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Seeking a Global Iconic Brand:

The Higher Education Brand Campaign and the Chinese Elite-Singletons

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Jing Xu

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Seeking a Global Iconic Brand:

The Higher Education Brand Campaign and the Chinese Elite-Singletons

by

Jing Xu

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor John N. Hawkins, Chair

In the past twenty years, higher education has become a hyper-competitive industry in the context of globalization. Universities, particularly the world's most reputable universities, have entered an age when multiple resources are not only allocated within strict national boundaries, but also in a global marketplace. Branding, originally a concept from the management field, has been introduced to the world of higher education, as universities seek to retain a comparative advantage in this environment of global competition. However, very few studies have addressed the emerging trend of branding in the higher education sector. My dissertation research explores this trend by examining the interplay between two of the significant players in the game of the global iconic brand campaign: a prestigious U.S. research university (UCLA) and an important group of its prospective international students – the Chinese elite-singletons. It explores the nature of university branding in interacting layers through a deep analysis of the motivations, process, and bidirectional impact of seeking a global iconic brand on the part of both parties.

A mixed-methods approach in a single case study was applied to address the research topic, including both quantitative methods and qualitative methods. Data were collected in China and at UCLA over a three-year period between 2012 to 2014. Surveys and interviews were conducted with Chinese elite-singletons in China, while document analysis, interviews and participant observation were conducted at UCLA.

This empirical research yielded three main research findings and their associated implications. (1) The rise of university branding was a result of supply and demand in the higher education sector, which was largely influenced by neoliberalism and globalization. Branding at UCLA was an organizational response to the changing socioeconomic environment and was encouraged by strong demand from the international student market, particularly from China. (2) University branding, derived from the field of management and applied in the world of education, is hybrid in nature, which has presented administrative challenges for universities, which typically tend to be loosely coupled organizations. The conflict and compromise apparent in the branding process at UCLA has provided a compelling example of this phenomenon. (3) University branding had a bidirectional impact on both the institution's global student recruitment efforts and the institution itself. The evaluation of UCLA brand equity showed a match and mismatch between the institution and its prospective international students in their common goal of pursuing preeminence through association with a global iconic brand. It also vividly illustrated the essential importance of addressing social and cultural differences in branding for the global higher education market.

Indeed, although my research findings are framed in large part from the institutional perspective, this is not to downplay the critical importance of the Chinese elite-singletons who were also the subjects of this study. The data this project assembled shows that they are a truly

unique group among international students and their impact on the university is unique. They are affluent, high-achieving students who not only contribute to university finances, but also to the intellectual and cultural diversity on campus. As a group, they have a highly cohesive and less idiosyncratic set of preferences with regard to what they consider important in a university. And in terms of numbers, they dominate the international student population at UCLA. Therefore, any university branding efforts would do well to be attentive to the particular priorities of this group, as both institution and students seek to reach their ideal and global iconic brand.

The dissertation of Jing Xu is approved.

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Val D. Rust

John N. Hawkins, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

DEDICATION PAGE

 To my beloved daughter Violet, and every child in the world, as their parents' unique treasure and heart's desire.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

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My thanks also go out to the broader scholarly community, both in the U.S. and internationally, for their counsel throughout the course of my research, and their important help in gaining access to my field study sites. These scholars were: Barbara S. Lawrence and Robert Rhoads (UCLA), Stephanie Kim (University of California, Berkeley), Deane Neubauer (East-West Center), and Jose Santos (The Education Trust), from the U.S.; Roger Boshier (University of British Columbia), from Canada; Gang Wu, Guangping Wu, Yong Zhou, and Mei Li (East

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I also give heartfelt thanks to the large number of people who participated in my study, both from China and UCLA. This includes the many Chinese high school graduates that I surveyed, their school teachers and principals, and college counselors from Chinese study-abroad agencies. At UCLA, leaders from the central administration, Marketing & Special Events, and Undergraduate Admissions were generous with their knowledge and insights. Without their time and openness to my research, this dissertation would not exist. This dissertation was also made possible by financial assistance from the UCLA Graduate Division and External Affairs.

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Mirroring the experience of the Chinese elite-singletons in my research, studying abroad was not an easy undertaking for me. However, pursuing a doctoral degree from a prestigious American university while also keeping up with a job and raising a baby was even more challenging, and at times seemed impossible. I must give sincere thanks to my parents for raising me with passion, diligence, and resilience, so that I was able to balance these three important life tasks at the same time. Beyond that, I owe them an even greater debt for the long and dedicated support they gave me, when they left their home in China in order to help me take care of my baby daughter in the U.S., from her birth to almost the age of two. Without their unconditional love and devoted time, this dissertation would not have been completed. This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband and my daughter; they have brought so much joy into my life, and, most importantly, given me another perspective whenever dark times come. Finally, I wanted to offer my gratitude to my extended family in China: my in-laws, who also spent a great deal of time helping me at home; my aunts and uncle, who assumed the duty of taking care of my ninety-two-year-old grandfather and eighty-eight-year-old grandmother in China, so that my parents could stay in the U.S. to support my dissertation writing; and my beloved grandparents, who have no idea what a doctoral dissertation is, but who are always proud of me, and give their support to whatever I choose to fight for. Becoming the first holder of a Ph.D. in the family is my best gift to them. They are all heroes in this dissertation.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Background

Over the past twenty years, higher education has become a highly competitive industry in the context of globalization. Intensive student recruitment activities from developed countries such as the U.S., Australia, and the UK are often seen in many Asian countries. Different joint professional programs and satellite campuses are rapidly growing in Eastern European and Arab countries. Even universities in China, which have traditionally been supported by the government, have begun fundraising overseas in recent years, by tapping into networks of alumni and patriotic Chinese philanthropists.

As a result, branding, originally a concept from the business and management field, has been introduced to the higher education sector, as a tool that can help universities to retain a comparative advantage. Universities know that a strong brand is an extremely valuable and intangible asset, which plays a key role in the race to attract multiple potential resources, including support from politicians, donors, prospective students, and exemplary faculty, all of whom may have gravitated to a particular university as part of their own "brand identity." A strong brand bolsters the crucial human and financial resources that allow universities to maintain or achieve their "positional goods" (Hirsch 1976) in the higher education stratifications which, in turn, "provide access to social prestige and income-earning" (Marginson 2006).

For world-class universities at the apex of the higher education hierarchy, and particularly for top American universities, having a global iconic brand is a highly desirable goal, because it enables them to stand out immediately from their international rivals in the competition for

potential resources beyond national boundaries. "Iconic brands" develop identity myths and address people's desires in imaginary worlds (Holt 2004). In addition, a global iconic brand can, by itself, be inherently highly valuable. One such university brand, Harvard, has been rated more valuable ($15.9 billion) than that of multinational corporations like Pepsi ($14.0 billion) and Nike ($13.7 billion) (Times Higher Education 2011). Although there is only one Harvard, no one wants to be left behind in the higher education global branding competition, particularly when a new order, triggered by global university rankings, is stratifying all universities. It is in this global socioeconomic context that the emerging trend of the global university brand campaign has appeared.

In this new trend of global university branding, top U.S. universities and young elite-singletons in China are two significant players. Their outstanding profiles match each other's expectations, in that they are each seeking a global "iconic brand" in the higher education market. Chinese elite-singletons are an important part of the **Chinese singleton generation**,[1] a generation of only children born to Chinese families since the introduction of the One-Child Policy (1979-2015).[2] The singleton generation comprises the majority of Chinese international students in the U.S. and other host countries, since most Chinese international students come from large urban cities where the One-Child Policy restrictions were primarily implemented. These students are the main contributors to the new wave of "study abroad fever" (*liu xue re*) in China; indeed, from 2007 to 2010 the number of Chinese students attending universities overseas increased by more than 20 percent (MOE 2010), making China the largest sending country for

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[1] I use the terms "Chinese singleton generation," "Chinese singletons," and "Chinese international students" interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

[2] The One-Child Policy was a national directive in China that officially restricted married, urban couples to having only one child, while allowing exemptions for specific populations, including rural couples, ethnic minorities, and parents without any siblings themselves.

international students in the U.S. They have a particularly strong motivation for upward mobility and believe studying abroad is one way to achieve this goal. As Vanessa Fong claims, the singleton generation is "born and raised for [the] developed world" (Fong 2011). Within this unique generation, the elite-singletons – the highest achieving Chinese students, usually from upper-middle class or upper-class families – comprise the group that is most actively seeking a global iconic brand when they look to cross-border higher education in order to secure their future elite status. They are defined in my study as a group of Chinese students who (1) were born in the Chinese singleton generation; (2) achieved a high level of academic performance; and (3) are children of China's new elites, coming from the upper-middle and upper classes. Their strong academic backgrounds and ample financial resources make them particularly attractive prospects for many world-class universities, including the top U.S. public research universities.

On the U.S. side, American higher education institutions (hereinafter HEIs) are, in many ways, undoubtedly pioneers in practicing branding. Bookstores on American campuses sell not only books but also numerous types of institutionally-branded products, stamped with university logos, slogans, and mascots. Intercollegiate athletics are another area in which there are special branding collaborations between top U.S. universities and high-profile corporations – such as Nike and Adidas – which generate external revenue and increase university brand awareness (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). These practices reconfigure branding culture to fit within U.S. higher education, and are part of a broader shift toward the branded society characteristic of the new economy (Stuart 1988; Savan 1994; Twitchell 1996; Goldman and Papson 1996; Frank 1997; Stuart 2001; Klein 2002). However, this brand-building tradition in American HEIs has mainly focused on domestic needs and markets. In contrast, HEIs in other developed countries, such as the U.K., Australia, and Canada, all have traditions of focusing on international markets in order to attract international students. In particular, some prestigious U.S. public universities

have just started to journey overseas in recent years, due to the American financial crisis. Enjoying a central position in the global higher education system, having access to relatively secure funding, and being subject to high expectations to meet local needs, these universities have traditionally put forth less effort on branding or marketing towards international student consumers.

Now, the situation is changing. The recent economic crisis has resulted in heavy financial pressure on many top U.S. public research universities, driving them to place significant emphasis on recruiting international students in order to not only solve their financial problems, but also to move them towards becoming "self-reliant [universities]" (B. Clark 2004). For top public universities such as UCLA, talented international students, including Chinese elite-singletons, are exceptionally desirable, because these outstanding prospective international students not only help to alleviate an institution's financial burden in the short term, but also strengthen the university portfolio when building a global iconic brand in the long term. The competition for young talented brains in the international market is becoming ever fiercer, as prestigious U.S. public universities enter the new era of global branding campaigns. However, the research on this new phenomenon is under-explored, since branding is an emerging idea in academia (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009) that has not yet been widely discussed.

Literature Review

Literature on the University Branding Context

Marketization of higher education and decrease of public funding

The branding of higher education institutions mainly occurs within a context that is characterized by an increasing transfer of "good" business practices from the private sector to

higher education. But this is only the tip of the iceberg, reflecting the broader historical transition of higher education towards marketization and privatization.

The 1990s, for instance, witnessed market-oriented developments in higher education worldwide. During this period, governments in many countries retreated from significant public-sector funding, including that for higher education. Meanwhile, economic development and the burgeoning technological/digital revolution triggered a shift in access to higher education, away from something that was once available to elites only, towards models of mass higher education, and even further, to universal higher education. Yet the higher education sector worldwide continued to face the challenge of financial constraints. Given this situation, privatization and marketization mechanisms were introduced to "solve" future problems. Many countries adopted fee-paying policies, particularly for international students, and increased their branding competition for international recruitment. Decreasing public funding from governments in many developed countries, particularly the United States, Australia, and Japan, also forced universities to develop new models of financing and governance to maintain their competitiveness, such as the "performance-based" funding model (Sörlin 2007) and entrepreneurialism (B. Clark 1998). The branding of higher education is, in this context, a natural response to continuous financial constraints. In the economic downturn that has recently affected many developed countries, the concept of university branding has assumed even greater significance. At the same time, some express concern that an aggressive university branding approach may one day hurt a university's image by sacrificing its reputation as a public good in favor of the drive towards commercialization.

The emerging global model in higher education

The transition towards marketization and privatization in higher education has generated a great deal of debate regarding whether higher education should belong to the public sector or the private sector; the reality is that it probably belongs to both. Exploring a new hybrid model that swings between the two sectors is like walking on a muddy road. Along the way, we can observe the appearance of some emerging global models, which are leading higher education in new directions. In contrast to the "traditional university," these new models are known as the "entrepreneurial university"(B. Clark 1998), the "innovative university" (Christensen and Eyring 2011), the "enterprise university" (Marginson 2000), the "U.S. research university model" (Rhoads 2011), and the "emerging global model" (Mohrman, Ma, and Baker 2008). Each of these concepts is explained below.

Clark proposed the concept of the "entrepreneurial university," based on his mid-1990s research on five European universities. He claimed that these entrepreneurial universities were actively and proactively involved in university transformation, towards self-sustainability and entrepreneurship. These universities had five common elements: a diversified funding base, a strengthened steering core, an expanded developmental periphery, a stimulated academic heartland, and an integrated entrepreneurial culture (B. Clark 1998). This emerging idea, presented in his book *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities*, has been well-received. The idea of the entrepreneurial university also led to a formal award system created by *The Times Higher Education* in the U.K., which encourages universities that successfully embrace entrepreneurship. As the Award report describes it, this Award is:

> …a recognition of higher education excellence in demonstrating how institutional
> leadership and a strong entrepreneurial culture can create the policies and
> practices that are conducive to the development of enterprising and
> entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviors throughout the organization – in

management and administration, in teaching and research staff and in students and graduates. It is these characteristics that drive transformative change leading to economic prosperity and social well-being (NCEE 2011).

An even larger study on a similar topic was conducted by Marginson in Australia. Grounded in case studies of seventeen Australian universities, he contended that the modern university can be understood as an "enterprise university," characterized by corporate-style executive leadership (Marginson 2000).

"The Innovative University" builds upon the theory of "disruptive innovation" and applies it to the world of higher education. The concept, originally introduced by Christensen in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, holds that sustaining institutions or models exist, until change "disrupts" the traditional or "sustaining" model; this bears some similarities to Clark's concept of the "entrepreneurial university." As Christensen and Eyring argued, there are many disruptors to the traditional university, such as a recession, the rise of for-profit schools, or the prevalence of high-quality online programs. To avoid the pitfalls of disruption and turn the scenario into a positive and productive one, universities must change their institutional "DNA"(Christensen and Eyring 2011).

As Clark and Marginson note, the features of academic entrepreneurialism have become hallmarks of U.S. research universities; these new institutional characteristics are also front and center in the work of Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), most notably in their development of the concept of academic capitalism. One recent, aggressive example in the U.S. could be the Enterprise University Plan for Ohio, passed by the University System of Ohio in 2011 (Board of Regents 2011). This plan defines how the state's public colleges and universities can gain increased freedom from state regulation. Increasing international student recruitment is

considered to be one of the key ways to increase revenues. According to IIE Open Doors 2011, Ohio had the greatest percentage increase in the year 2010-2011 in terms of its international student numbers, with 10.5 percent; the state also moved up in the list of top ten hosting states in the U.S. (Institute of International Education 2011).

Furthermore, the eight fundamental features of the Emerging Global Model (EGM) of the research university, unsurprisingly, look quite similar to characteristics one finds at top U.S. research universities: a global mission, research intensity, new roles for professors, diversified funding, worldwide recruitment, increasing complexity, new relations with government and industry, and global collaboration with similar institutions (Mohrman, Ma, and Baker 2008). These authors acknowledged that "at this particular stage in the development of the university, many of these features of the EGM are rooted in the American experience of the past four decades."

International students as an indispensable financial resource

When modern universities transform to the new models in the trend of higher education marketization, the student's institutional identity becomes dual. They are not only considered to be an "educated person" but also a "loyal consumer" of the university and its intellectual property (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Thinking of a brand as something that "resides in the minds of consumers" (Keller 2012), we can picture a university brand along with its customers, the students. In fact, one of the most obvious branding practices in higher education is geared towards students.

Globally, the "importation" of overseas students and the "exportation" of higher education services have become more active economic contributors within host countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In 2001, educational exports drew $40 billion from

two million students worldwide (Marginson and McBurnie 2004). A unidirectional student flow

from emerging nations (71.6 percent of all Asian international students in 2001) went into Japan

and the English-speaking nations of Europe (Marginson 2006), in pursuit of both a high-quality

education and the acquisition of a branded degree that would be recognized by future employers.

Many governments adopted higher fee-paying policies, particularly for international students,

who have become indispensable financial resources for university development, and sometimes

even survival. International students have become critical financial resources for many

universities around the world. The following pie chart from the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) represents the segments of the international higher

education market (Figure 1.1).
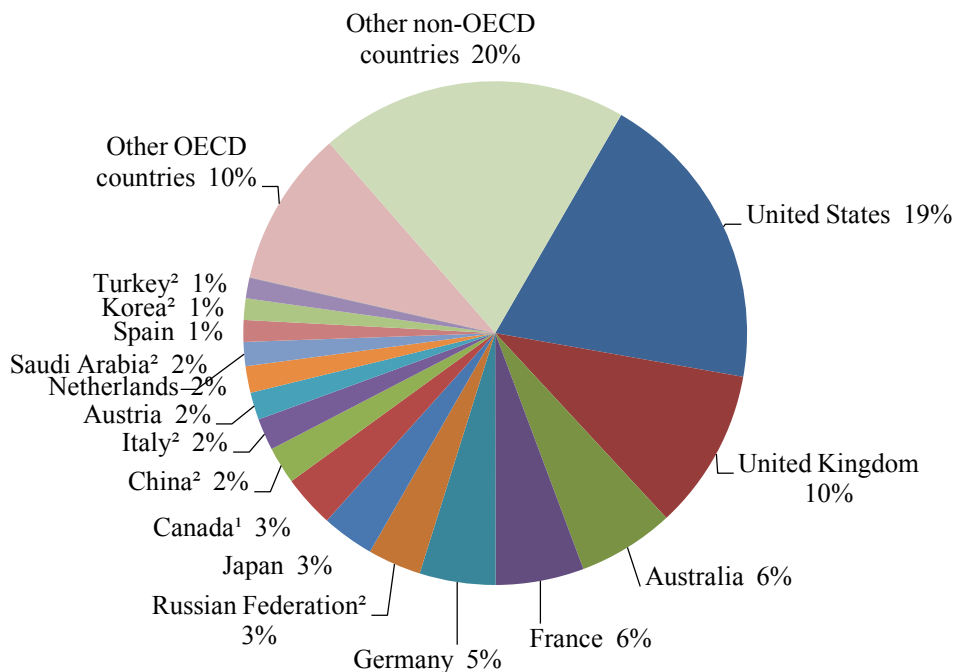
Figure 1.1. Distribution of foreign students in tertiary education, by country of destination (2013).
Source: Education at a Glance (OECD 2015b).

It is obvious that among all the countries in Figure 1.1, the U.S. is the biggest winner. It hosts the highest number of international students, and education and training are among the top ten U.S. service exports (Export.gov 2011). Because of the global reputation (based on international university rankings) and diversity of American colleges and universities, more students worldwide (18 percent) are choosing to study in the U.S. (OECD 2011). The tuition and living expenses paid by international students and their families contributed over $18.8 billion to the U.S. economy for the 2009-10 academic year, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (Export.gov 2011). In 2010-11, among all the international students in the U.S., the students from the top three sending countries (China, India, and South Korea) comprised nearly half (46 percent) of the total international enrollments. There is no doubt that the continuous decrease of state funds and the severe economic recession have triggered more American universities to more aggressively pursue international recruitment.

