformation from “exclusiveness to the elite” to “openness to the public.” This new trend in international education landscape has, however, received little attention. With strong contemporary relevancy, issues of Chinese middle class and international education deserve deeper investigations.

Problem Statement

A sizable research has been done on the overseas studying fever of Chinese students. However, the student diaspora in international education has witnessed a transformation in its membership as the Chinese middle class emerges and expands at a rapid pace. Currently, an increasing number of middle class children are involved in this fever and play an important component of the student diaspora in the West. However, little attention has been cast to the middle class students who pursue international education abroad. In this thesis, I hope to investigate what motivates the contemporary “studying abroad fever” of the Chinese middle class and what impact it will exert on China’s future.

Research Questions

The thesis focuses on the trend of the “studying abroad fever” among Chinese middle class families. It intends to study the reasons of the middle class expansion in China’s society as well as the motivations of their fervent pursuit of international education. Additionally, the possible impacts of this phenomenon on the social stratification in China’s society will also be discussed. To address the problem statement, four specific research questions are presented below.

1. What causes the huge expansion of middle class in China?
2. What are the education expectations of Chinese middle class parents’ towards their children?
3. What are the push and pull factors of international education pursued by middle class Chinese parents?
4. What career prospects do the Chinese middle class have for their children after they graduate from schools in the U.S?

Significance of the Study

This study of Chinese middle class bears both theoretical and practical significance for sociologists and educators in their future research.

First, the study is theoretically significant since it pries into a new student body of international education--the Chinese middle class children, and supplements previous theories on social stratification and international education. Previous scholars in China and the West either focus on the big Chinese student diaspora, or the emergence of the middle class as a social group. Seldom are there any studies that project the expanding new social force into the arena of international education. On one hand, volumes of well-articulated research on Chinese international students in the West delve into the economic prosperity in China, government loose policies concerning overseas studies, as well as the globalization and internationalization of education (Zha, 2012). On the other hand, studies on Chinese middle class primarily discuss the theoretical questions such as its definition, membership, and potential consuming power of this burgeoning group (Li 2010; Wang and Davis 2010; Zhou and Qin 2010; Lu 2010). Few studies have ever touched upon the relationship between the emerging middle class and international education. Despite the few studies on Chinese social class and international education, the topics were exclusive to the socio-economic privileged families who spend a huge expenditure on international education for children. In a study concerning Chinese social class and abroad studies, Biao & Shen (2009) provide a solid analysis of “little international students” who come from wealthy families and study abroad at the middle school age, and how their international education helped to maintain their elite social and cultural status. Their rigorous study of China and international education, however, is limited due to its sole emphasis on the privileged class in China. With the growing household income and well-connected social networks, the middle class in China is joining the tide of international education. And Chinese middle class international students, are likely

to continue their expansion since the Chinese middle class continues to grow. Therefore, the exploration of this new group's entry into international education not only fills the gap in knowledge, but also bears strong contemporary relevance to both China's society and international education.

The significance of this research is also manifested in the practical perspective with the rising power of Chinese middle class both at home and abroad. From the perspective of Chinese society, the emerging middle class will shoulder the responsibility of expanding domestic consumption and motivates further economic growth of the country. The potential consumption capacity of China's middle class has been foreseen by some large companies abroad. Yuval Atsmon, principal of McKinsey & Co's Shanghai Office, announced that the Chinese middle class plays a pivotal role and will increase to become the major force in consuming market in years to follow (McKinsey Quarterly, 2006). In addition, the Chinese emerging middle class is closely related to the global arena. As Li (2010) argues, this burgeoning class "embraces cosmopolitan values, having close economic and cultural links with Western countries, and especially the United States. In this scenario, Chinese middle-class lifestyle closely mirrors that of the West" (Li, 2010, 5-6). Therefore, this new class is tightly engaged with the international community and "playing an active role in the increasingly interdependent world and by keeping abreast of transnational cultural currents" (Li, 2010, 5-6).

Finally, with its qualitative details, this research adds to the empirical resources of the Chinese expanding middle class and their motivations in the pursuit of international education for their children. Although the education expectations are not new topics in Chinese scholarship, most of the studies fall into the general discussion of the parents' concern on education, and few of them delve into descriptive details of education expectations in middle class families. The similar limitations in previous studies are echoed

in the research on international education. Despite a number of valid studies, most research concentrates on the macro-level factors, such as policies and globalization trend in their articulation. Unique individual variables, such as the personal education experiences, decisions on education transition, intergenerational communication on education issues, levels of financial sacrifice on education, and plans for work and life after international education have been glossed over by researchers.

Methodology

To explore the fever of studying abroad among the Chinese middle class children and the future impact on China's society, I resorted to both secondary sources and primary data collection methods. Both an extensive literature review of historical data and a qualitative study will be included in this research. Data will be further analyzed in response to my research questions, which mainly concern the reasons of the middle class expansion, the motivations in pursuing international education, the push-pull factors of international migration and plans after graduation.

Literature Review of Middle Class Expansion in China

First, I will conduct a literature review to address the first research question concerning the expanding Chinese middle class. Although the middle class expansion is a recent phenomenon which finds its debut at the turn of twentieth century, the expansion of this social group is deeply connected to the specific historical context of China's society. In 1950s when People's Republic of China was established, Mao Zedong asserted that the then middle class which consisted of businessmen, landlords, intelligentsia, was approximately 4 million in number and only accounted for 1 percent of the total population (Mao, 1952). Later, this middle class group witnesses an aggressive expansion as a result of the domestic economic reform. Since the legacy of the class formation in China could be traced to its historical background, an extensive historical study of the lineage of transformations in economics, education, and politics is indispensable in this study. To conduct the literature review of China's middle class expansion, I will refer to the documents of capitalist economic reform in 1978, and the research on socialist education reform since 1950s.

Fieldwork

In addition to the literature review, I will conduct a qualitative study of Chinese international students with a middle class family background. Since I do not intend to generalize findings of this study and apply them to the whole middle class families in China, I consider qualitative methods better suited to my inquiry. By delving into descriptive details of several Chinese middle class families, I will try to provide some understandings about the education expectations of those families and their motivations behind the “studying abroad fever.” Five participants in graduate schools at UCLA are chosen for this study, and the findings are expected to address the research question 2, 3, and 4.

(1) Research Ethics

Ethical approval for this qualitative study was received in February, 2013 from the Institutional Review Board at UCLA. Ethical issues such as access, confidentiality and risks were discussed, and the consent form and risk evaluation form were signed before the study. The purpose of the study, process of the research, and time involvement in the interviews are all included in the consent form. Participants were informed that their participation is totally voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. All potential participants were provided with ample time to read the documents and get familiarize with my research. Before the interviews, all participants were presented with written participant information and asked to give written consent to participating. All the information relating the participants were securely stored by me. The consent forms can be seen in the Appendix I. The interviews were scheduled according to the willingness of participants.

(2) Case selection

In this qualitative study, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is chosen as the case for three reasons. First, among all the states in the U.S., California is home to the largest number of Chinese international students. UCLA is located in the second largest city in the state, also hosts a big Chinese student diaspora. The rich availability of Chinese students provides a greater chance to select participants that meet the criteria for this study. Secondly, as a public school, UCLA charges a relatively lower tuition and fees. Technically speaking, UCLA is more affordable to international students than other private institutions in California. In addition, as a graduate student at UCLA, I have more access to the campus, organizations and social spaces of this school. My exposure to the student repertoire at UCLA marks an advantage in conducting the empirical study.

(3) Participant selection

Before the qualitative research began, I devised criteria regarding participant selection. In this study, there are three predetermined criteria for the participant selection: parents' occupation, income, and educational level. Relying on Lu Xueyi's (2002) paradigm on China's social stratification, I include the following occupational categories as possible middle class members: cadres, managers, private entrepreneur, professional and technical personnel, clerks, private small business people and commercial service workers. Here, I exclude industrial worker and agricultural worker in my criteria because despite their slight chances in "lower middle class" status, they are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and also less educated. As for the income level, I referred to an income standard released by McKinsey Company, which concedes that Chinese middle class families earn an annual income between \$13,500 and \$53,900 (Wang, 2010). Although their standard is subject to questions given the currency inflation in recent years, the number by McKinsey

Company still shares special reference to the defining of the Chinese middle class members. To make my qualitative more credible, I also incorporate the concept of “discretionary income,” which refers to “the amount of the individuals’ income available for spending after the essentials, such as food, clothing, and shelter, and so on have been taken care of” in the screening process (Wikipedia, 2013). Middle class families ought to have at least one third of their income available for consumption other than basic daily necessities. Consumptions in automobiles, technology products, traveling and so forth are all counted in the middle class standard. Last, I adopt a loose criterion with regard to the educational standard of defining the middle class. Because the education reform that advantages the current middle-aged Chinese targets at basic education, with little emphasis on higher education or post-graduate education, Chinese middle class, compared to Western counterparts, are likely to be lower in education levels. Therefore, I set the middle school education as the minimal requirement in the screening process of the Chinese middle class.

Table 2. Participant Selection Criteria

Criteria for selecting participants
1. Parents’ occupation should fall into one of the following categories: cadres, managers, private entrepreneur, professional and technical personnel, clerks, private small business people and commercial service workers
2. Discretionary family annual income no less than one third.
3. Parents’ education level should be no lower than middle school education.

In the selection of participants, I first widely advertised my study and used a referral method to reach as many as Chinese students as possible. By distributing my request of volunteer participants in a number of social network websites such as online chat groups, BBS, CSSA-UCLA, which are run by Chinese international students at UCLA, I intended to include as many Chinese students as possible in my potential participant list. Aside from advertising in public spaces, I also use my own social networks to conduct snowball sampling.

When the intensive social connection was completed, I gained approximately 30 students as potential participants, ranging from undergraduate to doctorate students in UCLA.

Next, I went on with the screening procedure. I began the process with some casual chats with those students, with the intent to get familiar with them and win their rapport for my further studies. During the preliminary study, I found that undergraduate students could hardly fit my criteria of the Chinese middle class children. Studying in the public university of UCLA, all the Chinese undergraduates that I became acquainted with are self-funded. The 4-year accumulative tuition, non-state supplemental fees, insurances, and living expenses for those undergraduates exceed \$190,000 (over 1 million RMB). The huge cost in undergraduate studies seems to far exceed the capability of Chinese middle class in view of their annual income (\$13,500 to \$53,900). Therefore, Chinese undergraduate students at UCLA are more likely to embrace a more privileged family background since only the wealthy families could afford the phenomenal cost of international education at undergraduate level in the U.S. Consequently, after the first screening process, I exclude undergraduate students in the selection of participants for my study.

As the screening proceeds, I further exclude doctorate students in my study due to their weak reliance on family support. Most doctorate students at UCLA are funded either by their departments in UCLA or by the Chinese government. The lack of need of family financial support prompted those doctorate students to be more independent. During the pilot study process, Chinese doctorate students indicate a strong sense of self-reliance and self-determination in the pursuit of international education. Even though some doctorate students fit my criteria of Chinese middle class children, their decision making of international studies are less influenced by family background due to their financial independence in the U.S. Hence, I excluded doctorate students in the consideration of possible participants.

In the final stage of screening process, I narrow down my target participants to master's degree students for the qualitative study. As a public institution, UCLA provides little scholarship for master students, especially for international students. Therefore, almost all Chinese master's degree students at UCLA are self-funded. This scenario indicates a strong connection between students and their family background. Also, compared to the four-year undergraduate studies, master programs are relatively short in length, ranging from nine-month to two academic years. The costs of tuition and other living expenses, which are much lower than those of undergraduate studies, are within the reach of Chinese middle class. Thus, I finally targeted Chinese master's degree students at UCLA as potential participants for my qualitative research.