China, the strongest emerging market in recent years, has gained substantial attention from international education marketers. At the beginning of the 2010s, there were 284,700 Chinese students who chose to attend universities overseas, representing a 24 percent increase compared to the year before. This number has risen to 544,500 in 2015-16, almost doubling in five years. Among these students, the majority of them pay their higher education expenses entirely out of their own pockets, and one in three chose to attend a U.S. university (Ministry of Education 2017). The U.S. is the most desirable country in which to study for most Chinese international students. As the IIE Open Doors (Institute of International Education 2016c) data shows, China has been the top sending country to the U.S. for seven years in a row since 2009.

The global ranking system and university branding

In recent years, the phenomenon of global ranking has gained much attention from university marketers. By explicitly rating universities on the same scale, global rankings help world audiences identify a university in comparison to its counterparts. These rankings provide a comparative advantage to the university with a higher position, and can eventually result in an enhanced reputation and a stronger university brand. Comparative rankings carry more weight at the global level, because outsiders, such as audiences from other countries, need some global reference in order to identify a university they are unfamiliar with. Therefore, universities pay tremendous attention to their positions in the rankings, and incorporate ranking strategies into their branding campaigns. To this extent, it seems that the game of university branding is centered on the concept of prestige rather than uniqueness, and global university rankings become the best demonstration of the importance of "positional good."

However, global rankings have nothing to do with the university brand identity, or what the university truly is. Rankings may indicate the level of prestige, but cannot convey the character or personality of the university. In addition, since a brand is, once again, something that "resides in the minds of consumers" (Keller 2012), rankings do little to reflect what the university's consumers think of the university brand. Taking the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) as an example, its index entirely depends on an objectivist ontology and uses data supplied by universities, which has nothing to do with the judgments and feelings of university consumers towards the university. However, a brand does not work through a purely objective ontology. A highly rated university may not necessarily earn a corresponding amount of good reviews from actual consumers. That is, securing a good position in global university rankings is not enough to develop a strong university brand. To demonstrate this tricky but important

difference, in 2011 Times Higher Education published its *World Reputation Ranking*, separate from their annual *World University Rankings*.

By conducting a survey of more than 13,000 experienced academics worldwide, the *Reputation Ranking* revealed clear discrepancies between the reputations and overall rankings of some institutions. For example, The California Institute of Technology, rated second in the *World University Rankings*, was tenth in reputation. The London School of Economics, meanwhile, was rated thirty-seventh in reputation but eighty-sixth overall. Japanese universities, on the other hand, won much higher scores in their reputation rankings, while the top Australian universities gained fewer points on reputation when compared to their performance on the *World University Rankings* (Times Higher Education 2011). Even more importantly, the Times Higher Education survey showed that there are only a handful of globally recognized, iconic brands. The top twenty universities are frequently cited in the survey, but below twenty there is a rapid drop in the number of mentions given to institutions. Indeed, there were only very slight differences between the scores of those institutions below the rank of fifty (Times Higher Education 2011). It is this gap between the perceptions of society and the "real" performance of the university (if we accept global university rankings as a reliable source for judging university quality) that creates the space for university branding practices. Those universities that received a lower reputation score than performance score will more than likely want to shrink that gap by communicating their university brand more effectively.

Current Literature on University Branding

Despite the fact that branding efforts are easy to observe (visual design, logo and trademark, international recruitment, etc.), there is a paucity of research that specifically addresses higher

education branding. It is a field that is still in need of much basic research (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006). A short literature review of university branding follows.

The definition of university branding

Branding, one of the main fields of concentration in business, has been widely studied since the 1980s. Despite many different theories and frameworks about branding, most marketing observers agree that, basically, "branding is all about creating differences" (Keller 2012). Branding seeks to sell an image rather than a particular product. While branding has been adopted in the higher education sector, the meaning of university branding remains ambiguous and underexplored. Within the limited literature, there has been some examination as to what makes a "successful" university brand (Chapleo 2010). Some argue that university branding is about defining what a university "is" and what it "stands for" (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009); others argue that the concept of branding, as applied to higher education, is different from branding in the commercial sector. It should truthfully reflect the "personality" that the institution has developed through its mission and values (Black 2008). Compared to the comprehensive understanding of the branding concept in management, the definition of branding in higher education has not yet been fully established. Even though some scholars argue that there is a difference between branding in the commercial sector and higher education, the definition of university branding is still based on the business-world model and does not reflect an educational philosophy that emphasizes the "good life" and the construction of a good society.

The debate over university branding

Because branding is a contentious subject in the higher education sector, issues around the legitimacy of university branding attract attention from many scholars. Some scholars regard

branding efforts as a "symptom of deep malaise in higher education" (Boshier 2012) and question the value of branding in the higher education sector (Jevons 2006). Others argue that branding is simply a concept that can be applied to higher education, as well as to other industrial sectors (Opoku, Abratt, and Pitt 2006). University branding, in this view, is a practice that long preceded globalization (Temple 2006), and one that practitioners have increasingly embraced because of globalization (Chapleo 2010).

The empirical studies of university branding

Within the existing research on university branding, empirical studies compose the majority of available literature. Most of these studies focus on the communication of university brands (Belanger, Mount, and Wilson 2002; Bulotaite 2003), branding architecture (Baker and Balmer 1997), and branding positioning strategy (Celly and Knepper 2009). These studies are considered a part of university brand management research, which usually addresses the issue of defining brand identity, establishing brand communication, launching brand positioning, and evaluating brand equity. As Louro and Cunha (Louro and Cunha 2001) argue, branding is considered a central organizational competency that needs to be understood and developed, as strong brands affect almost all marketing activity and are claimed to receive preferential evaluations of attribute and benefit information, as well as generally higher overall preference (Aaker 1991; Hoeffler and Keller 2003). In many studies, university brand management is associated with university rankings (Chapleo 2010). However, the literature also shows that a comprehensive university brand management framework has not been fully investigated. Most colleges and universities have not made brand management strategy a core function of their senior leadership. As Lockwood and Hadd (2007) argue, much of the work on branding in higher education has been in peripheral areas, such as assessing Pantone colors in logos, creating and disseminating marketing materials, or selling licensed merchandise.

A few other studies explore the specific field of university branding in the U.S. For example, in *Academic Capitalism*, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) explore the "branded culture" in American universities by exploring sports programs and university trademarks as branded intellectual property.

The remaining empirical studies have been carried out in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand, where institutions have traditionally targeted international education markets for the purpose of student recruitment. These studies discuss different aspects of university branding in a global context, which include but are not limited to: the influence of cross-cultural values on the positioning of international education brands (Gray, Fam, and Llanes 2003); a case study of executive and professional education program marketing in China (N. R. Liu and Crossley 2010); and how to sustain international student numbers amidst global competition (Szekeres 2010). It is important to highlight that in such literature the notions of marketing and branding are used interchangeably, but are considered different terms in business.

Institutions that want to actively manage their educational brands must first consider how the marketplace perceives the brand promise (Lockwood and Hadd 2007). Academic quality and the student experience are foundational elements of any higher education institution, and are key elements of its brand promise. However, the image and message delivered by university branding could lead to different perceptions of an individual university brand. Some studies show there is a gap between a university's image and students' perceptions (Belanger, Mount, and Wilson 2002).

Significance of Study

Contributions of the Study to the Field

As university branding emerges as a trend in the global higher education sector, my research is positioned to contribute pioneering work in this new field. In effect, it will extend brand theory from the commercial sector into the non-profit sector of higher education through a multi-layered analysis dovetailing work from the fields of management, sociology, and education. The trans-disciplinary work in this case study will generate a more holistic view of the complexity of university branding. The research will provide a meta-analysis of the core values of a public university when economic times are difficult, and an in-depth understanding of how a university transforms to be a self-reliant and entrepreneurial entity, by engaging the branding concept and practice. Important data will be gathered during the research process at a time when this information is in great demand by the university. This study will furthermore provide much-needed empirical data and vital findings about university branding to institutional leaders at UCLA and other U.S. public universities, to aid them in making better decisions regarding their university brand, and in constructing more effective strategies for their own particular branding campaigns in relation to the global education marketplace, particularly for the purpose of attracting talented international students. It is hoped that the case study will help provide tangible feedback on UCLA's branding efforts and its current focus on recruiting Chinese elite-singletons. Last but not least, my research highlights the important interactions between the U.S. higher education sector and China's future leaders (i.e., the elite-singleton generation), an area where there is a significant gap in the literature.

The utopian visions pursued in social science and education theories are always inspiring to me; however, they sometimes make me feel as if I have lost touch with reality. My work experience in different educational environments and schools makes me aware of the complexity of the education system, and this always piques my interest to discover what is really behind the curtain. I hope that my doctoral dissertation research can be somewhat visionary in terms of identifying where we could be, but also realistic and pragmatic enough to conceptualize where we are now.

While studying at UCLA, my awareness of branding, institutionally and personally, has been gradually illuminated. It is amazing to find out that no matter where I go or who I talk with from different parts of the world, my personal identity is always associated with the name of UCLA. I assume it is the power and magic of the university brand, which indicates personal accomplishment, connections, tastes, mind-set and even identity in a profound and long-lasting way. Exploring this profound impact of the university brand and the process of university branding is like unraveling an exciting personal mystery as well.

Research Questions

Situated in both this global context and the gap in academic literature on university branding, my dissertation explores the emerging university branding phenomenon by focusing on the interplay between two significant players in the global iconic brand competition – prestigious U.S. public universities and high-achieving Chinese international students from the singleton generation, or as I refer to them, Chinese elite-singletons. I chose UCLA as the subject of my institutional case study, as it is a good representative of a top U.S. public research university that has just entered the game of higher education global branding campaigns, partly in pursuit of a

broader institutional transformation towards a more self-reliant model. Multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews, a survey, document analysis, historical research, and participant observation were used to create an in-depth and multi-level analysis to understand the new branding phenomenon. Three research objectives were designed to achieve this goal:

1) Explore the rationale and process of university branding as a strategy and practice to help the organization better adapt to the fast-changing external environment (e.g., domestic financial crisis and increasing global competition).

2) Explore the hybrid nature of university branding, when branding as a business concept is applied to the non-profit higher education context.

3) Examine the efficiency and impact of university global branding strategy and practice by analyzing the response from Chinese elite-singletons, as the main targeted consumers and key stakeholders in the higher education global market.

Towards these research objectives, the following research questions, along with several related sub-questions, are answered in my dissertation.

RQ1: What is the rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization?

1) What are the social-economic forces between the U.S. and China that are relevant to the rise of higher education brand campaigns for international recruitment?

2) Why has branding been applied in a specific U.S. university, such as UCLA? What are the motivations of UCLA to enter the brand competition for international recruitment?

3) What are the motivations of Chinese elite-singletons as prospective international students, based on their backgrounds?

RQ2: What is the process of building a brand campaign in a specific university, using UCLA as a case study?

1) What is the UCLA brand, based on its institutional history and mission?

2) How was the concept of branding introduced at UCLA, and what are the main steps of UCLA's recent rebranding efforts? The possible main steps may include, but are not limited to: (1) the introduction of the idea of refining UCLA's current branding strategies; (2) major new branding activities; and (3) new organizational structures in the university to facilitate the change (secured human resources and funding).

3) How is UCLA's branding applied in the international student recruitment marketplace? What are the specific strategies and main efforts?

RQ3: What is the impact of UCLA's brand campaign on its prospective Chinese international students – Chinese elite-singletons – as well as on the institution itself?

1) What is the nature of college choice for Chinese elite-singletons who want to attend prestigious U.S. universities, and to what extent do UCLA's brand strategy and practice affect their perception of the UCLA brand and their intention to attend the university?

2) To what extent does UCLA's brand campaign transform the university as an organization?

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

Introduction: A Transdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

To set the framework for an analysis of university branding in this context, a trans-disciplinary theoretical framework is deployed that combines work from the fields of education and management. One particular theory, "academic capitalism" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) – a combination of the sociology of education and economic analysis – will be superimposed on work regarding "customer-based brand equity (CBBE)" theory (Keller 2012), and Bolman and Deal's (2003) "organizational change and reframing" theory from the management field. Each theory could be applied to explain one aspect of university branding from a single perspective, but none of them directly addresses university branding as a whole in the age of globalization. Thus, I propose a trans-disciplinary theoretical framework that provides a synthesis of three conceptual theories, and which is designed to present a "deep analysis" of several stories of university branding in interacting layers (Figure 2.1). These three theories provide a set of lenses that will help make sense of the developing concept of university branding.
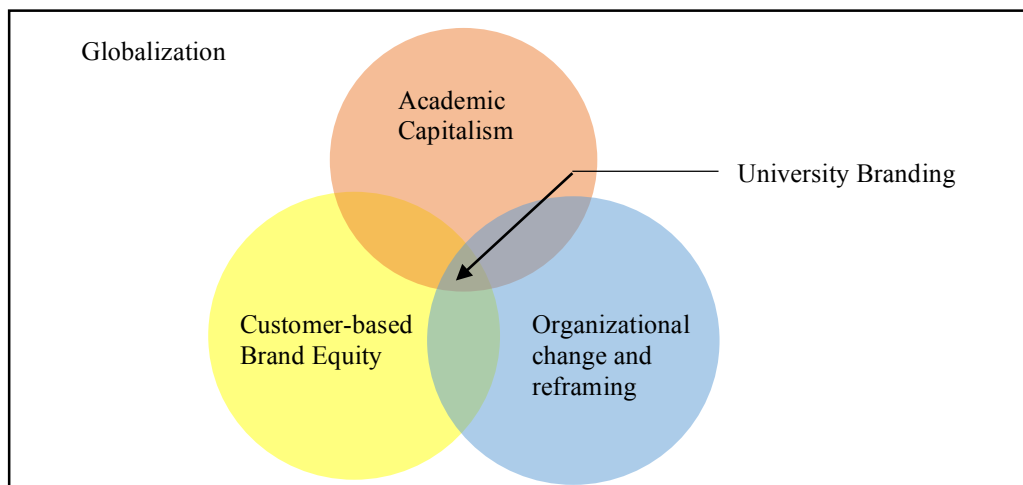
Figure 2.1. Trans-disciplinary theoretical framework for university branding analysis

As the framework shows, each theory interacts with the others in some circumstances; meanwhile, university branding falls within the intersection belonging to applications of all three theories. In the following sections I will discuss each of the theories and their implications for university branding in more detail.

The Theories in the Framework

Globalization, Neoliberalism and Academic Capitalism

Globalization and neoliberalism

> Globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Held 1991).

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the term "globalization" was first used in 1983 by Theodore Levitt. At that time, Levitt referred to vast changes in economics and finance affecting production, consumption, and global investment, occurring as a result of economic and financial liberalization, structural adjustment programs, and the diminished role of the state in the economy (Levitt 1983). This definition almost perfectly captured the economic side of the changes but did not sufficiently grasp the transformations in other sectors of society, including education. Over the decades, and as globalization has permeated our daily lives, some experts from other fields have defined the term in a more general way. As David Held argued, globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Held 1991).

As an economic model, neoliberalism is a major point of contention in discussions about globalization. Simply defined, it is an economic doctrine that sees the market as the most effective way of determining production and satisfying people's needs (Stromquist 2002). It is an

element of globalization that encourages free trade or freedom of commerce. Citizens are increasingly viewed as consumers, making market-led decisions. Individuals, not the state, are responsible for their own well-being.

Globalization and neoliberalism have effected profound changes in global higher education and have led to several new trends in the education sector. Higher education has become available at different price points, as a *commodity*. The privatization of higher education has increased, as, for instance, the burdens of government payment have shifted to individuals through increased "user" fees (Lynch 2006). Higher education has also been placed in an environment of global competition; the phrases "university international rankings" and "world-class university" appear often in the news. This has become one of the key issues in academic and higher education administration. What is more, the movement to broaden access to public universities, the dominant strategy during the 1970s and 1980s, has largely been supplanted by a reliance on the marketplace, not the government, to shape the contours of higher education (Kirp 2010).

By the early 1990s, globalization had become a leading influence in the evolution of education. The economic, technological, and cultural effects of globalization fed one another. The growing "people movement" and better communication technologies brought about more cultural interaction, and facilitated market development in education, particularly in higher education. It was during this very period when privatization and marketization mechanisms were introduced to higher education. We have been witness to a market-oriented, worldwide transformation in higher education, and international higher education is not an exception.

In this dissertation, neoliberalism and globalization will be used to develop a historical review and analysis of the trend towards market-driven privatization in higher education, in the

context of globalization. This will help to both locate UCLA now, and identify where it is going within this trend. It will also help to understand the needs of making UCLA a global brand.

Academic capitalism

The theory of academic capitalism moves beyond thinking of the student as a consumer to considering the institution as marketer (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004); in this theory, universities are actively involved in marketing themselves. When students have enrolled, their status shifts from one of consumers to that of a captive market, and colleges and universities offer them goods bearing the institutions' trademarked symbols, images, and names at university profit centers such as unions and malls. In this sense, the students shape their identities in relation to the university brand. The value of a university brand is sometimes impressive, particularly the value of a world-class research university. According to The Times Higher Education (2011), the Harvard brand is valued at $15.9 billion, which is more than Pepsi ($14.0 billion) and Nike ($13.9 billion). Stanford beat Amazon with its highly reputable university brand ($10.7 billion), while MIT, a birth-place for advanced technology and science, had a more valuable brand than a world-renowned luxury car maker, Porsche (Times Higher Education 2011).

The theory of academic capitalism, established by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, is conceptualized on the basis of work by Foucault (Foucault 1977, 1980), Mann (Mann 1986), Castells (Castells 1996) and other scholars, and utilizes the concepts and ideas of knowledge, organizations, and networks to economy. But the authors also crafted a theory of their own, which directly addressed higher education. The theory is situated in what we now call the knowledge society, information society, or new economy. The authors argue that the relationship between higher education and society has been altered, along with significant changes occurring across different divisions in higher education. These changes are conceptualized as "a shift from

a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime." In a public good knowledge regime, knowledge is valued as a public good. It should be reachable, open, and most important, free to all citizens. Professors have the academic freedom to conduct research in whatever direction their expertise takes them. New knowledge discovered through basic science or in other disciplines is aimed to create public benefit. In this way, the public good knowledge regime displays a relatively strong separation between the public and private sectors. In contrast, the academic capitalist knowledge regime values knowledge privatization and profit-taking at HEIs, inventor faculties, and corporations. Knowledge is viewed as a "raw material," which can be converted to products and then traded for a price. For this reason, knowledge needs to be protected by patents, copyrights, and trademarks. As Slaughter and Rhoades argue, "knowledge is construed as a private good, valued for creating streams of high-technology products that generate profit as they flow through global markets." In this sense, science is embedded in commercial possibility (Stokes 1997), and is only valuable when it leads to high-technology products for the new economy. In the academic capitalist knowledge regime, the line between public and private is blurred.

Based on an understanding of the shift above, the academic capitalism theory not only explores the relationship between knowledge and the new economy, but also the scene behind knowledge production: how a university markets and sells its research products, educational services, and consumer goods in the private marketplace, often through university-industry-government partnerships. In a neoliberal state, universities set up new offices related to the generation of external revenue, while college students are trained to become "educated workers and technology savvy consumers" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). In this process, companies heavily influence key decision-making regarding educational programs, research projects, and

even university performance reviews, such as the rankings published by U.S. News and World Report.

Slaughter and Rhoades conceptualized the academic capitalism theory by focusing on important *networks*, which include "circuits of knowledge," "interstitial organizational emergence," "intermediating networks," and "extended managerial capacity" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). These networks link actors, such as institutions, faculty, administrators, academic professionals, and students, to the new economy. It is the total of the combined network and actors which explains the complexity of the academic capitalism regime.

Applications of university branding

The academic capitalism theory examines sports programs (contracts, trademarks, and logos) in American universities, which is relevant to the university brand and its branding practice. From Slaughter and King's work, one case describing all-school contracts demonstrates efforts to have sponsors become central to the identity of universities. Universities begin to trade their institutional logos, while companies also are "branding" universities with their own logos. A second case deals with a university's development of trademarks as "branded" intellectual property aimed at generating external revenue. In addition, building on critical studies of contemporary consumer culture, the authors argue that university marketing strategies reconfigure the culture of American universities to conform to "branded culture," which then becomes part of a broader shift towards the branded society characteristic of the new economy (King and Slaughter 2004). The "branded culture" as historical context can be situated within Bolman and Deal's "symbolic frame" to examine the meaning of the university's overall branding practice (not only in sports programs) in the international marketplace.

The undergraduate student and educational markets are two other important aspects of university branding. "Academic capitalism in the new economy involves institutions turning toward students as targets for the extraction of revenue, including but extending beyond tuition" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The insights and knowledge of different segments of the American domestic educational market, particularly the part related to the role of the university brand in the recruitment process, provide a guide for analyzing the international educational market. Meanwhile, an analysis of students' socioeconomic background during the recruitment process also provides a way to think critically about the university branding phenomenon.

Brand Theory: Customer-Based Brand Equity

Introduced by Kevin Lane Keller, Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is built on an understanding of consumer behavior and its relationship to marketing strategies. It provides a comprehensive and well-grounded framework for brand study. The CBBE theory conceptualizes the definition of brand equity, identifies sources and outcomes of brand equity, and provides tactical guidelines about how to build, measure, and manage brand equity.

Brand: It is vital to resolve the meaning of a ***brand***, the most basic term in brand studies, before any discussion of CBBE, because the definitions of "brand" vary based on one's particular emphasis. Some definitions are more information/label-oriented, such as the AMA's definition, which focuses on the importance of a name or symbol. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition" (American Marketing Association 2011). Based on this definition of brand, whenever a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol of a new product, he or she has created a brand. In contrast, some other definitions go

beyond the information approach. For example, Keller (2012) defined a brand as "something that has actually created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence, and so on in the marketplace." Branding can also represent a core purpose, the organization's fundamental reason for being (Spence 2009). So, rather than simply focusing on the graphic design of a logo or name selection for the product, the two latter definitions of a brand demand that managers pay more attention to customer behaviors associated with the brand he or she creates. These definitions of brand include a richer set of associations and intangible benefits, such as brand equity, and it is this broader focus that establishes a theoretical foundation for other concepts and guidelines in the CBBE model.

Brand Equity: Brand equity is the key concept in CBBE theory, which is one of the most popular and potentially important marketing concepts to emerge from the 1980s. In contrast to the financial definition of brand equity – referring to the total value of the brand as a separable asset when it is sold or included in a balance sheet (Feldwick 1996) – CBBE theory defines brand equity in terms of the customer perspective, and is based on consumers' knowledge, familiarity, and associations with respect to the brand (Washburn and Plank 2002). In this view, if the brand has no meaning to the customer, none of the other definitions are meaningful (Keller 1993; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, and Donthu 1995). Keller coined the customer-based definition of brand equity (CBBE) as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand."

Customer-Based Brand Equity Model: This model explains what a strong brand is and how to build it (Figure 2.2). According to Keller (Keller 2012), building a strong brand involves four steps: (1) establishing the proper brand identity, that is, establishing breadth and depth of brand awareness, (2) creating the appropriate brand meaning through strong, favorable, and

unique brand associations, (3) eliciting positive, accessible brand responses, and (4) forging

brand relationships with customers that are characterized by intense, active loyalty. Achieving

these four steps, in turn, involves establishing six brand-building blocks: brand salience, brand

performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, brand feelings, and brand resonance.
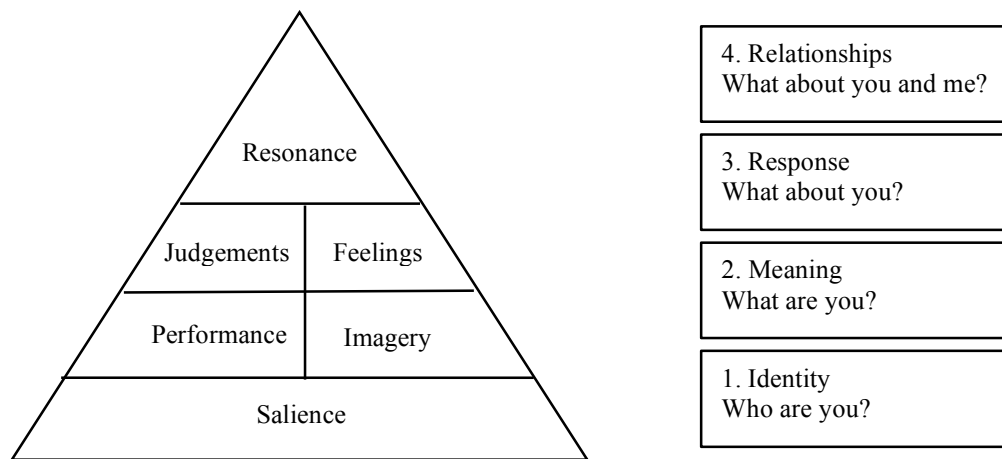
Figure 2.2. Customer-based brand equity pyramid

To measure and interpret how strong a brand is through brand performance, both qualitative

and quantitative methodologies are applied to evaluate a brand's equity and value. The

measurement takes place from both the sources of brand equity (customer mind-set) and the

outcomes of brand equity (market performance).

Applications in the university

A university owns its brand. By examining higher education as a category, we see different

types of institutions associated with different purposes and cultures in the world. In other words,

each institution owns a brand showing a specific purpose, which is explicitly or implicitly

illustrated in the university mission statement, reflected by its administration, staff, faculty,

students, and alumni. One excellent example is the university system in California. The three tiers of universities in California were designed and established for different goals and functions.

Although Customer-Based Brand Equity is an industry model of brand equity, it is grounded in a theory of customer behavior using the perspective and methodologies of psychology, which make it the brand equity model that is most applicable to the higher education sector. Customer-Based Brand Equity can thus be applied to evaluate university brands in four aspects:

1) Brand identity: what is university X?

2) Brand meaning: what is the perception of university X?

3) Brand response: what is the performance of university X and how do I feel about it?

4) Brand relationships: where do I see myself with university X?

Organizational Reframing

Organizational reframing is a theory, or more precisely, a theoretical framework from organization studies. It was developed by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (Bolman and Deal 2003) as a way of searching for new opportunities in confusing and troubling organizational situations. "Reframing" is the central theme of this theory, which emphasizes the development aspect of organizations under certain "environment shifts" (Bolman and Deal 2003). Management and leadership, therefore, become the two major foci in the theory; they ensure that adaptive mechanisms can be successfully operated within the organization. In addition, the authors also show how multiple frames (structural frame, human resource frame, political frame, and symbolic frame) give leaders an edge in decoding organizational complexity. The four-frame model they conceptualized, with its view of organizations as factories, families, jungles, and theaters, remains the heart of the theory.

It is worth mentioning that organizational reframing theory emphasizes the homogeneity between public organizations and private organizations, rather than the heterogeneity, which differentiates this theory from other organizational theories. The authors claim that "the public and private sectors increasingly interpenetrate one another," but often "harbor stereotypic conceptions of one another that impede effectiveness on both sides" (Bolman and Deal 2003). To keep their four-frame model most relevant to all types of organizations, they studied various cases, ranging widely from government administration and high schools, to multinational companies and NGOs, which provided their frames with a generic application.

Applications in university branding

If we view the university as an organization, or a system, any strategic practice, such as branding, affects the direction and shape of the university. For many universities, branding should be considered more as a transformation rather than a specific marketing practice. Certain "environment shifts" that we have all experienced, including globalization, economic recession, and the privatization of universities, have prompted serious consideration of university branding on the part of university leaders. Organizational reframing is thus a useful way to explore the university as an organization that is constantly undergoing these changes, as it views university branding as one result of university transformation or "self-renewal" (Owens 1998).

The four-frame model also provides a different dimension with which to examine a potential systematic change in the university through branding efforts. However, within the four frames, only the "structural frame" and "symbolic frame" will be included in my trans-disciplinary theoretical framework, since these two frames have the most relevance to the issue of university branding. Assumptions behind the "structural frame" will be reviewed to discover (1) how a university operates its systems to create a successful brand that will meet the goals of the

university; (2) whether the university works best when rationality prevails over external pressures (for most American universities today these are mainly economic pressures); and (3) are there appropriate forms of coordination and control to ensure the success of university branding? The "symbolic frame" can be applied to analyze the university brand as a symbol which shapes university culture; this in turn gives purpose and meaning to students and faculty as they do their work in the university, to university administrators as they communicate the university brand to internal and external audiences, and to university leaders as they build university spirit through ritual, speech, ceremony, and story.

Summary

In summary, each theory holds to a well-established standpoint based on what it originally studied. Meanwhile, these theories also provide unique perspectives to study university branding through different approaches: individual (each customer), system and leadership (organization), and networks of actors (linking the institution to the new economy). These three approaches reflect the basic assumptions of the trans-disciplinary theoretical framework: (1) university branding practices need to be evaluated from the audience's perspective, (2) university branding will trigger a systematic reframing in the university, and (3) university branding, when closely related to the new economy, will accelerate university privatization.

Table 2.1 summarizes the key points of these three theories in the framework and how they applied to my research regarding university branding.

Table 2.1 Theories and their implications in the trans-disciplinary theory framework

Theory	Explanations	Applications in University Branding	Approach/Research Lens	Discipline
Customer-Based Brand Equity	Brand equity in corporations	University brand equity	Individual	Management (Psychology)

	Customer-based brand management	University branding practice		
	Measuring brand equity	University brand evaluation		
Organizational Change and Reframing	"Four-frame model" (Structural Frame, Human Resource Frame, Political Frame and Symbolic Frame)	The role of university branding in university as an organization under an "environment shift"	Institution System and Leadership	Management (Sociology)
	Improving leadership practice for organization development	University leadership for brand development towards university self-renewal		
Academic Capitalism	Shifting knowledge/learning regimes	Dynamics of educational market and critical analysis of university branded culture	Networks of actors	Education, Sociology and Economics

Table 2.2 illustrates the relationship between the three main research questions and the

theories applied.

Table 2.2 The relationship between theories associated with research questions

Research Questions	Theories		
	Organizational Reframing	Academic Capitalism	Customer-Based Branding Equity
RQ1	×	×	
RQ2	×	×	×
RQ3	×	×	×

Note: RQ1: What is the rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization?
RQ2: What is the process of building a brand campaign in a specific university, using UCLA as a case study?
RQ3: What is the impact of UCLA's brand campaign on its prospective Chinese international students – Chinese elite-singletons – as well as on the institution itself?

By contextualizing university branding within a broader background of globalization and

neoliberalism, my trans-disciplinary theoretical framework explores university branding from a

more well-rounded perspective, drawing on work from different disciplines. It presents the

different stories of university branding in interacting layers: the practical aspects of higher

education as a business, where branding is virtually unstudied; the role of university branding –

now beginning to have an overarching effect in the U.S. – in the economics of higher education;

and the implications of university branding for the university as an organization, when faced with significant change. All these assumptions are held within the theoretical framework, and their applicability is tested in the field work and explained in the following chapters.

Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

An Overview: A Multimethod Approach in a Single Case Study

Methods and methodology are fundamental to the cognitive structure of any field of study (Wells and Picou 1981). My study was designed as an in-depth, single case study deploying both qualitative and quantitative methods. It builds a multi-layered analysis of the university branding issue at both the institutional level and the individual level, by examining multiple interactions between an individual institution – UCLA – and its target "student consumers" – Chinese elite-singletons. Multiple methods include document analysis, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and surveys.

Why a Single Case Study?

A single case study was used as the main research strategy in this study for the following reasons. First, as described by Yin, case studies are the "preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed…when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin 2009). The topic of university branding in the context of globalization fit into this description perfectly, due to its nature as a new phenomenon in higher education. Active brand campaigns can increasingly be found in international admissions, star faculty recruitment, and international donor cultivation, particularly when the bounds of the general public cross national borders. Meanwhile, whether or not a formal branding effort has been made at the institutional level, universities own their brands over time. The brand exists and transforms through daily interactions between the university and its stakeholders – students, faculty, administrators, alumni, donors, funding agencies, and government. It is an ongoing process in the day-to-day administrative practice of the university.

In addition, because "investigators use a case study design in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved" (Merriam 1988), the strategy of a single case study enabled me to understand and interpret the complexity of the university branding phenomenon through a close examination of one specific institution. A detailed multi-layer story of university branding was told through different voices from both the U.S. and China. The Chinese perspectives were collected from Chinese elite-singletons who were actively seeking educational opportunities in U.S. higher education, their parents, the principals and teachers at the high schools they attended, and the study abroad agencies they hired to assist in the application process. The voices from the U.S. included university faculty, administrative leaders, admissions recruiters, and marketing and communication staff; together, they shaped the direction and daily practice of university branding, toward its goal of university development.

Finally, since a case study approach is often the best methodology for addressing problems in which one seeks to improve practice through better understanding (Merriam 1988), a case study of a university that embraces branding, like UCLA, can provide tangible feedback to university leaders who are eager to discover more efficient branding practices through valuable empirical data.

It would be interesting to conduct case studies using multiple subjects in order to compare the similarities and differences between institutions, and eventually conceptualize a general theme of university branding across the cases. However, due to the particular opportunities and constraints that I faced when designing my study, a single case study appeared to be the best approach. An excellent research opportunity emerged from simply being located at a very desirable case study site, at the right time – in my case, being at UCLA during a major brand campaign. At the same time, I had limited human resources and financial support for my PhD

research. Thus, using a single site was both efficient and effective, and I was able to build an in-depth understanding of my topic from a concrete case study. This also still allows for the comparison of similar studies at other institutions in future research.

The Multi-Method Approach

For the purpose of an in-depth investigation of the university branding phenomenon through a single case study, a multiple research methods approach is designed to investigate information both at the institutional level (UCLA) and the individual level (Chinese elite-singletons). It is also designed to discover and confirm the complex phenomena of university branding.

Multiple research methods will be applied in the UCLA case study primarily in two categories: qualitative methods and quantitative methods. The qualitative methods are comprised of three elements: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. A survey served as the main quantitative method. Together, these three methods contributed to answering each of my three research questions through the "coexistence" of inductive qualitative investigation and deductive quantitative investigation. Table 3.1 outlines the relationship between the research methods and the three research questions.

Table 3.1. Type of Research Methods to Address Research Questions

Research Questions	Qualitative Methods			Quantitative Method
	Document Analysis	Semi-Structured Interview	Participant Observation	Survey
RQ1	✕	✕		
RQ2	✕	✕	✕	
RQ3	✕	✕	✕	✕

Note: RQ1: What is the rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization?
RQ2: What is the process of building a brand campaign in a specific university, using UCLA as a case study?
RQ3: What is the impact of UCLA's brand campaign on its prospective Chinese international students – Chinese elite-singletons – as well as on the institution itself?

As the table above indicates, three qualitative methods – document analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews – were used to investigate why branding was introduced to higher education in the context of global competition, and how one university, UCLA, practiced branding for the purpose of encouraging international admissions from China. The investigation at UCLA provided a rich and detailed story of university branding from an institutional perspective. Meanwhile, the quantitative method – my survey, followed by semi-structured interviews with Chinese students, parents, teachers, and study abroad agencies – was mainly applied to support a micro-analysis at the individual level. This revealed internal monologues from Chinese elite-singletons about their motivations and concerns regarding the pursuit of an undergraduate degree in the U.S.; in addition, it demonstrated how their college choices were affected by their own educational and family backgrounds, the brand names of institutions, overall university branding, and the marketing efforts and strategies aimed towards them. The mixed method applied in China effectively depicted these students' perceptions of UCLA's university brand compared to the other top-tier U.S. institutions that they were considering. It also provided an evaluation of UCLA's brand among its targeted student consumers in China, and a corresponding guideline for the improvement of its branding strategy. More importantly, it shed light on the overall issue of higher education branding in the international environment, in terms of its legitimacy and effectiveness.

Data Collection: Methods and Analysis

Selection of Research Sites

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Although many higher education institutions around the world practice marketing and branding, sometimes at the departmental level and sometimes at the institutional level, American

universities are among the most active in applying branding to international admissions. From among this group of institutions, I selected the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as the site of my case study. It was chosen for a number of reasons:

1) As a prestigious world-class university, UCLA already owns a well-known brand, which provided a foundation for brand research.

2) The dramatic decrease in public funding by the State of California in recent years, starting from the economic crisis in 2008, has caused UCLA to begin the process of switching from a purely public university to a more self-sustaining model, which aligned well with, and in fact demanded, a formal treatment of branding policy at the institutional level.

3) The same mounting financial pressures make the UCLA experience representative of the budget experience of many world-leading research universities in the U.S. and other developed countries today.

4) As a flagship university located in California – the most popular state for international students in the U.S. – UCLA attracts a large number of high-quality Chinese applicants suitable for my research investigation.

5) An entrepreneurial spirit is embedded in the UCLA brand campaign, which was formally launched in the beginning of 2011, when I started my research. This brand campaign constitutes a backdrop for my analysis, and is an example of one of the early, pioneering branding efforts, which other institutions that are interested in achieving similar success may wish to study or emulate.

6) My formal affiliation with UCLA as a doctoral student in the Education Department and my role as a graduate student researcher at UCLA's Marketing and Special Events Office – the key office mainly in charge of UCLA's branding and marketing strategy and

practice – allowed me to closely observe organizational change, and institutional development towards the new needs of the university during the critical first years of its second century.

7) Due to its identity as a public university, UCLA is required to show its data to the public for monitoring and review, which allowed for easier access to necessary data from the university.

My research subjects at UCLA included top leadership at the institutional level, who shared their perspectives on the issue of higher education branding and recent UCLA branding initiatives. These subjects also included the key administrative staff members responsible for creating and delivering branding strategy and efforts at both the central marketing office and the office of undergraduate admissions.