After the preliminary screening, twelve master's degree students fit my criteria for this research and consented to participate as interviewees. As a result of my consideration of the variety of academic programs, the rapport from participants, their attitudes of involvement in the study and their parents' willingness to participate in the research, five students were selected as my participants. The first participant is **Fiona**, a first-year law school graduate student at UCLA whose parents are both managers in a state-owned enterprise in Jiangsu Province, China. **Snow**, the second participant comes from Henan Province. She is now a graduate student in Education Department and will graduate in June 2013. Her mother is a private entrepreneur and her father is a manager in a joint-ventured company. The third participant is **Ivy**, who is also an M.A. candidate in Graduate School of Education. Originating from Hubei Province, Ivy's father is a private businessman and her mother a clerk in a state-owned company. **Jack**, the fourth participant is a master's degree student majoring in Computer Sciences and his parents are both commercial service workers in the public transportation system in Shandong. My fifth participant is **Michael**, who comes from a family in which both parents work in local government in Zhejiang Province. Michael's

father works as a senior official and his mother as a junior clerk. Not all the families were willing to disclose their annual family income, but the five families claimed that the percentage of their discretionary income ranges from one third to two fifths. Hence, their income status fit my criteria of the Chinese middle class. Also, the five families indicate strong representativeness of the middle class in China. Come from middle-developed provinces in China, these 5 families reside in the places that not resemble metropolitans nor poor regions. Moreover, the five middle class families that I selected are the ones that rose from working class and farming class in the recent decades. Their experiences in social upward mobility greatly mimic the general expansion of the middle class in China's society.

Table 3. Profiles of Participants

name	Program in UCLA	Hometown	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation
Fiona	Law	Jiangsu	Manager in a state-owned enterprise	Manager in a state-owned enterprise
Snow	Education	Henan	Manager in a joint-ventured company	Private entrepreneur
Ivy	Education	Hubei	Private businessman	Clerk in a state-owned company
Jack	Computer Science	Shandong	Commercial service worker in public transportation system	Commercial service worker in public transportation system
Michael	Electronic Engineering	Zhejiang	Senior official in the local government	Junior clerk in the local government

(4) Interviews

After the participant selection, I conducted extensive interviews concerning education experiences with the student participants, and later conducted online interviews regarding education expectations and decision-making in the international education with the parent

participants. The interviews are mostly semi-structured, offering more chances for participants to narrate their stories while not limited to the options that I offered them. Interview questions are mainly requesting students to share their educational experiences in China and discussing their ideas in pursuing overseas studies. Each student participant spent approximately two to three hours in a face-to-face interview. As for the interviews of parents, I adopted QQ, an online chatting application that is widely used in China to do the interviews and all the interviews with parents are carried out by online chatting. Interviews with parents are about one-hour and almost all the five online interviews reached both parents in the families. The interview questions for parents are also largely semi-structured. Some general questions such as: “How did you select elementary school for your child?”, “What do you think about international education in the U.S?”, “Why not choosing Chinese graduate schools for your child?” and “What expectations do you have for your child after graduation in UCLA?” are raised in the online interviews. Those loosely structured questions are brought up to investigate the education expectations of Chinese middle class parents, and their attitudes towards international education. During the online interview process, almost all the couples in the five families share high consensus with regard to the issues of their children’s education. They offered nearly the same response to interview questions and seldom disclosed disagreements with each other. Furthermore, almost all the parents were active in the interviews and demonstrated great enthusiasm in the discussion about children’s education. Their offering of detailed answers to many of the interview questions indicates their great attention to the education issues of the next generation.

(5) Risk and Benefits

In the qualitative study, my positionality as the researcher should be taken into consideration and analysis of risks and benefits are important in the evaluation of credibility

and reliability of the study. To start, coming from a Chinese middle class family, I share similar educational experiences with most of the participants and thus, could better understand their stories and the mentality of their middle class parents. Therefore, my saturation with the Chinese education environment and family background of middle class equipped me with huge advantages in conducting this qualitative research. Besides, by using Chinese as the communicating language in all the interviews, I removed the language obstacles in my interviews since Chinese is the mother language of all my participants. Despite the student participants' excellence in English, it still lends more credibility when the interviewing process is conducted in Chinese. And for parents who could seldom speak English, Chinese seems to be the best language for our negotiation. In sum, the similarity in family background and using Chinese as the communicating language might help building a better understanding of what participants are doing and saying.

However, there are some risks in this qualitative study. This study which includes five student participants and their parents, is small in scale. The lack of large quantitative samples might impose difficulties in the generalizing its findings to whole middle class group in China. Besides, the local contexts of different regions in China vary, and the unfamiliarity with some provinces might render misinterpretations. This is more likely to take place in the interviews with parents due to the inadequacy of face-to-face communication. However, I will try to reduce this risk as much as possible by the doing member checks after every transcribing process, with my interpretations and comments reviewed by participants. Despite the existing risks of this qualitative study, it bears great significance because some characteristics of this group, especially their attitudes on education consumption will be helpful in further exploration of this social class. My goal was not to produce knowledge generalizable to the situation of all Chinese middle class students abroad. Rather, I wish to highlight its relevance by providing a deeper understanding of the motivations of the pursuit

of international education of my participants and their families.

Findings

Historical Review: Economic Reform and Education Transformation

(1) Economic Reform in the 1980s

The economic reform in the 1980s has transformed the landscape of China. In the initial planned economy, state-owned enterprises and collective enterprises dominated Chinese national economy. This socialistic planned economy tremendously confined the economic development, since people were hardly motivated to work due to the need-based income distribution. Additionally, the postwar recovery also stagnated Chinese economic progress. Involved in the eight-year Anti-Japanese War and consequent constant civil wars with Kuomintang, China had long been unstable and seldom able to make advancements in science and technology. Hence, social productivity of China in 1950s-1970s remained extremely low.