The East Coast Region of China

Due to the Chinese education selection system, the majority of Chinese elite-singletons attend local elite high schools (*zhongdian gaozhong*), which are both highly selective and publicly funded. Although almost every large or mid-size city in China has this type of high school, the cities that produce a high proportion of graduates studying abroad are mainly concentrated in four regions of China; this is due to higher levels of economic development as well as greater degrees of internationalization in these areas. They are the east coast, north coast, south coast, and middle China. Because of my limited financial support and human resources for this research, I narrowed my research scope to only one region – the east coast, where I had the most personal connections in China, and therefore the best access to the data I needed. Meanwhile, the east coast region, especially south of the Yangtze river, is historically famous for producing high-achieving students and young talent, due to the high value placed on education,

which is embedded in its local culture. It is also the region that now includes one of the most developed economic areas of China— the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) Economic Zone, which accounts for 20 percent of China's gross domestic product and is responsible for one-third of its imports and exports (Wikipedia 2017b). The major cities in this region, such as Shanghai, Nanjing (capital city of Jiangsu Province) and Hangzhou (capital city of Zhejiang Province) have received a great deal of attention from HEIs abroad, including UCLA, for the purpose of recruiting international talent. The students in these cities, in turn, are highly exposed to university branding and marketing efforts from overseas.

In this region, eight elite local high schools were selected as the main research sites of my study. Two were in the city of Shanghai, three were in Nanjing, and three were in Hangzhou. These eight schools all have a high reputation for selectivity and academic excellence, indicated by the high proportion of their graduates who are admitted to the most prestigious universities in China as well as overseas. Among these eight, two were foreign language schools, while the rest were key high schools at the provincial level.

Foreign language schools historically produce foreign language specialists; and many of their graduates hold important positions in China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government sectors related to foreign business. By Chinese standards, they are the "smartest students," based on the extremely low admission rates to these schools. For example, the students from one of the foreign language schools in my study were ranked as the top 1 percent of their overall class. Meanwhile, because of the specialized mission of the foreign language schools, these students receive much stronger language training, particularly in English, than the students from other high schools, which, in turn, provides a language advantage in the standardized tests that are required for college admissions in the U.S., such as the TOEFL, IELTS and the SAT. Their

average scores on the TOEFL were 12 percent higher than those received by students from other high schools in my study, and 7 percent higher than the average score – 2100 of 2400 in total – of all student samples. Their language advantage and overall high quality provided these students with a greater chance of success when applying to the most prestigious universities in the world, including Harvard, Cambridge, and MIT. Historically, approximately one-third of the graduates from these two foreign language schools chose to study abroad after graduation. However, this proportion has increased dramatically during the recent "study abroad fever" in China. In 2012, the year I collected my data, the average proportion of those studying abroad increased to nearly 70 percent.

Unlike the foreign language schools, the main responsibility of the key provincial high schools in China is to educate and produce high-quality high school graduates for Chinese higher education in all fields. Therefore, the majority of the students I surveyed in this type of high school took the Chinese College Entrance Exam, known as the *Gaokao*, while only a very small proportion chose to study abroad after graduation. These students were described as "soldiers who swim in the water on their own" (*sanbing youyong*) by one of the school principals, indicating that their high schools provided only limited support and resources to help them pursue their college goals overseas. However, all six key high schools were greatly internationalized in terms of hosting regular visits from overseas education groups, and establishing exchange programs for their own students and teachers. Furthermore, three out of the six key high schools in my study established an international program for the students who aspired to study in the U.S. These students paid much higher fees to receive the dedicated support from such programs, and to potentially fulfill their dreams of studying in the U.S.

My research subjects in these eight elite high schools included senior students who had applied to U.S. colleges, as well as principals and other school leaders who were responsible for the schools' international programs. In addition to the students from these eight high schools, a small number of senior students from other elite high schools in the region was also included in this study. These additional student participants were mostly referred by the student participants from the eight high schools I visited. Finally, I also included three major study abroad agencies from the cities of Nanjing and Hangzhou in my research. At these agencies, I interviewed four college counselors who had extensive experience in working with prospective Chinese international students. Their experiences with a great number of students provided me with a broader context for the phenomenon of "study abroad fever" in China, as well as a valuable second opinion on students' motivations for studying abroad, and their college choices.

Quantitative Method and Analysis

A survey was used as the major quantitative method in this study; it served as the tool with which to paint a general picture of the background of Chinese elite-singletons, their motivations for studying abroad in the U.S., and their impressions of UCLA as a reflective indicator of their college choice. The surveys were "printed forms containing queries for respondents to answer" (Thomas 1998), which allowed me to collect data from a relatively large number of students in a short period of time. Most of the responses in the survey questions were numerical, and therefore suitable for a summary and analysis that provided a direction for follow-up interviews. This is also one of the most frequently used quantitative protocols for measuring cause and effect relationships and correlations between variables, which I found to be particularly useful for measuring motivation factors in this study.

Survey design

The questions in my survey instrument were divided into three parts. The first part provided a profile of Chinese elite-singletons based on their background information, including gender, socioeconomic status (SES), parents' education level, geographic location, which school they attended, academic performance, occupation orientation, and their previous international travel and study abroad experience. This part of the survey was inspired from the existing Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Freshman Survey, which is housed at the University of California, Los Angeles. The questions in my survey were altered to cater to the targeted population. The second part of the survey explored student motivations for studying abroad in the U.S., perceptions of U.S. higher education, and the key factors influencing college choice. The final part examined students' perceptions and impressions of UCLA, as well as their response to the UCLA brand, as a specific case. In the end, the survey also collected information on the list of schools to which these students were accepted, where they ultimately chose to enroll, and which majors they chose to pursue.

Survey distribution and samples

The survey questionnaire was distributed to prospective Chinese international students from the east coast of China from January to June in 2013. The student sample consisted of high school seniors who applied to colleges in the U.S. and enrolled in Fall 2013. Among the 353 student participants who took the questionnaire, 264 samples were effective, with 44 percent males and 56 percent females. Among effective samples, 92 percent were from the eight elite high schools I visited, while the remaining 8 percent were from other elite high schools in the region, via a snowball sampling method. In terms of their affiliation with high schools, 68 percent were enrolled in regular programs and 32 percent studied in international programs.

Overall, 92 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they were the only child in the family.

Depending on the convenience of the high school as well as the personal preferences of the students, student participants either filled out a paper questionnaire distributed at their high school by administrative staff and myself, or answered the questionnaires at home from an anonymous survey link through Qualtrics – an online research survey service. The questions were written in Chinese and translated to English, which helped the students gain a full understanding of the question, because some of the concepts and words used in the questions were originally from an English-language context. In terms of privacy, all participants took the questionnaires anonymously. A short letter written in Chinese was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire, which explained the purpose of the survey questionnaire and how each student's privacy was protected. Prior to implementation, I pilot-tested the survey instrument in a high school located in the city of Hangzhou from November 2012 to January 2013, and those results were used to refine some of the questions in the final questionnaire. Overall, the survey questionnaire took approximately thirty minutes to complete.

Qualitative Methods and Analysis

Document analysis

Document analysis is a valuable method to illustrate changes in policy and practice. It provides contextual information for a study, and is a tool for corroborating data collected from other sources. The document analysis method in this study involves the review and analysis of various documents and archival records related to both the general context of university branding and UCLA branding practices in particular. It was also an important method for determining the socioeconomic background of the Chinese singleton generation, the historical context of Chinese

international students in the U.S., and how the university branding issue was laid out in UCLA's policymaking process and daily activities. As discussed by Yin (2009), documents and archival records may contain errors and bias, just as with any other data sources. So, "if the documentary evidence is contradictory rather than corroboratory, the case study investigator has specific reason to inquire further into the topic" (Yin 2009). Types of documents that were collected and analyzed mainly included:

1) Official government documents, both in China and the U.S., related to international student mobility, such as U.S. immigration regulations and visa policies, historical statistics on Chinese international student flow in the U.S., and Chinese government policies for Chinese citizens studying abroad.

2) Statements, reports and archives on UCLA's brand identity and history, for a historical perspective on the university's core values and missions.

3) UCLA marketing and branding materials for new branding initiatives, such as website pages, commercials, school brochures, and the new UCLA Viewbook aimed at prospective undergraduate students.

4) Official UCLA documents related to branding and international student recruitment, including the official branding statement, regulations, reports, records and statistical archives.

5) Statistical archives of undergraduate enrollment at UCLA over the past fifteen years, including records on international students, out-of-state students, and California students.

Semi-structured interviews

Use of the semi-structured interview was a key method that supported the qualitative investigation of my research topic. I conducted interviews with both UCLA leaders and Chinese

elite-singletons as prospective international students, which allowed me to gather multiple perspectives from the university, as well as its targeted consumers, on the topic of higher education branding. It is important to mention that I also conducted informal interviews with principals of the high schools where my student participants were enrolled, and with college counselors from Chinese study abroad agencies, to complement the interview data from student interviewees. Since higher education branding is a relatively new phenomenon, both in general and at UCLA, semi-structured interviews enabled my interviewees, as well as myself, to discuss what we thought about various situations from our own points of view, through a guided but less restricted conversation. I began my interview with a set of prepared questions, and then adjusted my questions, and sometimes the focus of the interview, several times during its course, in order to generate a deeper knowledge of the topic, particularly when I received unexpected answers.

Interviews at UCLA: From 2012 to 2014, I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews at UCLA, with university leaders from the various different departments that were closely involved with the UCLA rebranding agenda. The interview participants were mainly from three backgrounds: five from marketing, three from admissions, and four from UCLA's top leadership office. The diverse backgrounds of the participants allowed me to examine the new branding strategy and practice from several different directions. As I found in my pilot study, the new branding efforts were mainly created by university administration, rather than through a process including all members of the university community. Therefore, my interview participants at UCLA mainly came from administrative backgrounds, although two participants from the top leadership office were faculty members who had served in academic leadership positions for more than twenty years before they moved to their current administrative positions. In terms of their years at UCLA, five of them were relatively new and had worked at UCLA for less than one year. They had been brought on board from competing institutions, as well as from business

and industry, to help UCLA reform and enhance both its central marketing office and undergraduate admissions. Two participants had worked at UCLA for between five to ten years. The remaining three had long relationships with UCLA, including one who had worked at UCLA for more than thirty years and two who had been with the university for more than twenty years. Interacting with participants who had differing years of service at UCLA provided me with an opportunity to investigate UCLA's new branding effort from a historical point of view.

All interviews were conducted in the participants' offices, where our conversations were kept private so that interviewees felt free to talk about sensitive issues. For example, several participants frankly admitted that the increase in international recruitment at UCLA was mainly prompted by financial strains, which was not what one might have expected to hear on the basis of any of their public utterances. Each interview lasted for approximately sixty minutes. Interestingly, three of the participants showed particularly high levels of interest in my research topic and asked for a second interview. Considering their extremely busy schedules, their high interest in my research topic indicated the importance and usefulness that university leadership attached to the subject of branding in higher education. These three second-round interviews not only helped the participants to gain more knowledge of branding from my research, but also enabled me to dig deeper with follow-up questions.

Although the focus of every interview was slightly different based on the backgrounds of the particular participants, I covered several important general themes in each interview. These included: (1) the desired UCLA brand, domestically and globally; (2) the forces and motivation of UCLA re-branding initiatives for the international student market; (3) the process and practice of UCLA branding and marketing for international recruitment, especially in China; and (4) the impact of UCLA branding on its international recruitment efforts.

Interviews in China: From January 2013 to June 2013, I conducted fifty-two interviews with Chinese high school seniors who planned to study in the U.S. at the undergraduate level and to enroll in Fall 2013. They were asked for a follow-up interview when they filled out the survey questionnaire, and occupied one-fifth of my total survey sample. Student interviewees were selected to achieve balance by gender, field of study, future university type, and SES background. Semi-structured interviews with Chinese students were designed to be an important complement to clarify their perceptions of UCLA, as well as the reasons behind the answers they choose in the questionnaires.

In addition, I also conducted five informal interviews with the principals of the high schools these students attended, and another four interviews with college counselors from Chinese study abroad agencies. The interviews with high school principals provided me with some important background information on the "study abroad fever" then occurring in local elite high schools, while the interviews at Chinese study abroad agencies helped me to generalize the students' motivations and their choice of colleges, based on the perspective of college counselors who had extensive experience with many Chinese students over the years.

I conducted interviews in multiple locations based on the participants' convenience. I interviewed school principals and college counselors in their offices when I visited their workplaces, while I interviewed the students either in person or online (through Skype). When it came to the face-to-face interviews with students, the locations included both private places (a private classroom in their high school) and public spaces (Starbucks and KFC). When I had online interviews with students, they mostly took the interview at home, as a private and relaxed environment usually generated more useful information. In general, the interviews lasted for thirty to sixty minutes depending on the availability of the participants. Chinese was used, as it is

the mother tongue of the interviewees and the investigator; this allowed me to better seek in-depth information about students' perceptions and motivations for choosing U.S. higher education and a particular university.

Participant observation

In order to collect contextual information on the rebranding initiatives, as a naturally occurring phenomenon at UCLA, I took advantage of my position as a graduate student researcher at the university's central marketing office, known as UCLA Marketing and Special Events. I was able to conduct participant observation at this key office, where branding strategy and practices for the entire university were generated. This rare opportunity to be part of UCLA's new branding initiatives enabled me to lay out a meaningful historical picture of my research subject and gain insight through daily interactions with people who worked on UCLA branding projects.

I conducted participant observation from 2012 to 2015, while I held a position in the marketing office. The observation mainly included: meetings I attended relating to UCLA's new branding strategy and initiatives; projects in which I was involved, that were meant to increase the number of international students at UCLA through close collaboration with its Undergraduate Admissions Office; and daily conversations with my colleagues at the marketing office regarding their perspectives on the issue of UCLA branding and international admissions. In addition, I also observed how administrative staff reacted to the changes at the office and in their work resulting from the new need to increase international students on campus; I found the office dynamic played an important role in the organizational change and development that occurred in response to a shifting environment. Lastly, it should be noted that some meetings, notes, and daily conversations were more confidential than others, and the information related had to

remain strictly internal, especially when it gave away details of UCLA's competitive advantage. Therefore, out of respect to my research subject, not all my observational findings were able to be included in this dissertation.

In terms of the observation process, I undertook ongoing respondent validation. I discussed my notes and findings with the people involved in the meetings and projects, and asked for their corrections, revisions, and additional information. It was through this process that I collected more accurate observational data with fewer gaps, and involved the case study community more closely in the research process. Through the process of reviewing my notes and findings with those observed, I created opportunities to highlight discrepancies in the data, and simultaneously created openings where these discrepancies were further discussed and investigated, thereby leading to more complete data collection.

In summary, although a multi-methods approach was applied in my research, more in-depth insights all came from my qualitative investigation: making sense of the complex numbers from the questionnaires, analyzing the words of UCLA leaders, and observing the behaviors of students as they chose colleges. The ethnographic part of my research – interviews and observations – contributed to my understanding of the larger pervasive context of the topic, in that I sensitized myself to participants' personal attitudes, feelings, and vocabularies. I wanted to tell a holistic story of the interplay between institutions and students within the topic of university branding. The multi-methods approach allowed me to take a snapshot of elite-singletons as a unique generation in Chinese history, rather than simply measuring this group in terms of the return on their educational investment – in other words, it allowed me to look beyond the basic data regarding the time and money spent and the university offers they received.

Pilot Study and Implications to Method

During January 2012 to May 2012, I conducted a pilot study at UCLA to explore the timing and legitimacy of choosing UCLA as my case study site. The pilot study also served as a tool to test the efficiency of a multi-method approach in a single case study. Both the survey instrument and interview protocol were revised based on the feedback from research subjects. The pilot study mainly consisted of two parts: a qualitative study at the UCLA central marketing office and a mixed-method study of UCLA Chinese freshmen.

Study at UCLA Marketing Office

All three qualitative methods – document analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews – were applied to my pilot study at the UCLA central marketing office. The primary findings from each method complemented one another, indicating the importance and different role of each. As a consequence of the pilot study, all three qualitative methods were confirmed for use in exploring UCLA's rebranding strategy and practices. The main findings from the pilot study included UCLA's new branding strategy, the main steps of new branding initiatives, and structural changes within the marketing office, undertaken to increase organizational efficiency.

UCLA's rebranding strategy was reflected in a new *UCLA Branding Guideline*, which was created to establish a centralized UCLA brand positioning that would be consistent with the UCLA brand identity. *Cultured*, *balanced*, *vibrant*, *perseverant*, *visionary*, and *catalytic* were identified as the six new main characteristics of the UCLA brand. These six new characteristics were used as a guide for developing all branding and marketing materials.

During the time of my pilot study, UCLA had four major branding projects, which drove the steps UCLA took to reach its goal of rebranding the university for its Centennial Campaign (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Main Steps in UCLA's Rebranding Initiatives in Spring 2012

Main Steps	Time
Optimists Advertisement Campaign 1.0	Feb 2012
UCLA Brand Guidelines	Mar 2012
Branding for UCLA Undergraduate Admission	Mar 2012
New UCLA Gateway Website (Phase 1)	Apr 2012

Source: UCLA Marketing and Special Events Office, 2012

The Optimists Ad Campaign 1.0 was the first formal rebranding practice that the Marketing Office launched, arising from a collaboration with an outside ad agency. The campaign was launched on Saturday, February 11, 2012, with a thirty-second television commercial that aired during a UCLA men's basketball game against UC Berkeley. It was also broadcast on radio and presented on a dedicated website linked from the UCLA Gateway, UCLA's main website. Although there are many ways for colleges and universities to get their messages out to the general public, advertising remains the best method to reach the largest number of people in the most cost-effective way, as UCLA's Vice Chancellor of External Affairs explained to the UCLA Newsroom in an interview. She also stated, in a note to campus leaders, that "UCLA is competing aggressively for visibility, public support and the best students and faculty from California and the world. This campaign is one critical tool for telling our story" (C. Lee 2012). The campaign was aimed at highlighting the qualities that set UCLA apart from other universities.

In terms of rebranding UCLA for the new challenge of international recruitment, officers from Undergraduate Admissions were invited to the UCLA brand workshop and worked closely

with the UCLA marketing team so that all brand communication for UCLA international recruitment could be aligned with the newly-developed UCLA brand identity. Consistency, as the core principle in UCLA branding, was particularly emphasized in all kinds of branding practices, such as admission presentations, recruitment brochures, and the UCLA Viewbook.

The UCLA Gateway Website project was another major branding initiative, which has carried on for many years. Because the UCLA Gateway was the official website of UCLA, it was considered to be an important look at the UCLA brand and an effective path to deliver brand messages. This first version of the new website contained more brand messages that were consistent with graphic design principles, eye-catching pictures, and inspiring slogans. "We are the class of optimists," or "Do you want to change the world? Maybe there is something Bruin in you," were some examples of the sorts of messages that could be found on the new website. The website was launched before the deadline by which prospective undergraduate students had to make a final choice of college. According to one senior leader from the central marketing office, the UCLA marketing team hoped that the new website would have a positive impact on the student decision-making process, nudging them to select UCLA as their institution of choice.

In order to increase organizational efficiency for the new branding initiative, UCLA made a significant change to its organizational structure by taking the step of introducing new leadership. Fresh leadership was established by hiring a new Executive Director of Marketing and Special Events in July 2011. The new director (who had previously worked as the Director of Global Marketing Strategy and Planning at The Walt Disney Company), reorganized the Marketing Office by integrating several small teams into three main sections, including marketing, creative services, and special events. She also created a position for customer relationship management (CRM), a new section in the office, meant to provide the leadership

with research-oriented strategies. This reborn Marketing Office was now heading in a new direction, led by marketing professionals with a greater emphasis on consumers' input.