However, in the 1980s, an economic boom stemmed from the implementation of Reform and Open-up Policy. The policy, introducing markets to the Chinese planned economy, was the prelude of a myriad of economic, political, and social changes in China. The integration of capitalism has reshaped the landscape of China's economy through the great improvement in social productivity as well as stimulation in the industrialization process. As Guthrie (2006) observes, Chinese economic reforms had raised autonomy of enterprise-owners and local governments since the industrial economy was no longer manipulated by communist party or industrial bureaus. Although not witnessing pervasive privatization in the market, China's economy still embraced private capital in its emerging industries such as manufactures and service sectors. Under the vitality of private capital, new markets emerged in large numbers. Chinese socialistic market economy entails characteristics that like no other capitalist economy: the predominance of state-owned capital and the thriving of private capital in domestic market. Therefore, national capital still plays a pivotal role in Chinese economy. For

instance, the four biggest banks----Bank of China, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China are all state-owned. Through gradual reforms, the state created an institutional environment that stimulated economic prosperity within its domestic market. The socialistic market economy reform also witnesses a decentralization of the government. In the prior planned economy, the Communist party held the absolute authority of the national economy. The highly centralized government authority gradually dissolved, and local governments were endowed with certain control over their jurisdictions. This decentralization of government controls and stimulation of private economies gave birth to an increasing number of new industries such as service sectors, communication, and technology businesses.

(2) Socialist Education Reform

Unlike the sweeping market economy reform which brought quick responses from the national economy, education reform took a relatively long time to explicate its impacts. The socialist education reform, under the planned economy, reached a large percentage of age cohorts and achieved great success in increasing the education level of the Chinese population.

Before the establishment of PRC and its education reform, education resources and opportunities were only available to the privileged class. A family's socio-economic status, for the most part, determined children's education access. Education resources were exclusive to upper class children, such as bureaucrats and entrepreneurs. Most of the working and farmers' children were shunned in the education system and remained illiterate. The scenario very much resembles Bourdieu's argument of social reproduction since there existed little chance for social upward and intergenerational mobility.

However, the reproductive effects of education significantly waned during 1950s-1980s,

when an education reform took place. The progressive education reform, implemented by the Central Government, warmly encapsulated three influential policies. First, the government exerted great efforts in promoting basic education at elementary and secondary level. Second, standardized tests replaced the recommendation system in the selection of prospective students in tertiary education. Free tuition and large subsidizes from the government were easily available, clearing the obstacles of underprivileged students in receiving higher education. Last, and most important, the “preferential policy of working and farming children” played a magnificent role in breaking the education monopoly of the upper class and inducing social and intergenerational mobility in China. According to a study by Deng and Treiman (1997), the socialist education reform greatly downplayed family background. Under Mao’s socialistic ideology, working class and agricultural workers are labeled “politically superior” to the intelligentsia. Consequently, the children from “political superior” but economically poor families were preferred in education enrollment while the children of the intelligentsia were exorcised (Deng and Treiman, 1997, 391-428). This reversion in regards of social status provides better chances for the underclass and working class. The intervention of preferential policy nearly excluded family socio-economic background in obtaining education access. With the children of working and farmer class getting access to education, they were very likely to experience social upward mobility in the future. A well-known regression model of family background and education in China from 1940-2001 is presented by Li Chunling (2003). From Li’s regression models, the decreasing family influence on children’s education opportunities is conspicuous among the Chinese who were born between 1940s and 1970s. For those who were born during this period, they were likely to get education, between 1950s and 1980s, a time when the socialist education reform was in progress. The decreasing impact of family background is largely fostered by the education reform which glorifies political superiority of working class and farmer class.

Empirical Findings: Five Trajectories to Graduate School

(1) Education experiences in China

When sharing their educational experiences in kindergarten and elementary school, four out of the five participants---Snow, Fiona, Ivy, and Michael said they went to a public kindergarten in their hometown. Jack went to a private kindergarten which was founded by one of his remote relatives. All of the five participants entered public elementary schools near their home after kindergarten. In the discussion of the reasons for elementary school selection, almost all of the middle class parents prioritize the short distance from home to school. Ivy said her elementary school is only 5 minutes' walk, and Fiona and Michael's schools are only 10 minutes' bus. Michael's mother admitted that "At that time [1996], almost all elementary schools in China are public. There were few private schools. So we didn't even think about that [private school]". Snow's parents provided similar responses and added that, "Children do not learn much knowledge in elementary level, so there is no big difference between schools. In this case, why not choose a school that is near our home?" However, Fiona's father claimed that he actually did some research on the three accessible elementary schools in their city, and finally chose the one with highest reputation for his daughter. In China, schools with better education resources and higher reputation are officially designated as "key schools." Privileged in education resources as those key schools, they excel in students' graduation rates and enrollment rates for further studies. Fiona's father believed that a key school is definitely a better choice by noting that "the graduation rate of that school is higher, and it also sent more students to key secondary schools."

Entering the level of secondary education, all the five participants attended key schools in their province. Their access to those key schools, however, was not easy. According to the compulsory education and designating policy of secondary school in China, elementary graduates naturally attend the secondary school that is nearest to their home without any

tuition. Any transition to other secondary schools requires not only an additional test, but also an expensive sponsorship fee. Fiona, Ivy, Michael and Snow were among those who made such a transition. They were encouraged by their parents to take the additional test. “The middle school designated to our district is not good. Students in that school are not diligent and could hardly pass the high school entrance exam. I would never send my daughter to that school. I would rather pay the high sponsorship fee. Education quality is the most important,” said Ivy’s mother. Other middle class parents were in the same boat as Ivy’s family. They conceded that it was worthwhile paying the expensive sponsorship fee to guarantee a better secondary education for their children. Jack’s father said that “secondary education is much more important than elementary education. It very much determines what kind of high school you will enter and what kind of college you will attend in the future.” Among the four families, the sponsorship fee varies from 8,000 RMB to 18,000 RMB. For Snow’s family, the sponsorship fee of 8,000 RMB equals to accumulative salaries of 3 months by both her parents in 2002. And in order to shortening the commuting time for their daughter, they sold their house and took loans from bank to buy a new one near Snow’s school. Fiona’s family resembled Snow’s family in their investment on child education, and they spent more efforts on networking for information. “Good schools are hard to get in, and sometimes “guanxi” (reference) is the prerequisite”. With the 18,000 RMB sponsorship fee and strong “guanxi”, Fiona finally got a position in one of the best secondary schools in her hometown. Fiona still clearly remembered the efforts of her parents in getting her to that key middle school and their determination on this huge investment on education. “The sponsorship fee was 9,000 RMB in 2001, but that number rose to 18,000 in 2002. I accompanied my mom to withdraw money from her bank account. I clearly remember that she took 18 pieces of ‘100-yuan bill’ and handed them to the registration office.” Unlike the above four participants, Jack attended a private secondary school in his hometown. His parents said their choice is made based on

the academic excellence and high enrollment rate in key colleges of that private school. “The annual tuition is 15,000 RMB in that private school. It’s really expensive. But for our son, we didn’t hesitate to make this investment. Our investment will be paid off as long as Jack could get into a key university.”

In the stage of college education, all the five students said that the choice was made in negotiation between their parents and themselves. Since Chinese higher education matriculation is solely based on the scores of college entrance exam, the higher score one has, the more choices he or she will have for college application. Personal interests are the primary factor in the selection of college. Snow, with a high score on that exam, chose one of the most prestigious universities in China and enrolled in the major of International Politics. After hearing daughter’s explanation of her interests, Snow’s parents were really supportive in her decision. Ivy’s parents said that they did a comprehensive research on all the available universities for their daughter, and chose a national key university in their province. “W University is famous for its academic prestige, and also it is near our home.” Fiona went to a key university outside of her hometown, because that is the best university she could attend in view of her exam score. And her decision was greatly endorsed by her father.

During their college years, three of the five participants claimed that they had overseas experiences. At her junior year, Fiona went to National University of Singapore for an exchange program. She was supported by her undergraduate school in China and spent a semester in Singapore. Ivy had been to India as a volunteer. She went abroad on an NGO program and stayed in India for three months. Another participant who had been abroad is Snow. Having been to the U.S. twice, Snow enrolled in the summer school sessions in UC Berkeley and Yale University. “The summer school in Berkeley was only one month, and it charged about 40,000 RMB. So did the summer school in Yale.” When asked about the expensive fees of summer schools abroad, Snow’s father replied that, “Even though the fees

were quite high, we thought that it was a good opportunity to help Snow broadening her horizons and to improve her English. And those two universities are worldly known, so study experiences in Berkeley and Yale make Snow's resume look excellent.”

(2) Post-graduate studies at UCLA

When asked about the reasons of sending children to pursue post-graduate studies in the U.S., credential inflation, education quality disparities between China and the U.S., and better job prospects are the three most important motivations. Jack's parents clearly demonstrated their opinion on post-graduate studies and American higher education, “College degree is now greatly devalued in the job market in China, and you could hardly secure a decent job after graduation. Post-graduate degree will be an advantage for my child, especially after he receives a diploma in one of the famous American graduate schools. Chinese employers favor students who have studied abroad”. In the similar tone, Ivy's father articulated his concern of the fierce competition in job market in China and perceived the post-graduate studies as the only way to stand out in the age of credential inflation. “Chinese higher education expands so quickly and its quality dramatically decreases. College graduates could seldom get a decent job. Employers in China always think someone who has a Master's or PhD degree to be more competent. If you have a foreign diploma, you will have more chances because employers always think overseas scholars have better technology, superb capabilities and good English skills. So it is very likely that our daughter will get an advantage in job market and more chances for promotion if she get a post-graduate degree abroad”. Michael's father echoed this opinion by arguing that, “Chinese higher education is not good enough, especially in post-graduate studies. Most of those graduate programs in China teach little things to students. It's purely a waste of time to pursue post-graduate studies in China.” Unlikely, the parents of Snow, Fiona and Michael, all attributed their motivations to their children's determination.

Snow's parents said, "We do not know universities in the U.S. But Snow always tried to convince us of the better quality of American education than Chinese one. She told us she really wanted to experience Western education. We had only one daughter and did not want to disappoint her. So we nodded. What we could do is to provide financial support."

In the discussion of choosing host countries, education quality proves to be the most important factor. Almost all the five families asserted that they had not considered other host countries other than the U.S. Only Jack's parents said that they had considered other English-speaking countries such as U.K. and Australia as destination countries for their son. When asked about the reason for their decision, those middle class parents acknowledge that U.S. graduate schools embrace a high international prestige and better education quality. Ivy's parents believed that, "American graduate schools have really good rankings in the world, and they are recognized at the international level."

Moreover, high quality of teaching faculties is also pivotal in international education. Fiona shared her experiences in some undergraduate courses that were instructed by the overseas returnees, "I found them [teachers who have studied abroad] quite different from other Chinese teachers. Those who have not been abroad always impose teachers' authority in classroom. They try to convince students to accept their ideas. However, in the academic field of laws, there exist many schools and each has its own merits. Students should be encouraged to voice their own ideas, rather than conform to whatever teachers say. And those professors who have received higher education in Western countries always respect each individual opinion from students. Their individualized pedagogies and interactive classroom atmosphere greatly influenced me at that time. I was impressed by Western education style and determined to study abroad after graduation." Fiona's longing for American education was fully supported by her family. Her father agreed with Fiona in the academic inclusiveness, diversity, and teacher-student equality of American higher education institutes, and held

optimistic attitudes toward the overseas studies of their daughter.