The three primary findings indicated that branding not only created new buzz in university communication, but also resulted in structural changes within the organization. It transformed the university focus from introspective to extrospective, a focus that is more consumer-based. It confirmed that the rationale of UCLA branding follows the principles from the framework of Customer-Based Brand Equity. However, the question of whether the new branding efforts would elevate UCLA or create more challenges in the future required more investigation. Therefore, the theory of organizational change and reframing, and the theory of academic capitalism were both confirmed as important lenses through which to investigate the branding issue in further research.

Study of Chinese UCLA Freshmen

Pilot survey questionnaires were designed to explore the main factors impacting Chinese students' decisions to attend UCLA, the ways in which they first heard about UCLA, and their impressions of UCLA both before and after they came to the campus. The questionnaire was also administered to test the effectiveness of the survey questions as worded, and to investigate its relative value as an information-gathering tool when combined with the use of interviews.

The limited sample included seven Chinese UCLA freshmen (three males and four females). They fitted the definition of Chinese elite-singletons in my study, as high-achieving students from a Chinese family with only one child. Before they came to UCLA, they lived in big cities in mainland China, located in the north, east coast and middle region. This geographic information from the sample provided me with guidance in finding the most appropriate locations for dissertation data collection in China. Meanwhile, each student took thirty minutes on the survey

and another thirty minutes in a follow-up individual interview. The student samples showed a good tolerance for a thirty-minute survey, and they were willing to spend up to sixty minutes in the interviews. Therefore, I rearranged my interview protocol to include a sixty-minute interview.

The main findings from the pilot study included critical factors in choosing colleges in the U.S., main reasons to attend UCLA, limited channels for learning about UCLA in China, and changed perceptions of UCLA after attending the university.

These findings showed some overarching themes across the survey results. For example, the range of critical factors that influenced Chinese students' college choice illustrated that choosing a university in the U.S. was a complex business for Chinese elite-singletons. Various interrelated factors influenced the students' decision making (Table 3.3), but university rankings and future job opportunity together made up two-thirds of this process. These two factors indicated the importance of rating well on crucial attributes (certain rankings) which, to some extent, guaranteed the quality and reputation of the university. Chinese students were willing to travel and incur expense to access "reputation," which would be recognized by future employers and lead to future job opportunities. Among the rest of the important selection factors, gender differences played a key role. Females were inclined to more heavily emphasize those factors which implicate lifestyle, particularly as represented by weather, safety, cost, and a beautiful campus. This survey result echoes the qualitative data from the follow-up interviews. Therefore, this was confirmed as a key question in the survey instrument that would help me explore the determining factors of college choice from my later, larger sample of Chinese elite-singletons.

Table 3.3. Determining factors of college choice for Chinese freshmen at UCLA.

Factors	Male (%)	Female (%)	Average (%)
University/Major Rankings	50	37.5	44
Future job opportunity	23	17.5	20
Location	10	16.25	13.15
Safety	10	12.5	11
Cost	7	13.75	10

In addition, the feedback from the student sample regarding some criteria used in the survey instrument guided a revision of survey questions toward clarity. For example, student participants raised questions about the definition of ranking, and indicated that they looked at institutional ranking and major ranking differently. Therefore, I broke the ranking factor into two dimensions in the final survey questionnaire, which allowed the students to indicate the difference between the two factors more accurately.

In terms of interview method, students were able to clarify the reasons behind their choices in the survey during the follow-up interviews. The interview data also revealed important information that was not covered in the survey questionnaires, such as the narratives behind their motivations for studying abroad or their college choices in the U.S., which ultimately related to their personal and family experiences in China. This provided a critical societal context to understand my research subjects. Therefore, it was confirmed as an important complement to survey questionnaires in the final dissertation research.

Overall, the pilot study, including the study at the UCLA central marketing office and the study of Chinese UCLA freshmen, provided tentative but important primary research results which guided my investigation of the phenomenon of university branding in my further dissertation research. It also provided methodological strategies to build an in-depth case study

based on a multi-method approach. All research activities involving human subjects in this

dissertation were approved by the Office of Human Research Protection Program at UCLA.

Results and broader conclusions from these methodological strategies are provided in chapters 5

through 8.

Part I The Global Context

Chapter 4
An Overview of the Consumer Environment

The number of international students enrolled in postsecondary education has increased dramatically over the last few decades, reflecting the impact of globalization and free trade, and the recognition of an emerging knowledge society. According to the OECD (ICEF Monitor 2015), five million students were studying outside their home countries in 2014, more than double the 2.1 million who did so in 2000 and more than triple the number in 1990. Asia – a main engine of growth in global international mobility – accounted for 53 percent of the international student market in 2013 (OECD 2015c). Within Asia, China alone contributed 19.61 percent of the student market in 2014, and was the world's largest source of international students. Indeed, the financially secure and academically accomplished students coming from China have become some of the most desirable student-consumers for many of the most prestigious and elite public and private universities in America and elsewhere.

Chapter 4 reviews and analyzes the consumer environment that influenced this new force of international student-consumers – Chinese elite-singletons – when they were on their path to attending college in the U.S. It includes three parts: (1) an overview of China as the largest and most quickly expanding market of international students; (2) a review of key characteristics of the international student population in the U.S., with a special focus on the segment from China; and (3) an analysis of the major push and pull forces between China and the U.S. that have influenced the flow of Chinese students to the U.S. This chapter will focus on a macro-level analysis of the socioeconomic factors that have the greatest impact on Chinese elite-singletons as student-consumers, while the following chapters – comprising Part II: The Individual Pursuit – will shift to a micro-level analysis of the influence of students' family backgrounds and their own personal characteristics.

China: An Ever-Growing Market

China has a long history of sending students overseas, stretching back over one hundred years. The first Chinese international student in the U.S. was Rong Hong, who graduated from Yale College in 1854.[3] Following in his footsteps, 120 boys, aged ten to fourteen, were sponsored by the Qing government and sent to the U.S. for schooling, as the first official group of Chinese youth studying abroad. Later, waves of Chinese students traveled to Japan, Europe, and the Soviet Union, bringing back new ideas and technologies to aid China's development. However, due to the social and political upheavals in China during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the number of Chinese students attending school abroad was small and remained flat. Furthermore, opportunities to study abroad were strictly limited and mostly controlled by the Chinese government. With the exception of those few students chosen by the government through rigorous competitions, only the children of the most elite Chinese families had the luxury to travel overseas for schooling. As a result, during the hundred years from 1872 to 1978, a period which included the late Qing Dynasty, the Republican period, and the first thirty years of the People's Republic of China, there were only about 130,000 Chinese students who studied overseas. Deng Xiaoping's Open Door policy, implemented in 1978, not only laid the foundation for thirty years of rapid economic growth, it also increased the nation's openness. Chinese students were allowed to travel abroad for their studies without government approval, and their numbers increased dramatically. Between 1978 and 2015 (Ministry of Education 2016), 4.04 million Chinese students traveled overseas, to more than eighty countries (Figure 4.1). This included both government-sponsored and self-supported students; the latter represented 80

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[3] Although historically many Chinese, such as the famous monk Faxian (337-422 CE), traveled abroad in order to obtain and translate Buddhist sutras into Chinese, they are not considered to have been international students in the modern sense.

percent of the total Chinese international student population and have become the primary source for the ever-growing Chinese international student market.
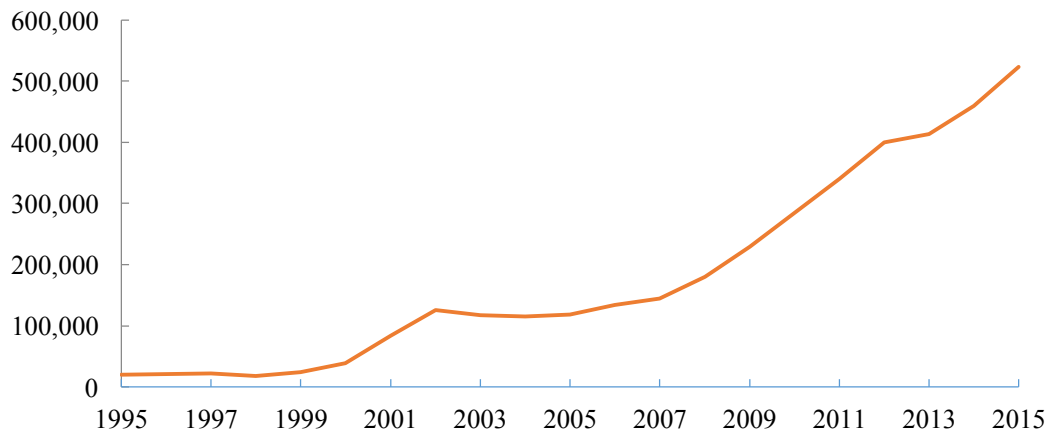
Figure 4.1. Number of Chinese studying abroad (1995-2015).
Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2015)

Upon closer inspection, the sharpest increase in Chinese students abroad occurred after 2000, when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the government began to place a strong emphasis on "going out" (*zou chu qu*). At the same time, an increasing number of ordinary Chinese families could afford a high quality overseas education. From 2000 to 2001, the number of Chinese studying abroad jumped by 115.4 percent, and it has continued to grow at an average of 24.1 percent per year since then. After fifteen years of growth, the number of Chinese students overseas has more than tripled, and in 2015 the number of students abroad hit a new record of 523,700 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2015).

"Study abroad fever" (*liu xue re*) has increasingly swept China, making it the largest supplier of international students for many host countries. In fact, China is the largest country of origin for six of the top ten receiving nations (B. R. Clark 2004; Wang 2015), namely the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Canada, and Japan (Institute of International

Education 2015d; OECD 2015a). Although the annual increase rate has been slowing down in the last three years, it is probably too early to say this recent decrease is the beginning of a longer-term trend. As most international organizations have noted, China still dominates the international student market (OECD 2015c). In other words, it is the "age of China" in international admissions.

The most popular destinations for Chinese international students include the major English speaking countries, such as the U.S., the UK, Canada, and Australia, as well as developed countries in Asia, such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Out of all these popular countries, the U.S. receives the highest interest. As *OECD Education at a Glance 2015* (OECD 2015a) reported, almost one-third of Chinese students studying abroad chose the U.S. as their destination in 2013; this was a much higher figure than the second (Japan, at 12.3 percent) and third-most popular countries (Australia, at 12.1 percent) hosting Chinese students. In comparison, only 20 percent of the total number of international students from all sending nations chose to study in the U.S. in the same time period. Chinese students seem to show a much greater passion for a U.S. education, and loyalty to institutions "made in the U.S.," than do students from the rest of the world.

In addition, it is important to note that the majority of Chinese international students today are from a unique generation consisting of "singletons" – those who are the only children in their families due to national population control policies. This marked demographic change in the Chinese student population, combined with dramatic socioeconomic development, has produced a special group of student-consumers who are accustomed to not only having full access to the resources of their families, but who also anticipate as a matter of course the best in their academic futures.

Beginning in 2013, China's One-Child Policy was loosened to allow a second child under certain conditions, and in 2015 it was formally phased out, allowing a second child regardless of circumstance. But the impact of this policy change may not show itself in the composition of China's international student population for some time. The freedom to have more than one child in the family will have little influence on the singleton generation that is currently seeking educational opportunities abroad, because most of them had already reached adulthood by 2015. Their parents are much less likely to have a second child, therefore the family structure and environment that shaped this generation will remain the same. Likewise, the educational experiences which prepared them for higher education abroad are also unchanged by the new policy.

Beyond the sharp increase in the total number of Chinese students overseas during the past fifteen years, another major change in the China market is that more and more Chinese are choosing to study abroad at a younger age. During the 1980s and 1990s, most Chinese students chose to finish their college education at home and then pursue graduate level studies outside China. From 2000 onward, the number of students who chose to study abroad at the undergraduate level began to catch up. In 2010, the number of Chinese students who decided to forgo the domestic college entrance exam (*gaokao*) altogether was close to one million, and 21.1 percent of those students planned to attend college abroad. In 2011, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) announced a 19 percent increase in the number of Chinese TOEFL takers over the prior year (Education Testing Service 2012),[4] a figure that resulted partly from the doubled number of participants under the age of eighteen (China Education Online 2011).

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[4] Higher education institutions in English-speaking countries generally require the submission of international English language test results from TOEFL (U.S.) or IELTS (U.K.) for applicants whose native language is not English.

Another important new trend is the increasing proportion of top-tier high school graduates joining the new generation of Chinese international students. This trend is even more obvious in big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, both of which have historically sent a large number of Chinese students abroad. As the *Oriental Morning Post* (Han 2012) a reputable Shanghai newspaper, reported in June 2012, the average proportion of students choosing to pursue their undergraduate education abroad ranged from 10 to 20 percent among the top four elite high schools in Shanghai;[5] these four schools, it is worth noting, accept only the top 2 percent of local high school students. If one includes the students enrolled in the international programs at these schools, the proportion of those headed abroad for college goes up to 50 percent. Unlike previous generations of students, many of whom chose to study abroad as an alternative or last resort when they had either failed or feared failure in the fiercely competitive Chinese college entrance exam (Fong 2011), top-tier Chinese high school graduates today often aim for the best universities in the world from the start. As this group increases, the loss of high-achieving students earlier in the educational pipeline has become a concern for both Chinese academia as well as government.

In addition, as the number of Chinese students competing for the best colleges abroad keeps increasing, a rising proportion of students attending high school overseas is also on the horizon (Zha 2011). In 2010, among all Chinese students who chose to study abroad, 19.8 percent were at the secondary and primary school levels. The very next year, students attending high school abroad, without their families, made up 22.6 percent of the total Chinese international student population (Wang 2015). Consequently, in 2013, Chinese students made up a large proportion of

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[5] The top four high schools in Shanghai include Shanghai High School (上海中学), No. 2 Secondary School of East China Normal University (华师大二附中), High School Affiliated to Shanghai Jiao Tong University (交大附中), and Shanghai Foreign Language School (上外附中).

the total number of international students at the secondary education level in many major English-speaking countries, including the U.S. (32.3 percent), Australia (48.9 percent), Canada (31.2 percent), and the U.K. (15 percent, ranked top two) (Farrugia 2014). "Going abroad at a younger age" seems to be the outcome of a domino effect caused by stiff competition for better higher education resources overseas. This new phenomenon is even more pronounced in China's new elite classes, as the families in this group have more financial resources than ordinary Chinese. A recent survey put out by *Hurun Report* (Hurun Report 2016)*,* a Shanghai-based publication famous for ranking China's wealthiest individuals, found that among 458 affluent Chinese (with a personal net worth over ten million RMB) more than 30 percent of them stated that they would send their children abroad at the high school level, followed by the college level (23.14 percent), and finally the middle school level (13.76 percent). This finding shows that China's new wealthy elites have a tremendous commitment to international education and foreign degrees; they see the educational and cultural capital of study abroad as a pathway to maintaining their socioeconomic status and economic resources into the next generation.

The United States: The Most Popular Destination

Overview of the U.S. Market

As the world's leading economy, the United States has attracted the most international students from around the world for many years. It captured 19.4 percent of the total international student market in 2013, followed by the U.K. at 10.3 percent and Australia at 6.2 percent. (OECD 2015a). It is commonly accepted that international students have a significant and positive economic impact on the host country. *Open Doors 2015* reports that 72 percent of international students studying in the U.S. receive funds from outside the country, ranging in source from family and personal resources to government, university, or employment support.

According to NAFSA, the 974,926 international students present in the U. S. during the 2014-2015 academic year contributed more than $30.5 billion to the American economy, and supported more than 373,000 jobs (NAFSA 2017). Beyond this direct economic contribution, *Open Doors* (Institute of International Education 2017a) notes that "Students from around the world who study in the United States also contribute to America's scientific and technical research and bring international perspectives into U.S. classrooms, helping prepare American undergraduates for global careers, and often lead to longer-term business relationships and economic benefits." In addition, international students not only act as cultural ambassadors between the host and home countries after graduation, but may forge more permanent relationships. Many decide to stay on in the host country after graduation as highly-educated immigrants, while others use their advantages in language, cultural understanding and personal connections to serve in those business sectors of their home countries that are directly related to the host country.

According to the *IIE Open Doors Report*, over the past sixty years, the total population of international students in the U.S. has increased thirty times. In 2015/16, the number of international students in the U.S. increased by 7.1 percent to 1,043,839, which accounted for 5.2 percent of all students in U.S. higher education (Institute of International Education 2016a). Although the total number of international students in the U.S. has increased dramatically, their proportion in relation to the overall student population is not terribly impressive compared to the next three largest hosting countries – Australia (20.7 percent), Canada (12.9 percent), and the U.K. (21.1 percent) for 2014-2015 academic year (Institute of International Education 2017b). Considering the size and capacity of the American higher education sector, there is a great deal of space for continuing growth in the future.

In terms of the source of international students in the U.S., Asian countries still send the most, which is consistent with the global trend. The top four sending countries (Institute of International Education 2017d) in 2015/16 were China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia, which together made up 60 percent of the total international student population in the U.S. As for the most popular locations, nearly one out of three international students chose California (10.5 percent), New York (7.1 percent), or Texas (8.7 percent). However, only New York hosted a higher proportion of international students (9 percent) than the national average (5.4 percent), indicating that the other popular states, such as California and Texas, were in fact less internationalized in terms of the proportion of international students on campus, even if they hosted a larger number of international students in absolute terms. Another imbalance is in the fields of study. Approximately 60 percent of international students in the U.S. either chose Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields (41.6 percent) or studied in business and management (19.2 percent). In contrast, international students were more equally distributed in terms of the level of study; for every one student at the undergraduate level, there was 0.89 at the graduate level.

Among all higher education institutions in the U.S., doctorate-granting universities host the most international students, not only because of their large student bodies, but also because of their well-recognized brands. In 2014/15, the top twenty-five hosting institutions were all doctorate-granting universities; they enrolled 21.4 percent of all international students in the U.S. Among these twenty-five universities, fifteen are public research universities and the other ten are private research universities. For public universities, the higher tuition fees that international students pay have become increasingly important since the economic crisis of 2008, when state funding was in many cases cut dramatically; these fees have been seen as a fast and easy way to relieve financial pressure on many major public universities. Although more than half of the

institutions on the top twenty-five hosting list were public, private universities in the U.S. hosted more international students overall, due to their long history of recruiting international students and little state regulation regarding the size of international enrollment (IPEDS 2014).

Chinese Students in the U.S.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, China sent no students to the United States from the 1950s until 1974/75. In the 1980s, the number of Chinese students grew dramatically after China and the U.S. officially established diplomatic relations. By 1988/89, China had displaced Taiwan as the leading sender, largely because of growth in the number of self-supported students. China remained the leading nation of origin until it was displaced by Japan in 1994/95. In 1998/99, China once again became the leading sender, until it was surpassed by India in 2000. In 2009/10, China regained its spot as the top sending country, and has retained that place for seven years in a row, after eight years of double-digit increases. In 2015/16, there were 328,547 Chinese students studying in America, accounting for one-third of the total international student population in the U.S. (Institute of International Education 2016b).The large number and quick expansion of Chinese international students in recent years demonstrates both a keen interest in U.S. higher education and a clear ability to afford it. At the same time, such a high proportion of students from one sending country has also posed a challenge to diversity among the international student population overall.