(3) Career Prospects after Graduation

Among the five Chinese middle class families, only Snow's parents wished their child to return to China after graduation. "We want Snow staying near us, not too far away. It would be too difficult for a girl like Snow to stay in another country." The other four families, however, are flexible in plans after children's graduation. Staying or returning, according to those parents, will be determined by their children, and they are confident with the result of both options. Ivy's father said that a foreign diploma will help Ivy getting a decent job in their hometown. "Compared to other college graduates, Ivy has a huge advantage because she has a post-graduate degree. Even competing with other post-graduates in the job market, my daughter will still have a cutting edge since her degree is issued by a prestigious U.S. institute." But Ivy's father also noted that if Ivy insists on staying in the U.S. to work, he will still support her. This flexible attitude towards agreeing on the student to decide their own plan after graduation also resonates with the other three families. Words such as "it's up to our child," "both choices work," and "we won't make the decision for the child" were frequently repeated by the interviewed parents. Michael's mother said, "Our only wish is that he can get a good job and have a happy family. It doesn't matter if he comes back or not. I only wish him a promising future."

Implications

Chinese Middle Class: From Insignificant to Influential

In this study, I discuss economic as well as educational factors in the expansion of the Chinese middle class, and I argue that the majority of the members in this group are the beneficiaries of the two reforms. Moving upward from lower socio-economic status, their social mobility is largely due to the educational reform between 1950s-1980s and the introduction of a market economy in recent decades. The socialist education reform, downplayed family's socio-economic background, included children from lower social background, and promoted education equity to a large extent. The effects of education reform were greatly demonstrated in the modernization period, when the central government implemented "Reform and Open-up Policy" in the 1980s. The capitalist economy, embodied by markets and competition, invests large credits in education, especially credentials. This orientation of "knowledge economy" greatly advantaged those educated young Chinese. Born between the 1950s-1960s, those Chinese people reached their school age in the 1960s-1970s, a time when the education reform was going strong. Markets thrived, alongside the solid education background, producing a new group----middle class as a consequence. The primary beneficiaries of education reform are now in their 40s-60s and are experiencing the best timing for wealthy accumulation and social prestige establishment. Given their privileges in education in youth, this age cohort is equipped with capacities to get advantages in the market when the country implemented the capitalist economic reform.

This research complements previous studies on the middle class expansion in China's society. Predecessors in the field almost solely focus on the economic drive in the explanation of the transformation of social stratification. Prominent studies by Kharas & Gertz (2010) Zhou & Qin (2010), Lu (2010) and so forth, all owe the birth of the new social class to the decades of a double-digit economic boom (Li, 2010, 32-104). Other possible

factors, however, are always neglected in considering this phenomenon. This integration of education reform to the well-articulated economic impetus provides a more comprehensive theoretical analysis in Chinese middle class.

Chinese Middle Class Parents: High Education Expectations

From the interviews with middle class parents, it is obviously seen that all the five families have high education expectations of their children. Their high expectations are largely manifested in their fervent investment on children's education, especially at the secondary school level. Jack's family invested a great deal of money on private school education, and the other four families spent a high sponsorship fee to guarantee a better secondary education for their children. Economic cost, compared to education quality, is perceived to be much less important.

Chen (2006) asserts that once rising to the middle class, Chinese people tend to adopt a fervent strategy of education investment in order to maintain the obtained advantage in social status and cultural capital (Chen, 2006). And now, their high expectations have manifested in the field of international education, with an increasing number of middle class parents sending children abroad. Though a nouveau social class which emerged just a decade ago, those in the Chinese middle class are playing a pivotal role in the international arena, especially in the field of international education.

Motivations for Overseas Studies

When projecting the push-pull models on Chinese international student flows, micro-level variables seem to be more illustrative than macro-level factors in the explanation of the "abroad studying fever". Government policies or general trend of internationalization of education were never mentioned as motivations in the interview. Instead, family and

individual characters were the most telling reasons for the pursuit of graduate education overseas.

In terms of push factors, massification of domestic higher education stands as one of the most important factors. Credential inflation, as the result of the huge surplus of college graduates in China, tremendously pushes middle class children to pursue post-graduate studies abroad. With the expansion of university enrollment since 1999, China has witnessed a sudden increase in its college graduates. This huge expansion in access to higher education does not, however, bring equivalent academic capabilities and skills to the increasing student population. College graduates find it more difficult to secure a job, because university credentials are “depreciated” with massification of higher education in China. In the year of 2008, nearly 20 percent of university graduates remained unemployed, according to a study conducted by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (China Radio International, 2008). Chinese middle class families, with a high expectation of cultural capital accumulation, realize the negative consequences of access expansion in China’s higher education and resort to international education in the US as a complement.

When it comes to pull factors, high education quality, transnational experiences, and potential result of better job opportunities prove to be the most important ones. High quality in education is almost the top priority in every family interviewed. Altbach (1998) claims that “world science is highly centralized, that its infrastructures are located in a small number of industrialized countries, that advanced science requires large investments of funds and highly sophisticated laboratories, and that top scientific personnel are concentrated in a small number of countries and at the key academic and research institutions within those countries” (133-136). China, overshadowed by external scientific developments, is primarily a knowledge consumer rather than a knowledge creator. In nearly all the interviews, middle class parents stressed the high education quality of American schools. The relatively high

international fame, as well as good rankings of graduate schools in the U.S allures education investments abroad to a great extent. In addition, the belief of correlation between job opportunities and diploma is another strong pull factor of abroad studies.

International Education and Social Reproduction

Through education investment, middle class parents tried to convert economic capital into cultural capital. This conversion proved to be effective, since the middle class children are provided with better education opportunities. The five interviewed students, privileged by better education resources in secondary schools, all achieved great results in college entrance examinations. With high scores in the crucial test, those middle class children are secured with positions in prestigious domestic colleges in China. According to the empirical data, two of the middle class families continue their investment on education by supporting international exchange programs and internship opportunities for their children. This economic investment adds to the cultural capital accumulation of the students, and increases their success rates in the pursuit of further studies abroad at the graduate school level. Since the privileges in education opportunities will in return, help the students becoming competent in job market and accumulate economic capital, it is very likely that the socioeconomic status of their family will be maintained in the future. The findings of this study, to some degree, confirms the EMI model, which claims that the socio-economic advantages are always effectively maintained, and children from upper and middle class will be furthered advantaged in education quality if access is no longer difficult. When education access to prominent schools is rare, those middle class parents exert great efforts in winning a place for their children in the key schools. Now, when domestic diplomas are less valuable, Chinese middle class parents resort to international education to help their children maintain advantages in the job market. It is justifiable to conclude that the middle class children, who

are privileged in the institutionalized cultural capital, will distinguish themselves from the “mediocre” masses. This accumulation of “habitus” and cultural capital will guarantee their advantages in social and economic status.

Westernization and Waning Traditional Values

Another implication perceived during the study is the Westernization of Chinese middle class. Contemporary middle class parents, unlike the traditional parental authorities, tremendously celebrate Western values of individualism and independence. The high education expectation that middle class holds is a personal strategy for family development rather than a choice for the public good. When making decision of education investment, the Chinese middle class are more concerned with the potential advantages yielded to their own child. This individualism sentiment is reinforced by the “one-child” policy in China. Since each family is allowed to have only one child, they are willing to sacrifice everything they have, economically and emotionally, to win a promising future for their only child. In addition, the glorification of individualism is demonstrated by the “decentralization” of parental authority among the burgeoning group. Intergenerational equality which highlights communications and mutual-respect between parents and the child, weakens parents’ control over the future of the children. In a traditional Chinese family, elder members such as grandparents and parents have absolute authority in deciding children’s education transition, friendship establishment, and even in the choice of marriage partners. The children will follow the decisions made by senior members in the family and disobedience was regarded as shameful. However, the emerging middle class parents seem to care less about traditional value of parental authority and filial obedience. Instead, they very much respect their children’s choices. During the interviews, almost all the parent participants claim that it is their child who has the final say in their ways after graduation and repeatedly state that they

are flexible with whatever decisions the children make. The parental authority and hierarchy within families seem to be replaced by mutual-respect and intergenerational equality. Finally, the middle class groups indicate Western value of independence since they do not rely on their children for welfare and security. Traditionally, Chinese children must stay at their parents' side and take care of the parents when they age. This filial piety has been promoted as a merit in China for thousands of years. This traditional value, however, does not witness reinforcement as the "one-child" policy prevails in Chinese families. Since the majority of middle class families have only one child, the separation of the child from their parents suggests a lonely life for the senior parents. As far as Chinese middle class is concerned, the adherence to the filial piety seems to wane. Consequently, parents need to be independent in terms of welfare and security, the scenario of which much resembles their Western counterparts. In sum, westernization in terms of values and lifestyles among Chinese expanding middle class is strongly indicated in the empirical study. As the Westernization trend of individualism and independence proceeds, the effects of some Chinese traditional values of filial piety and parental authority seem to wane.

Conclusion

China, now the country with the largest student migration body, is witnessing a great growth in overseas students from middle class backgrounds. This paper focuses on the social stratification in contemporary China's society, particularly the emergence of a new group of middle class and their pursuit of international education for the next generation. The problem statement of this research paper is proposed to explore the motivations behind international education fever among Chinese middle class and its possible impacts on China's society. Questions about the causes of middle class expansion, education expectations of middle class parents, motivations for international studies, and plans after children's graduation are forwarded as research questions.

In this research paper, several observations have been presented in response to the problem statement and research questions. First, Chinese middle class expansion was mainly driven by the 1980s domestic economic reform and the 1950s education reform. By raising the economic productivity and expanding education access to the lower social classes, China eventually saw the emergence of the middle class at the new millennium. Second, the Chinese middle class embraces a high expectation of education for the next generation. Through a fervent investment on education from kindergarten to graduate school, Chinese middle class families spare no efforts to win an advantaged position for their children in the future job competitions in the markets. Their firm pursuit of international education, as indicated in recent years, is triggered by various factors. Based on a qualitative study of Chinese middle class students at UCLA, lower quality of higher education in China and the credential inflation in domestic job market are the most important push factors for international education. In terms of pull factors, Chinese middle class parents believe that high education quality, international prestige of the overseas institutions, and recognition of foreign diplomas in China's job market are their major concerns. The pursuit of international

education by middle class students is likely to help maintaining socio-economic advantages of their families, reinforcing social reproduction in the China's society in the future. EMI model, which stresses the "permanent" advantages possessed by socio-economically advantaged class in obtaining education resources, is highly applicable to China's society. With the rising economic power and well-developed social networks, Chinese middle class parents help their next generation to maintain an advantaged socio-economic status for the future. Another observation about this emerging group is their Westernized values. Unlike traditional Chinese parents who exert parental authority and celebrates filial piety, Chinese middle class parents seem to embrace some Western values such as individualism and independence. By transferring the decisive power to their children, middle class parents are now more respectful to the individual choices of their children. Instead of relying on children for security when becoming old, Chinese emerging middle class seem to be more independent and tolerant for the absence of their only child in the family. These new trends, to a large extent, demonstrate some traits of Westernization among Chinese middle class.

In sum, this thesis explores a new social class in China by providing an analysis of the education expectations of this class and the possible social impacts of their education investments. Though not a comprehensive investigation of the burgeoning middle class, this study delves into the educational investment of 5 middle class families and develops a in-depth analysis of the education expectations of these families. Current trends of the "studying abroad fever" show that more international students from middle class families will expand the student diaspora in host countries. Therefore, this thesis serves as a pilot study for future research on social stratification and student migration. And due to the small sample size, the topic of the emerging Chinese middle class and their integration into international education deserves further investigation. The qualitative research design that included in this study can be a good starting point for larger sample studies. Moreover, the thesis could be

tailored to other newly-industrialized nations in the discussion of international education and social classes.