In terms of fields of study, over the past five years Chinese students have primarily and consistently concentrated in the fields of business/management, engineering, and math/computer science (Figure 4.2). Notably, the number of students in the top two most popular fields – management and engineering – together made up fully half of the total Chinese international student population in the U.S. Aside from these two fields, Chinese students have recently focused more attention on math/computer science and less on the physical/life sciences. Over the past five years, students in the math/computer science field slightly increased from 10.6 percent to 12.4 percent, while the physical/life sciences field decreased from 11.5 percent to 9.6 percent. The booming IT industry in the U.S. and China, and the accompanying increase in high tech jobs may have contributed to this change.
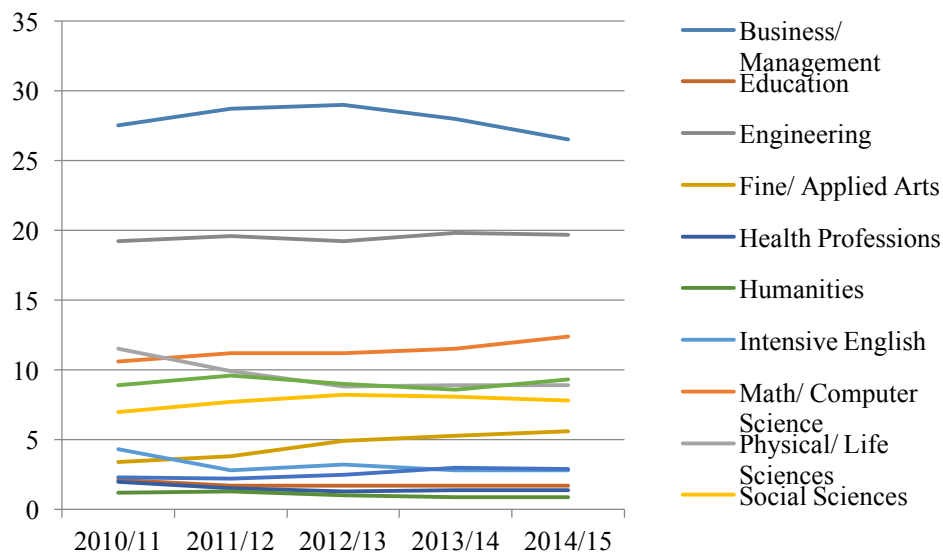
Figure 4.2. Fields of study for Chinese students in the U.S. (2010-2015).
Source: Institute of International Education (2010-2015)

It is interesting to note the high interest in STEM fields and business. The distribution of Chinese students in these two areas of study was extremely close to the breakdown for the international student population overall, which may be due to the high proportion of international students who are from China. Finally, there was a gender imbalance among Chinese students in STEM fields, with a ratio of 2:1 for male and female students; this same gender imbalance was

not found in the overall population of Chinese students in the U.S. (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2014).

Over the last decade, the number of Chinese students seeking to pursue an undergraduate education abroad has rapidly expanded, so it is no surprise to see a correspondingly quick increase in the number of Chinese undergraduates in the U.S. As Figure 4.3 illustrates, 80 percent of Chinese international students in the U.S. were enrolled at the graduate level in 2000, while only 14 percent were at the undergraduate level. By 2014/15, the number of Chinese undergraduate students exceeded those at the graduate level, comprising 41 percent of all Chinese students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education 2015e). Although the total number of Chinese international students at both levels has grown a great deal recently, the average increase rate of undergraduate students in the last ten years was 32.6 percent, outpacing the 9.6 percent growth rate at the graduate level. Compared to China, the overall international student population at the postsecondary level has always been split equally between the undergraduate and graduate levels over the same time period (Institute of International Education 2015b). Until 2014/15, the ratio between the undergraduate and graduate levels among Chinese students in the U.S. is nearing the ratio of the overall international student population in America. This strong shift from gaining advanced degrees and professional training to pursuing a college education and general knowledge was also reflected by another fast-growing cohort of Chinese students. Those attending secondary schools in the U.S. went from only 65 individuals in 2005 to 23,562 students in 2013 (Farrugia 2014). The majority of these students enrolled in full diploma programs so that they could be competitive applicants to U.S. universities.
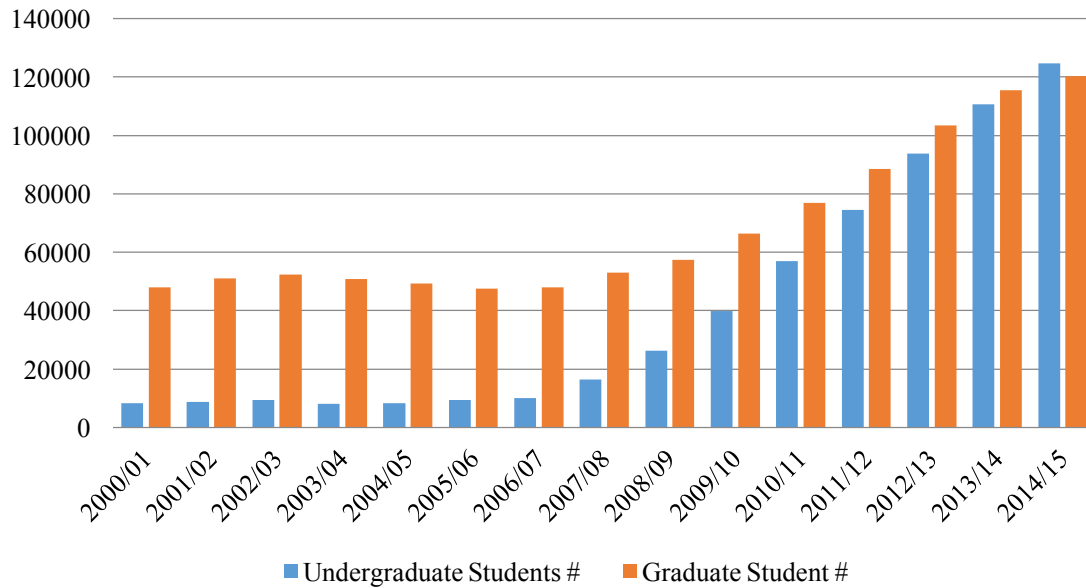
Figure 4.3. Levels of study of Chinese students in the U.S. (2000-2015).
Source: IIE Open Doors Data (2000-2015)

Major Push and Pull Forces Between China and the United States

Originating from the "laws of migration," the "push-pull" model has been widely used in the

explanation of international student mobility (K. H. Lee and Tan 1984; McMahon 1992; Altbach

1998; Mazzarol, Soutar, and Thein 2001; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002). Push factors 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" (Dorigo and

Tobler 1983). Although some scholars (Li and Bray 2007) have argued for a two-way push-pull

model that emphasizes the bilateral influence between the sending country and the host country,

my analysis mainly focuses on the momentum in one direction, the push force away from China

and the pull force toward the U.S., mainly because it was the direction the Chinese elite-

singletons in my study took.

Push Forces in China

The limits of Chinese higher education

The rapid expansion of Chinese higher education since 1999 has made China the largest

higher education system in the world, with 1,700 higher education institutions and twenty-seven

million students (Yang 2010). Yet there are still more good students than good universities, and

the competition to gain admission to the best Chinese universities is extremely intense. In 2011,

although the overall admissions rate in China was around 68 percent, only 13 percent of students

were admitted to first-tier Chinese universities. It is therefore not surprising that many capable

Chinese students should seek international education opportunities in developed countries, where

they believe they will receive a higher quality education than at the average Chinese university.

In addition, the massification of higher education in China has resulted in diploma

devaluation, leading to ever fiercer competition in the job market after graduation. Since foreign

degrees are, in general, considered more valuable than domestic degrees – due to the higher

quality of education and the foreign language skills and multicultural understanding gained from

time overseas – study abroad is thought of as a logical alternative path to obtaining or

maintaining elite status. In fact, for those high-achieving students, such as elite-singletons, who

could access the top Chinese universities, the choice to instead go abroad can be even more

compelling and attractive. The added prestige conveyed by a foreign degree can provide a

greater comparative advantage in attaining elite status back in China through differentiated

supply, which is particularly important when Chinese graduates are seeking a competitive edge

in a more globalized world.

Rise of the Chinese upper-middle class and new elites

The implementation of China's Open-Door policy, and the thirty-five years of social and

economic development that accompanied it have not only resulted in a large Chinese middle

class, but also in the rise of an upper-middle class consisting of new elites who can pay for expensive college educations in America. In 2016, the average annual cost of attending a four-year university in the U.S. was approximately $60,000 (0.4 million RMB), including tuition and fees, on-campus room and board, and allowances for books, supplies and transportation. Because most public universities in the U.S. do not award any scholarships or financial aid to international students, and since fellowships are likewise limited at private colleges, the financial burden of a college education is mostly borne by international students themselves, or more accurately in the case of China, their parents. Nearly all the Chinese student participants in my study confirmed this financial reality, saying that their parents were prepared to pay for their education in the U.S. Only a very small number of students – four out of eighty-two student interviewees – considered scholarships as a major factor in their college choice. Lu Xueyi (2002), of the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has defined the Chinese upper-middle and upper class to include cadres, business managers, private entrepreneurs, and professional and technical personnel, and the majority of students in my study had parents who held exactly these types of positions. Furthermore, because of higher income levels in developed areas of China, the majority of Chinese international students are from large metropolises (e.g., Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai) and midsize cities (e.g., Hangzhou, Nanjing, Shenzhen, Chengdu, and Shenyang) in economically mature areas (Yang 2010).

Ultimately, self-supported students made up 92 percent of the half-million outbound students in 2015 (China Ministry of Education 2016); this included students who received scholarships or stipends from their universities – usually at the graduate level – and those who received little financial support, a more common situation at the undergraduate and secondary school levels. This left a small minority of only 4.95 percent of students who were supported by the Chinese

government, and 3.06 percent who paid their way through concurrent employment (Ministry of Education 2016).

Expansion of international education infrastructure

Another important force enabling study abroad is the expansion, over the past two decades, of an extensive infrastructure dedicated to meeting the increasing demand for access to international higher education resources. Not incidentally, the various players in this infrastructure actively promote study abroad as not just an alternative, but often a necessary path to a high-quality education and respectable socioeconomic status. These infrastructure expansions include:

1) Chinese study-abroad agencies (liu xue zhong jie), which provide information on foreign higher education institutions, run English language prep-courses for various standardized tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Testing System (IELTS), and Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), offer consultation on college choice, and assist with the preparation of college applications. As of 2012, there were 448 legal study-abroad agencies in fifteen provinces in China, not to mention even more illegal ones (Ministry of Education 2012);

2) "International programs" (guoji ban) in Chinese local high schools, designed for students who plan to study abroad rather than attend Chinese universities. The programs usually offer AP courses or A-level courses, English language skill courses for TOEFL or IELTS exams, university preparatory courses (China Education Online 2015), and college counseling services;

3) "Exchange programs" between Chinese secondary schools and U.S. secondary schools;

4) Short-term language and culture programs, and summer camps in China or overseas (you xue);

5) International student recruitment activities by U.S. higher education institutions at Chinese high schools; and

6) Online study-abroad services.

Although the recent development of this international education infrastructure greatly assists Chinese students in selecting colleges abroad, its rapid expansion has also led to quality deficiencies in certain areas. Study abroad brokers often fail to provide sufficient levels of consultation or information regarding the various options available at a foreign institution, which can make a Chinese student's final college choice akin to placing a bet. For example, the option to enter college with an undeclared major does not exist in the Chinese higher education system, and many Chinese students do not receive appropriate counseling regarding this option at foreign universities. Not fully understanding that they have the choice to go undeclared, and wishing to avoid any unknown consequences, Chinese students will often choose a university where a major declaration is required, when they may in fact have preferred a university that allows one to enter undeclared. This sort of situation indicates that more information and consultation could be delivered by U.S. universities directly to the targeted students, rather than leaving them to wonder about the intricacies of a foreign educational system.

Pull Forces from the U.S.

Strong higher education sector

The strong and diverse U.S. higher education system provides international students with abundant educational resources at multiple levels. Over 16 percent of total international students at the postsecondary level chose the U.S. as their study abroad destination in 2015 (China

Education Online 2015), making America the top receiving country for international students. For many Chinese students, their perception that they will receive a higher quality education is the primary motivation to pursue an American college degree.

For better or worse, international ranking systems are the most widely-used indicators of university quality today, and both the Chinese government and student-consumers rely heavily upon them. American higher education institutions perform well on all global university rankings, and have retained their dominant positions on these lists for many years. For example, in the Shanghai Jiaotong and Times Higher Education rankings, more than half of the top one hundred universities are located in the United States. The *StudentPoll China* survey (StudentPoll 2012) shows that Chinese high school students believe U.S. higher education to be the best in the world in terms of academic quality. Overall, Chinese students gave American universities a higher rating as compared to universities in the United Kingdom and Canada on the basis of these four factors:

1) Academic quality

2) Teaching critical thinking, problem solving, and intellectual creativity

3) Quality of facilities

4) Quality of faculties

Among these four factors, "teaching critical thinking, problem solving, and intellectual creativity" is the characteristic that seems most typically "American." At the same time, current educational reforms in China have placed a greater value on these exact skills and have used education in the U.S. as a primary model, which in turn has lead student-consumers to even more strongly favor a U.S. education. In fact, the data from *StudentPoll China* shows that learning these specific abilities is the top impetus behind many Chinese students' interest in the U.S.

While the U.S. edged out the U.K. and Canada with respect to these four specific factors, the ratings for each factor were actually very close, which indicated an inability on the part of Chinese students to distinguish between institutions of higher education in these three countries. This seems largely due to the fact that their knowledge or awareness of the differences between institutions in these countries is limited or superficial. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that although the ratings on these and other specific factors, such as overall quality and campus environment, were very close, an overwhelming number of Chinese students (78 percent) still preferred to attend college in the United States rather than in the United Kingdom (24 percent) or Canada (22 percent). This sizable gap indicates that Chinese students view the U.S. as the most attractive destination for international higher education, even though there is little difference in the perceived quality of higher education among the United States, Canada and Great Britain, and further demonstrates the strong loyalty that Chinese student-consumers feel towards HEIs with a U.S. brand name.

The U.S. also appeals because it is the leader in many critical fields – such as the life sciences, computer science, and engineering – that promote national economic development and advanced technologies; this attracts Chinese postsecondary students who have already had solid training in math and science during their K-12 education. Finally, American university campuses are well known for their diverse cultures and international environments, which attracts Chinese students who seek to develop cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding in the age of globalization.

Future job opportunities

Although the recent economic recession has raised some doubts about the future prosperity of the United States, its past and current economic dominance still points towards prosperous

career prospects for graduates of American universities. The high-quality education Chinese students receive from U.S. higher education institutions equips them with excellent English language ability, multi-cultural understanding and communication skills, solid and advanced knowledge in key scientific fields, and critical thinking and problem solving skills that they can take back to a more competitive job market in China. In addition, well-recognized university brands from the U.S. open doors in the labor market outside China. For Chinese students who plan to continue on to an advanced degree in America or another English-speaking country, or who simply aspire to better job placement in the future, a college degree from the U.S. smooths the path due to the high esteem in which American degrees are held in the international higher education market.

Open visa and immigration policies

Visa issues have always been a key factor in determining a student's study abroad destination. A long and troublesome visa process could easily turn many international students away. Despite the recent and less-friendly immigration policies initiated by the new Trump administration, U.S. visa policy towards Chinese citizens, including Chinese students, has been friendly in the last decade, due to a number of economic and political factors. For example, in 2012, a new visa policy from the U.S. government allowed Chinese students to renew their student visas without having to undergo a face-to-face interview. The validation of F, M and J visas issued to Chinese students was also extended from one year to five years starting in November 2014; in general, it became much easier for Chinese nationals to attain a student visa from the United States than it had been in past years. In order to attract more STEM field students to work in the U.S. after graduation, the Optional Practical Training (OPT) period allowed after graduation was extended from 29 months to 36 months in May 2016. All of these recent visa policies have encouraged Chinese students to choose the United States as their study

destination, especially when other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia are constraining their immigration policies. Indeed, the market for international students in one country is always linked to the policies of both the host country and other competing countries.

Summary

Overall, rapid economic development and a strong demand for high-quality higher education in China have made it the top sending nation of international students to most countries in the world, including the U.S. Various push and pull factors between China and America influence Chinese students' decisions to study in the U.S., and their overwhelming preference for American universities provides the U.S. and its higher education sector with great financial and cultural benefits.

Among all Chinese students studying abroad, one particular cohort – the most academically and financially prepared students, who are accepted by the most selective U.S. higher education institutions – inspires the rest and sets the "taste" for Chinese students' college choice. These "student models" are also highly desired by top-tier U.S institutions to enrich campus diversity, strengthen academic performance, and support university finances. Their story will be told next in Part II: The Individual Pursuit.

Part II The Individual Pursuit

Chapter 5
The Profile of Chinese Elite-Singletons

In 1978, the One-Child Policy – a set of national population control measures – was introduced by the Chinese government in order to address the many social, economic, and environmental problems facing the nation. Although the policy allowed many exceptions – ethnic minority groups were exempted, for example – the majority of Chinese couples were restricted to only one child. In 2015, when the One-Child Policy began to be formally phased out, Chinese authorities claimed that it had prevented 400 million births over the past forty years (*Ifeng.com* 2013).

Children who were born after 1978, and whose families complied with the policy, are referred to as "singletons" (*du sheng zi nu*). Their parents received a "certificate of glory" (*guang rong zheng*) and a small stipend from the government for having only one child. The implementation of the One-Child Policy in 1978 created a unique generation dominated by only children, and this group makes up the main body of Chinese international students today. Although not every student from this unique group comes from a single-child household, they all nevertheless grew up in a new social environment, which had been greatly influenced and transformed in nearly all respects under this national policy.

The focus of Part II is on a special cohort within the Chinese singleton generation: "elite-singletons" who seek out, as early as the undergraduate level, the best higher education opportunities in the U.S. This student group, with their high levels of academic performance and preparedness, rank at the top of their class, whether judged by Chinese or U.S. standards. They are also the children of China's new elites, the upper-middle and upper classes, who are willing and able to afford expensive American undergraduate educations for their only children.

Although the number of students in this cohort is relatively small compared to the total number of Chinese international students in the U.S., they serve as role models, with their tastes and preferences in higher education institutions inspiring and influencing their Chinese peers. They are also some of the most desirable prospective students for top-tier American HEIs of all sorts, from the largest research universities to small elite liberal arts colleges.

Who are these Chinese elite-singletons and what are their main characteristics? Why do they choose to study abroad in the U.S. for their college education, when they could most likely secure a place at a prestigious Chinese university? How do they choose a college? All of these questions are answered in this part of my dissertation, which examines the individual Chinese student's pursuit of an education at the U.S. institutions with the most iconic and recognizable brands. In Chapter 5, I discuss the distinctive generational characteristics of Chinese elite-singletons as prospective international students. Chapter 6 explores their major motivations to study abroad in the U.S., and Chapter 7 examines the process of college choice and the factors that most influence it. In sum, Part II shows that study abroad behavior and the related college choice process are deeply embedded in generational characteristics shaped by social, economic and cultural forces in China, and are strongly influenced by the power of university brands that are themselves shaped by not only the characteristics of individual institutions, but also the clout of the host nation itself.