Appendices

I

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Chinese new middle class' education expectation----fervent investment in international education and its implication on future social mobility in China

Shanshan Jiang(Master of Arts), Dr. Carlos Torres, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because *you fit in our criterion of Chinese graduate student who study in UCLA with a new middle class family background.* Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is a part of my MA thesis, which addresses the topic of Chinese new middle class who send their children studying in UCLA and their education expectation of their children. We would like to investigate the motivation of the new middle class in pursuing international education for the next generation, despite of the huge cost both economically and psychologically. This study will shed some light on the attitudes towards education investments among this group and the implications of their fervent in international education in terms of social mobility in China.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- *Face to face interview, 2-3 times, each lasts about 1 hour*
- *Interviews will be conducted in private rooms. The specific locations will be determined by participants, for the purpose of confidentiality.*
- *There might be follow-up interviews after the initial 2-3 interviews. But all of them will be conducted within the process of the study, and none will take place after the research.*
- *Interviews will be recorded, but the participants have the option to view, edit and erase the recordings. Once the study is finished, all the recordings will be destroyed.*
- *Interview questions are semi-structured with open-endings. Most of the times, participants just need to tell their stories or family stories.*

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about 3-4 hours in total interviews.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

Participants might feel a little uneasy when talking about family stories which involve suffering or unhappiness. But this depends on specific cases since not all families experienced bad times. So this psychological discomfort will not surely happen if this is not the case for your family.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may offer some evidence on the investigation of Chinese emerging middle class and their education expectation on next generation. Since education closely linked to issues of social mobility, this study will lend some evidence on the possible changes in Chinese social classes in years to come.

What other choices do I have if I choose not to participate?

You may choose not to participate

Will I be paid for participating?

You will not be paid for participation.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of codification of all files in my personal computer, which is only accessible to me as the investigator. I will set password on my computer to keep those files in secret. No paper notes will be used during this research process. All the digital files, including interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed once the study is finished.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- *You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.*
- *Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.*
- *You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.*

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

· **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Shanshan Jiang at 310-600-0917

Email: chrissy33@ucla.edu

Address: 925 Weyburn Place, Apt #52, Los Angeles, CA, 90024

Dr. Carlos A. Torres

Email: catnova@aol.com

• **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant		

Signature of Participant		Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Shanshan Jiang

		310-600-0917
Name of Person Obtaining Consent		Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent		Date

II

Referral Recruitment

Shanshan Jiang(Master of Arts), Dr. Carlos Torres, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study, entitled as “*Chinese new middle class' education expectation----fervent investment in international education and its implication on future social mobility in China*”

This study is a part of Shanshan Jiang's M.A. thesis, which addresses the topic of Chinese new middle class who send their children studying in UCLA and their education expectation of their children. They would like to investigate the motivation of the new middle class in pursuing international education for the next generation. At present, they are eagerly looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- 1. UCLA graduate students with Chinese nationality.*
- 2. Students coming from new middle class Chinese families*
- 3. Financially dependent on family without any scholarship*

If you fit in the above criterion, you are eligible to be a possible participant in this study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

Sign an informed consent form before the study starts

Face to face interview, 2-3 times, each lasts about 1 hour

Interviews will be conducted in private rooms. The specific locations will be determined by participants, for the purpose of confidentiality.

There might be follow-up interviews after the initial 2-3 interviews. But all of them will be conducted within the process of the study, and none will take place after the research.

Interviews will be recorded, but the participants have the option to view, edit and erase the recordings. Once the study is finished, all the recordings will be destroyed.

Your Rights in Participating in the study

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Shanshan Jiang at 310-600-0917

Email: chrissy33@ucla.edu

Address: 925 Weyburn Place, Apt #52, Los Angeles, CA, 90024

Dr. Carlos A. Torres

Email: catnovoa@aol.com

III

Interview questions for student participants

Interview Questions
Name (will be codified)
Gender
Major
Parents' Occupations
Parents' Education Level
Could you please tell me your educational experiences in kindergarten to elementary school? (What kind of kindergarten and elementary school did you attend? Public or private? Why not other schools?)
Could you please tell your stories in middle school? (How did you get into that school? Why not other schools? How about the tuition fees, etc.)
Could you please tell me your experiences in high school? (Private or public? Tuition and fees? How did you enter it? Why not other schools?)
Could you please tell me your experiences in college in China?
Have you ever been to other country for international education before? If yes, please specify.
When applying for graduate school in the U.S, how many times did you take the GRE and TOEFL exams? How many graduate schools did you apply in total?

IV

Interview Questions for Parents

Chinese Middle Class & Opinions about International Education	
1. 您为孩子选择幼儿园和小学考虑的因素有哪些？ What did you take into consideration when selecting kindergarden and elementary school for your child?	
2. 您为孩子选择中学考虑的因素有哪些？ What did you take into consideration when selecting secondary school for your child?	
3. 您的孩子选择大学的时候，您的意见是什么？ What kind of suggestions did you offer when your child was selecting college?	
2. 您当初选择让孩子出国留学的原因有哪些？为什么不选择中国的大学继续学习？ Why did you send your child to UCLA for international education? Why not stay in China for post-graduate education?	
3 您认为在美国留学有什么好处？是否考虑过美国以外的其他国家？为什么？ What do you think are the advantages of international education in the U.S.? Have you ever considered sending your child to other countries? Why?	
4. 您认为美国大学的优势有哪些？ What do you think are the advantages of U.S graduate schools?	
5.您希望孩子毕业之后的去向是什么？（留美工作 / 移民 / 回国）为什么？ What do you expect your child do after graduation? (stay in the U.S for work; immigration; return to China) Why?	

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