The Background of China's Singleton Generation

"Little Emperors" and the "Only Hope"

One major consequence of the One-Child Policy was the change it wrought on the structure and focus of the Chinese family. After 1979, the typical urban Chinese family transformed from more extended configurations to a "4-2-1" structure, made up of four grandparents, two parents

and the single child (Figure 5.1). This new family structure focused substantial attention and investment on the single child in the family. As Liu observed in his research on post-90s youth in Beijing, these children became extremely "precious" to their parents and were, in his words, "the priceless children of China" (F. Liu 2016). A goal of the One-Child Policy had been to allow these single children to succeed rather than simply survive, and indeed the new "4-2-1" structure equipped the new generation of only children with concentrated parental love and financial support, which often resulted in better educational results and superior life opportunities. Placed at the center of family life as they are, children of the One-Child Policy are famously known as the generation of "little emperors" in China, indicating the privilege, and sometimes spoiling, that attends their status as only children.[6]

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              ┌──────────────┐
          →   │ Single Child │   ←
              └──────────────┘
     ┌──────────┐      ↑      ┌──────────┐
     │  Mother  │      │      │  Father  │
     └──────────┘      │      └──────────┘
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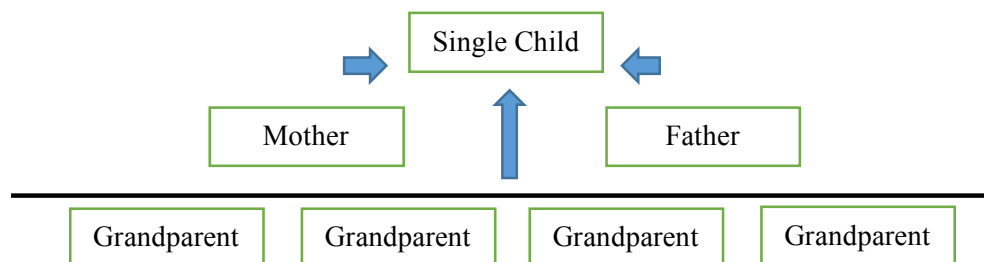
Figure 5.1. China's typical "4-2-1" family structure.

However, the many privileges this generation has enjoyed have not been without cost. It is one thing to be an only child in a society where most of one's peers have siblings; it is an entirely different matter to be part of a generation in which all of one's peers are only children, and the entire age cohort was intentionally "designed" that way. When every Chinese family has only one chance to produce a successful child who will support the parents when the child is grown, the competition within the younger generation becomes extremely fierce and overt. The stakes of success or failure are especially high for the "little emperors"; unlike those who came from the

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[6] The singleton generation has received much criticism in Chinese society for being spoiled only children. They are often viewed as selfish and dependent, with poor self-control and few life skills.

large families that were common in previous generations, if today's singletons lose out in the educational and economic competition, their parents have no one else to rely on for support, and they have no siblings to turn to for help. Vanessa L. Fong, an American anthropologist who has extensively studied the Chinese singleton generation, observes that every singleton is expected to be a winner and is referred to as the "only hope of the family" (Fong 2006). Her follow-up studies of Chinese singletons who seek educational opportunities abroad show that this generation bears extremely high family expectations for upward mobility (Fong 2011). Picturing developed countries like the U.S. as a sort of paradise, singletons are motivated to study abroad in order to reach elite status, and they furthermore hope that a flexible "developed world" citizenship will promise them the potential for greater happiness and the freedom afforded by transnational mobility within a global neoliberal system. As Fong argues, the Chinese singletons are "the generation born and raised for the developed world."

Individualism in Globalization

　　The different cohorts within the singleton generation go by a number of names, and as prospective international students, they are targeted at different educational levels (Table 5.1). They are distinct from earlier generations in other important ways as well.

Table 5.1 Terms used for different groups within Chinese singleton generation

Year Born	Age Range*	Terms	Nicknames	Targeted As
1979-1989	24-34	"Post-80s" "Chinese Gen Y"	"Little Emperor" "Only Hope"	Prospective graduate students
1990-1999	14-23	"Post-90s" "I-Want Generation"		Prospective undergraduate or graduate students
2000-2013	0-13	"Post-00s"		Prospective undergraduate students

*Age range is calculated based on the year 2013, when the empirical data was collected in China.

Perhaps most significantly, although China remains a country that advocates socialism and collectivism, the singleton generation shows a strong belief in capitalism and individualism. They grew up in the time of China's rapid economic and social development and have experienced the impacts of globalization at different times in their lives. As a group, they realize the importance of being "international" and are willing to expend great effort to gain the best return on their personal investment in education, thus leading more and more of them to choose higher education overseas. In contrast to the students who went abroad in the 1990s, the singleton generation is more interested in individual benefits when they choose to study overseas, rather than in national or social interests (Li and Bray 2007). In addition, a recent study in the *Harvard Business Review* demonstrated that this generation is more likely to respond to western brands (McEwen et al. 2006), which makes them ideal as targeted "student-consumers" for HEIs in Western countries.

Information Savvy

Furthermore, the singleton generation was born in the information age, with access to much better national K-12 education, making them a highly literate and information-savvy group. McEwan et al.'s research in the *Harvard Business Review* (McEwen et al. 2006) also showed that China's Generation Y (corresponding to the eighteen to twenty-four-year-old and Post-80s groups in my study) demonstrated a higher level of information literacy than Generation X (age twenty-five-plus) by reading more books, newspapers, and magazines. They also more regularly use computers and the internet to access information, indicating a higher level of engagement through electronic devices. It is highly likely that the Post-90s group, the middle cohort of prospective international students in my study, may show even greater and more sophisticated levels of information literacy. Indeed, a very high proportion of student participants in my survey

owned electronic devices that allowed them to access information anywhere, with more than 95 percent using a mobile phone and personal computer, and 69 percent owning iPads.

The Characteristics of Chinese Elite-Singletons

The Only Child

Within the Chinese singleton generation, the sub-group of elite-singletons had many characteristics in common with their only-child peers. They were adored by their parents and always placed in the center of family life. Most of my study participants indicated that they could usually get most things they wanted so long as their parents considered it appropriate: an advanced electronic device, a nice piece of clothing, a dining experience in a newly-opened restaurant, or a concert ticket to see their favorite pop star. Being the only children from affluent families enabled them to enjoy abundant material possessions.

Beyond that, many of the students in my survey indicated that their parents were very caring and open-minded to them, and the concentrated love between these only children and their parents resulted in close and trusting bonds. Because of these close relationships with their parents, my participants sought them out for consultation and emotional support when confronting important issues in their lives, including the prospect of studying abroad. Many of them referred to their parents as their best friends, and considered them to have played an important role in the journey of applying to college in the U.S. However, some of these students also indicated that they felt lonely at home when their parents spent long hours at work and there was no sibling to play with. Interestingly, although many in Chinese society have criticized the singleton generation for being selfish "little emperors," three-quarters of the students in my survey indicated that they considered their "cooperativeness" to be "above average" or in the "top highest 10 percent"; and 70 percent of them frequently "consider [how their] behavior or

words could influence others." This indicated that the students had a strong "sense of oneness with other people" (Hui and Triandis 1986), as well as a tendency and ability to keep other people in mind, a typical aspect of the collectivist culture which is commonly found in East Asian countries. Although Li's research found that China's younger generation showed a higher level of individualism than the older generation (Li 2006), my research suggested that the elite-singletons of the current generation still fall more along the spectrum of collectivism, rather than exhibiting the sort of individualism more typically observed in western culture.

In contrast, my student participants showed much less self-confidence in their leadership ability (62.4 percent) and social skills (60 percent). Only half of them indicated in the survey that they "frequently" led a team to achieve a goal; and less than half of them (46.8 percent) actively participated in student associations and clubs. Obviously, growing up without any siblings deprived them of the opportunity to practice social and leadership skills with peers at home, but overprotective parents and grandparents may have played an even greater role in this lack of confidence. Although more research is needed to confirm this theory, it is possible that singleton students developed the tendency to take less initiative and fewer leadership positions in their social lives, since the older generations in the family consistently put the children first and took the lead in preparing the way for nearly all aspects of their development. Singleton students therefore feel less comfortable taking leadership positions in social settings outside the family. In turn, this lack of confidence in their own leadership and social skills can not only put Chinese elite-singletons at a disadvantage when they apply to colleges in the U.S., but can also set up potential barriers to their future success on a U.S. campus, since these two personal traits are highly valued in the American education system.

High-Achieving Students

The "elite-singletons" in my study gained their "elite" designation not only from their affluent family backgrounds, but also from the academic excellence they achieved through their own efforts. Furthermore, the high-achieving students in my survey often managed to enroll in highly-selective local elite high schools, some of which had admission rates of close to 2 to 5 percent. Because admissions to local Chinese high schools are purely based on test scores, only those students who have the highest scores (and presumably the best test-taking skills) are able to attend the most selective local high schools. It is thus not surprising to see that my student samples also had very high test scores on the major standardized tests that are crucial to college admissions in the U.S., such as TOEFL[7] and the SAT.[8]

Looking at their SAT scores, for example, nearly 70 percent of the survey participants had composite scores of 2100 or higher. At a school like UCLA – ranked twenty-third by U.S. News and World Report in the year of my survey, and considered a competitive university in China on the basis of its ranking – only 28.47 percent of the freshman class as a whole scored in a similarly high range (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions 2013). Thus, while getting into UCLA may not present as much of a challenge for these top-tier Chinese students, getting into a school such as Harvard, on the other hand, is extremely difficult, given the fact that only a handful of students from mainland China are admitted to its undergraduate programs each year. Nonetheless, half of the student participants in my survey successfully scored between 2120 and

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[7] TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a standardized test used to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers wishing to enroll in English-speaking universities.

[8] The SAT is a standardized test widely used for college admissions in the United States, which measures the reading, writing, and math levels of high school juniors and seniors. It is developed and administered on behalf of the College Board by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the U.S.

2400 – the 25th to 75th percentile SAT scores at Harvard in recent years (PrepScholar 2017) – which raised their hopes of getting into "the very top university in the world."

If the traditional emphasis on test performance in Chinese education helped to equip elite-singletons with excellent testing skills that allowed them to stand out from the crowd, it may have limited some of their other potentials. Although the participants in my study clearly demonstrated their academic abilities through their overall performance in high school, high class ranks, and good evaluations from teachers, most of them nonetheless felt high anxiety regarding the TOEFL and SAT tests, and devoted most of their time to securing high scores on both tests while they were preparing for their college applications. This was not just because test scores were the only solid numbers they could glean from U.S. colleges for the purpose of self-evaluation, but also because China's strong tradition of high-stakes test-taking reinforced this behavior.

Unfortunately, high scores on standardized tests do not by themselves guarantee an offer from Harvard or any other competitive U.S. higher education institution. In fact, standardized tests are only used as a supplement in the admissions process, especially for the most selective institutions, where all applicants score high on the tests. Many other "soft" qualities, such as growth potential, a well-rounded personality, and proven leadership skills are taken into consideration; these are factors that are not considered in Chinese college admissions at all.

The definition of high-achieving students varies from country to country, depending on the educational evaluation system as well as the culture's overall values. A student who scores extremely high on China's College Entrance Exam, and who, on the basis of those scores alone, is admitted to its most prestigious universities, such as Tsinghua or Peking University, is generally considered to be the highest-achieving student in the Chinese context. But such a

89

student is not guaranteed to get into equivalent institutions in the U.S., such as Harvard or Yale. Indeed, devoting too much effort to test preparation limited the time and energy students could spend on the sorts of life experiences that many top-tier institutions look for: demonstrating balance through participation in extracurricular or social events, showing the ability to manage time by joining those outside activities and still maintaining good grades, and displaying a willingness to take the initiative in leadership roles that make a difference to society.

In short, while students are evaluated on multiple criteria in U.S. higher education, the test score continues to reign supreme in China; and even though Chinese students show some awareness of the different evaluation standards in the two systems, the primacy of test scores in China still greatly influences students' ideas about which U.S. schools are even worth applying to. The whole of their past educational experience leads Chinese students to pursue only highly selective institutions as a proxy for elite status, and this in turn results in not only a concentration of Chinese applicants to a limited number of institutions, but also to unnecessary competition within this group.

High Socioeconomic Status

Parents' occupation and income

Since most U.S. institutions do not provide any substantial scholarships for international students at the undergraduate level, the very ability to go abroad for undergraduate education in the U.S. indicates that, in general, Chinese elite-singletons have financially well-prepared parents and wealthy family backgrounds. Although 21 percent of my student participants managed to receive a fellowship from U.S. institutions, 93 percent of total participants indicated their primary source of financial support for studying in the U.S was their parents, while only 6 percent relied on fellowships or scholarships, and 1 percent on other relatives.

In 2013, the cost of a four-year undergraduate education for international students in the U.S. ranged from $200,000 to $280,000. For families in the Chinese middle class – with household incomes of ¥60,000 (approximately $9,500) to ¥106,000 ($16,800) – this is a huge burden (Barton, Chen, and Jin 2013). Even among those in the Chinese upper-middle class, with household incomes in the ¥106,000 ($16,800) to ¥229,000 ($363,500) range, it would take many years to save the money for such a large educational cost. It is therefore unsurprising that the Chinese students who attend undergraduate programs in the U.S. are more likely to be from the high end of the upper-middle class or from the elite class in China.

My survey results confirmed this assumption, as the parents of most participants were employed in various high-level occupations. About 90 percent of fathers and 84 percent of mothers worked in areas that were either well-paid – in the business sector, for instance – or that otherwise conveyed high social status, such as government or academia. None of my participants were from SES-disadvantaged groups in China such as factory workers or farmers. For fathers, who are still considered the major breadwinners in China's patriarchal society, 26.98 percent were "business executive[s] in big corporations or organizations," 17.29 percent worked as "government cadre[s]," 15.08 percent were "intellectuals," and 14.29 percent were "business owners." In comparison, 12 percent more mothers worked as "intellectuals" than did fathers, while 12 percent less were "business executive[s] in big corporations or organizations," and a slightly lower rate – 3 percent – worked as "government cadre[s]."

These well-paid occupations led to an affluent family financial situation. My survey showed, for instance, that 90 percent of the families had at least one car and around half of them had two or more cars. Compared to the national level (11 percent) of motor vehicles per capita, the

number of cars in elite-singleton families is significantly higher than the national average (Wikipedia 2017a).

Nonetheless, a wealthy family background does not necessarily lead to an absence of financial concern when it comes to studying abroad. Only half of the students in my survey felt a strong confidence in their ability to finance their college education in the U.S., while about one-third gave a neutral response, and the rest – 12 percent – indicated some level of discomfort. Even when parents assured them that they could afford the high cost of studying abroad, the majority of students in my follow-up interviews felt they owed their parents a great deal, once again indicating the strength of the bond between parents and children of this generation.

My study also showed that their parents' occupation had a strong influence on elite-singletons' career orientation (Figure 5.2). The top three occupations that my student participants intended to pursue were:

- Business executive (58 percent) – top occupation of fathers

- Professional (31 percent) – specializing in one field, such as law, medicine, or computer science

- Intellectual (25 percent) – top occupation of mothers

In total, roughly 75 percent of participants wanted to pursue the same profession as their parents. However, these students chose a different path (i.e., a U.S.-based education) to reach their career goals. This was an interesting demonstration of the uniqueness of the singleton generation; in spite of the many advantages they enjoyed in China, they were willing to bravely step out of the comfort zone that their parents had carefully created for them at home. It is also interesting to note that the survey participants had little interest in government positions (3.5 percent), although many of their parents had gained their financial and social capital by working

in government. One possible explanation for this result is that success in government often depends on the cultivation of personal connections (*guanxi*), and those who choose to study abroad lose the opportunity to develop those connections during the college years. Finally, only a small number of mothers were classified as "homemakers" (5.95 percent), which may have influenced the female students' career orientation – none of them indicated that they would like to be in that category.
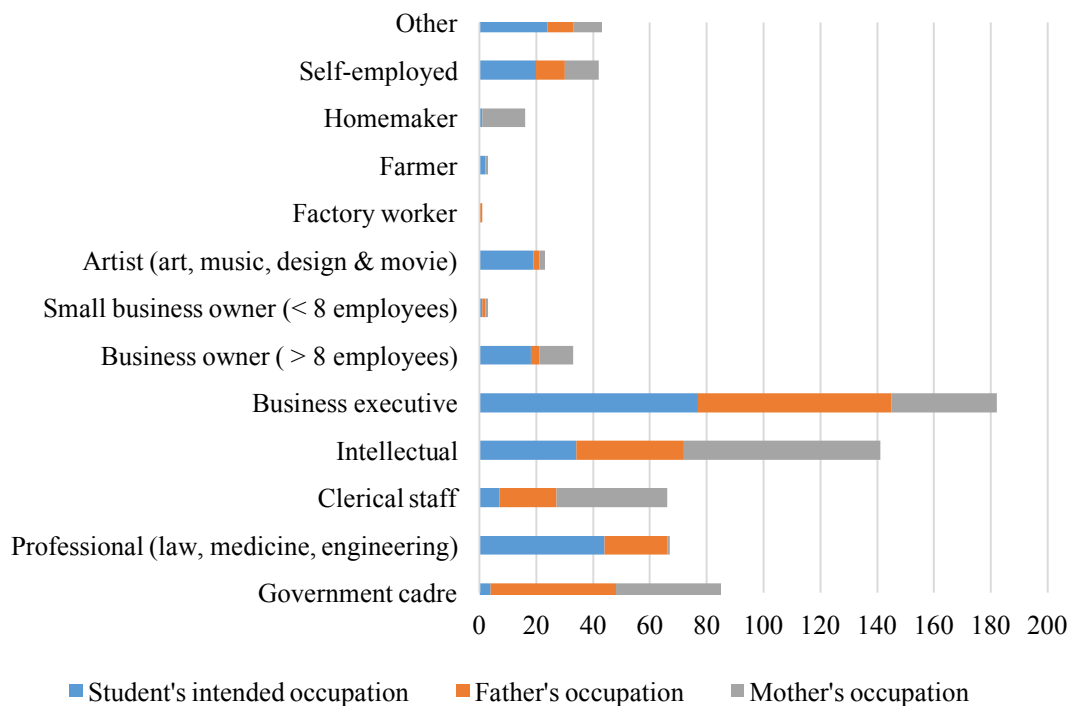
Figure 5.2. Parents' occupation and students' career orientation.

Parents' education level

In addition to their well-paid occupations, the parents of the elite-singletons in my study also had higher levels of education than was average in their age group, indicating a higher level of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) in these families. Around 80 percent of fathers as well as mothers obtained a bachelor's degree or above, compared to 2 to 3 percent of the overall Chinese population in the same age range (United Nations 2017). This result is in line with the increasing power of Chinese women, which dates from the 1950s, when Chairman Mao initially

promoted the equal rights of women, including educational rights. Interestingly, among those parents who obtained higher education training, more mothers had undergraduate degrees (52 percent) than fathers (40 percent), while fathers held more advanced degrees than mothers, including master's degrees (10 percent higher) and doctoral degrees (2 percent higher).

While, in general, the gross enrollment ratio in China has dramatically increased since 1998, reaching 39 percent by 2014 (UNESCO 2017), elite-singletons still led the way in terms of educational achievement, gaining higher levels of education than the population as a whole. About two-thirds of the students in my survey aspired to receive master's-level degrees, while one-third targeted a doctoral-level education; only 5 percent considered a bachelor's degree to be sufficient (Figure 5.3). This intention to pursue an advanced degree, particularly to the doctoral level, reflected the strong influence of parents on their children's academic achievement, through both their higher expectations as well as the pervasive family environment (Eccles and Davis-Kean 2005). Many students shared in their interviews that they were proud of their parents' achievements, and therefore not only felt inspired to pursue higher degrees themselves, but also felt a greater confidence in their own ability to succeed.
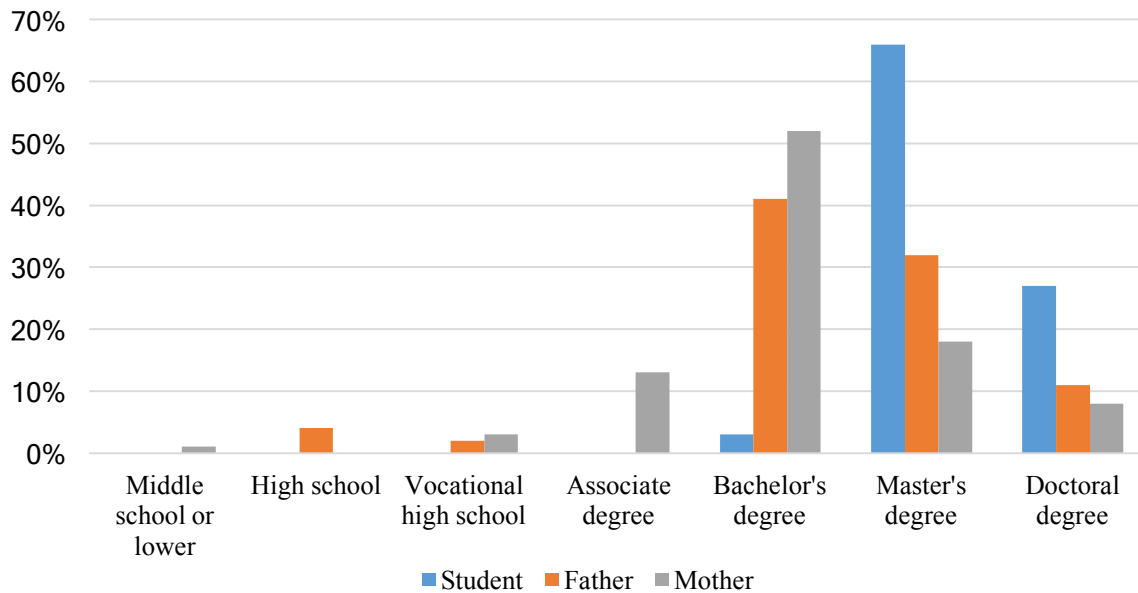
Figure 5.3. Parents' education level and students' academic degree orientation.

Interestingly, although the educational levels of both parents significantly correlated with singletons' highest desired degree, the father's education level (p-value = 0.1099, two-sided) was the strongest factor determining a child's highest desired degree; the higher the father's education level, the higher the education level to which their children aspired. A mother's education level was important to a lesser degree, although it was also related positively (p-value = 0.3658, two-sided). This was probably because fewer mothers received advanced degrees than did fathers, particularly at the master's level, even though more of them held bachelor's degrees. In addition, daughters were more influenced by their parents' education level than were sons, with the father's example again carrying more weight (p-value = 0.1671). The father as role model seemed to be stronger than the mother in this respect, which is once again probably related to the domination of males in China's patriarchal society.

Overall, their affluent family backgrounds and well-educated parents not only provided Chinese elite-singletons with great material comfort along with solid cultural capital, but also

strongly influenced the academic performance, career goals, and academic orientation of the participant group.

Global Travelers and Consumers by Design

The opportunity to explore the world beyond China at an early age was not a luxury for the elite-singletons. Of the students in my survey, 83 percent indicated that they had previously traveled abroad, while 67 percent had visited more than one country, and one-tenth had traveled to more than five countries. Clearly, these Chinese elite-singletons had a strong drive to explore the world from a young age, and took advantage of their family wealth to meet that goal. They indicated in follow-up interviews that the experience of traveling abroad opened their eyes and enriched their view of the world.

Given that the majority of the singletons in my study had just reached eighteen when I surveyed them, they had most likely traveled with their parents in the past, or, at least, their international travels had been financially supported by their parents. This was corroborated by survey data, which showed that a similar proportion of parents – 73 percent of fathers and 69 percent of mothers – had also traveled abroad. More impressively, 66 percent of fathers as well as 36 percent of mothers had worked overseas, which is not common in their generation, indicating that the elite-singletons' parents were not only global travelers but were also following career paths that led them to be global professionals. The Chinese elite-singletons in my interviews described their parents as "open-minded and supportive of their transnational ambitions in the U.S," even though they missed their children and wished they could be together in China.

For students who traveled abroad, the five countries with the most visits were the U.S. (70 percent), Singapore (30 percent), Japan (25 percent), Australia (24 percent), and the United

Kingdom (21 percent), each of which have historically received a large number of Chinese international students. No student visited Africa or South America, which generally host only a few Chinese students. Interestingly, for the students who only visited one country overseas, almost all of them chose English-speaking countries, and 68 percent traveled to the U.S. Given the fact that all of my student participants applied to American HEIs, it is clear that the elite-singletons took advantage of their family wealth not only for leisure and cultural enrichment but also to prepare themselves to attend college in their preferred destination country. In fact, the survey data showed that the main reasons to travel outside China for elite-singletons were "travel and sightseeing" (73 percent), along with "university campus visit or short-term camp/school" (68 percent). Only 9 percent of these students traveled abroad to "visit family members or friends," although two-thirds of them indicated they had relatives and friends in the U.S. For those who visited the U.S., more than half of them went for "summer/winter camp" and one-fifth "enrolled in an American school" for credits. Such educational experiences in the U.S. played an important role in student participants' decisions to subsequently pursue higher education in the U.S. As one student admitted to Stanford University told me in an interview:

> I was not sure if going to the U.S. (for my college education) was the right path for me, but I always thought I would study abroad sometime in my life. Then I attended a summer camp organized by Johns Hopkins University last summer [following the second year of high school]. Many top-tier students from around the world also attended. This great program had excellent professors and talented students. I enjoyed it a lot and made up my mind to give up an early admission offer I had already received from Fudan University [a prestigious Chinese institution] and started to apply to U.S. universities. My parents were not sure in the beginning, because it is risky to give up a good thing that you already have. However, they became very supportive after I made up my mind.

Aside from the opportunity to attend short-term summer programs directly organized by U.S. institutions, such as that described by the Stanford student above, or exchange programs between China and the U.S., for example, students also formally enrolled in U.S. high schools for credits.

Indeed, this is now a mature market promoted by Chinese study-abroad agencies, which greatly contributes to singletons' overseas travel behavior.

Unlike the summer camp attended by the Stanford student, more elite-singletons got on a plane for a short-term summer tour of the U.S., organized by these agencies as an earlier exposure to both the U.S. higher education system and more broadly to American culture, before they applied to college in the U.S. They visited university campuses from the East Coast to the West, and considered it to be a fun and eye-opening travel experience, although many of them wished there had been more of an educational component during the trip. Although Fong's study of Chinese singletons (2011) suggests that study abroad is more of a random outcome, my study indicated that for Chinese elite-singletons from the upper-middle or elite classes, it is a more well-planned result.

Indeed, more than one-third of the elite-singletons in my study first began to consider college in the U.S. before they started high school, and another one-third of them first thought of it during their first year of high school. Many participants described their decision to study abroad as a natural consequence of their earlier global exposure. Other research showing a new surge of young Chinese students heading to U.S. high schools for the purpose of later seeking admission to top American colleges – more than 23,000 at last count (Farrugia 2014)(Stage and Hossler 1989; York-Anderson and Bowman 1991; Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999; Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez 2001; Pascarella et al. 2004) – corresponds with my survey results. Obviously, Chinese elite-singletons are "early birds" in the global higher education market, and intentionally so.

The First in the Family to Study Abroad

Although the elite-singleton families in my study had strong college-going traditions based on the high educational levels of both parents – 93 percent of the parents had bachelor's degrees and above – the majority of participants were the first in their families to pursue higher education abroad, with only 10 percent of fathers and 6 percent of mothers having had education abroad experience themselves. Without knowledge of the higher education system and institutions in the U.S., or first-hand experience of studying overseas, parents were limited in the guidance and help they could offer their beloved only children when it came to choosing an American college, though all parties agreed they wanted the "best quality of education." Taking UCLA as one example, the majority of students learned about it from their school friends and classmates (69 percent) instead of their parents (17 percent). One student, Lili, said in her interview, "Parents don't really know about the universities in the U.S., all they care about is the ranking and the name of the school." She was not the only one to express dissatisfaction and even disappointment at this somewhat limited parental view of college choice. Yi, a college counselor working for a reputable study-abroad agency in Nanjing, who had consulted with more than a hundred Chinese students confirmed, "There is really no difference for most Chinese parents when choosing a university in the U.S. or in China. It is only about the (university's) brand name and ranking. That's all."

Obviously, a university's ranking and brand name cannot encapsulate everything about an institution, and the elite-singletons' parents, as highly-educated consumers, surely understood this. However, this does not mean that they knew which other factors mattered or how to process the sometimes overwhelming amounts of information for their children. To some extent, they were similar to any Chinese international students' parents in terms of language and cultural barriers. Although many of them understood some level of English due to their college

educations, they did not use English regularly in their work place or daily life. Their high educational achievements were all completed within the Chinese education system, providing them with little basic knowledge of either American colleges or the unique college culture that exists in the U.S. In turn, their conceptions of the American higher education system and its institutions were mainly built upon their own knowledge and experience of higher education in China, which is far different from the reality in the U.S. Hanhan, a male student from Shanghai, told me that he had argued with his father – a chemistry professor – about applying to liberal arts colleges. As Hanhan described it, his father did not approve of the idea because he believed that a liberal arts college was much smaller than a "university" (*da xue*) ought to be, and lacked fame (*ming qi*) in China. Because the Chinese concept of "college" (*xue yuan*) is closely tied to the image of a small higher education institution with much lower quality and learning opportunities than a comprehensive university, Hanhan's father did not think this type of institution was worthy of his son. Hanhan elaborated:

In my dad's eyes, the four-year education from a liberal arts college was like a repetition of high school – just emphasizing writing and reading skills, and critical thinking. [He felt] it could not provide me with strong academic training in one specific field, such as chemistry, which I had already decided to pursue. Even though I said I could eventually pursue my doctoral degree and would then have the type of academic training he envisioned, he still does not agree. He thinks "college" just sounds too cheap in China.

In this case, the father's misconceptions regarding the American liberal arts college not only prevented his child from exploring different educational options, but also set up emotional barriers between parent and child in the college decision-making process, which, in turn, greatly shaped the trajectory of this participant's study abroad in the U.S.

As a matter of fact, being the first in the family to pursue a college degree abroad tended to put these Chinese elite students at a great disadvantage with respect to (1) basic knowledge of college in the U.S. (for instance, types of institutions and the nature of the application process), (2) language and cultural barriers, (3) potential conflict with parents, and (4) restricted resources in high school to prepare for college in the U.S. Many of these limitations are also common to American high school students who are the first in their families to attend college (Stage and Hossler 1989; York-Anderson and Bowman 1991; Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999; Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez 2001; Pascarella et al. 2004); they too suffer from a limited understanding of postsecondary education (particularly the application process), ineffective family support in making college plans, and a lack of preparation in high school that would help them fit into campus culture in college. Despite their high levels of family income and support, Chinese elite-singletons still faced many of the same difficulties that most international students do. They were, to some extent, "high-income minorities" within American HEIs.

Summary

An only child born in a society consisting of other only children is very different from a single child born in a more heterogeneous society. The competition in China within the younger generation has become extremely fierce and intense, since every family has only one chance to produce a successful child who will support the parents when the child is grown. There is no other country in the world that has engaged in the planning of such a large generation in which each child is expected to be the only descendant, and the "only hope" of the family; certainly no such thing has ever happened organically in China's long history.

This dramatic demographic change has influenced the Chinese singleton generation in every respect, from their experience of education, to their personal characteristics, and their

relationships with parents. The most elite members of this generation, who enjoyed abundant material resources and the full attention of their parents, grew up to become promising young men and women equipped with solid secondary educational training. Following in their well-established parents' footsteps, they have aspired to become global professionals, even if, as the first generation in the family to attend college abroad, they may have encountered significant difficulties.

In all, they are a unique group of student-consumers who are accustomed to having the best resources from their families and who anticipate success in their academic futures. Studying abroad at the top U.S. universities is considered to be an affordable yet valuable opportunity, and their main motivations for doing so are revealed in the next chapter – "Even Better": The Main Motivations for College Education in the U.S.

Chapter 6
"Even Better": The Main Motivations for Pursuing an American College Education

The motivations to travel to the U.S. for a college education were complicated, and varied from student to student. However, the main theme emerging from my survey as well as from interviews was a strong internal desire for an "even better" college education – an education of the highest quality, enabled by the global higher education market and better than what one could receive in China. Chinese elite-singletons believe that in the age of globalization, such an education is extremely important for social mobility, self-actualization and ultimately, a happier life.

This strong theme revealed itself through the three major components that came together in the decision-making process and ultimately led to the students' choice of an American college education: (1) the decision to study abroad instead of staying in China, (2) the choice of the U.S. as the host country instead other countries, and (3) the decision to study abroad at the undergraduate level. By examining these three components, I will explore the systemic factors that most influenced Chinese elite-singletons' choice of an American college education. In addition, I will investigate the different levels of importance attached to these influential factors through a statistical analysis. Finally, I discuss the interplay among these three major components to demonstrate the dynamics of the decision-making process, especially at the individual level.

Why Study Abroad?

Better Higher Education Overseas

The first and most important factor that prodded Chinese elite-singletons to study abroad was the students' perceptions of the strong contrast between the quality of higher education in China and overseas. In interviews, when I asked them why they chose to study abroad instead of attending a Chinese university, they always replied that there was "a better quality of education" abroad; this was later further defined as "small classes and personal attention," "discussion rather than information dump," "high-quality teaching," "a strong academic and learning climate," "smart and diligent classmates," "advanced knowledge," "flexibility in choosing a major," and "a beautiful campus environment." These were the characteristics that combined to build students' impressions of a U.S. higher education system which was a model of high quality, and that later led to their pursuit of a U.S. college degree.

In contrast, Chinese higher education was perceived as "diluted" (*shui*), and Chinese university students were considered to be "slack" (*hun*) in their college lives; for Chinese elite-singletons, with their histories of high academic achievement, these disadvantages became the chief shortcomings of the Chinese higher education system. As a young man from one of the most prestigious high schools in Shanghai argued:

> I think it is kind of true that most Chinese undergraduate students do not study hard enough after they graduate from high school. They lose their motivation to learn since everyone is guaranteed a degree after four years of college. Plus, the courses are not that interesting or useful. The overall campus learning climate is not good at Chinese universities.

A positive school environment and the influence of peers are crucial for Chinese elite-singletons, since, as elite high school students in the highly centralized and hierarchical Chinese education system, they have greatly benefited from their position at the top of the pyramid. Aside

from their intolerance for a slacking campus culture, many of them also stated in their interviews that higher education in China could neither meet their need for an intellectual challenge nor help them to achieve the self-actualization they expected from a university experience. They described the Chinese university curriculum, typically delivered through large lectures, as "boring." They furthermore believed the fixed major system in China provided little "freedom" to explore the wide-ranging interests they had cultivated at their top-rated high schools.[9] The Chinese higher education system was perceived as "unchallenging" and "unexciting," and the elite students I interviewed expressed strong dissatisfaction with what it could offer. This became the major push force that led many high-achieving Chinese high school students to leave China for what they saw as a higher-quality education overseas. One female student told me, with much sadness, of her disappointment with Chinese higher education: "I am very much looking forward to my college life and want to feel passionate about it. However, I do not see it happening in China, even at a top-tier university."

Chinese elite-singletons formed this impression of the lower quality of higher education in China on the basis of information from various different sources, including friends and relatives who had recently studied at a Chinese university; their own participation in classes at top-tier Chinese universities, via recently-opened pilot programs for high school students; their experience of auditing open online college courses offered by well-known universities overseas; and from their well-educated parents, who had reached similar conclusions about Chinese higher education from either their social networks or their own hiring experience as managers. As one student explained:

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[9] Chinese college students must choose a major before they attend college, and it cannot be changed after they matriculate. Their choices of major are determined by their *Gaokao* scores. The most popular majors usually require the highest *Gaokao* scores.

My parents and I have heard lots of bad things about current Chinese college students who are slacking all the time. We began to be skeptical [about college in China] but didn't make the decision to study abroad until my father found out that many of his college-mates, who are now senior professors or deans at reputable Chinese universities, all send their children abroad because of the lower quality of Chinese higher education and the substandard learning environment that they have seen from the front lines.

Another student, meanwhile, said that his father was not satisfied with the quality of the recent college graduates he had hired, especially when he compared those graduates with his own cohort in college, back when China's gross enrollment ratio was limited to the top 5 percent of high school graduates.

To a great extent, these concerns about the quality of Chinese higher education are warranted. The leapfrog expansion of college enrollment in the last twenty years moved China from a system of elite to mass higher education, and purely quantitative growth, measured by increases in college enrollment, was widely celebrated as a national accomplishment. At the same time, this growth caused widespread systemic problems that have required increased enhancements to quality control (Huang 2005; Zha 2012).

The elite-singletons, who had enjoyed top-rated educations at their high schools, perceived a gap between what they were used to at the secondary level and what they saw as a sub-par college experience, and they were unwilling to lose their academic advantage by attending a Chinese university that would provide a less-than-elite education. Whatever the true "distance" between Chinese higher education and its counterparts overseas, the deep worries and dissatisfaction regarding Chinese higher education, felt by both students and their parents, created a compelling desire for better educational resources and learning environments overseas.

Unsatisfying Personal Circumstances in China

Although, as a group, Chinese elite-singletons were greatly influenced by the systemic gaps between Chinese and American higher education, the more essential factors determining who eventually chose to study abroad and who did not were at the individual level. Highly personal circumstances – such as a student's perception of their chance to get into an elite Chinese university based on their high school performance, the fit between their personality and academic interests and the Chinese higher education system, and sometimes, their family's immigration plans – all had a profound effect on the decision to leave China and study overseas.

Many Chinese international students choose to study abroad because they foresee potential failure in the Chinese college entrance exam (*Gaokao*), and going overseas is an alternative path to securing a seat at college (Fong 2011). But Chinese elite-singletons, as top students from the most selective Chinese high schools, generally face much better prospects in the *Gaokao* than the rest of their peers. The majority of them have an excellent chance to attend the top Chinese universities, which all require the highest *Gaokao* scores. Indeed, each year more than 95 percent of the graduates from these top high schools exceed the *Gaokao* cutoff score to enter a first-tier Chinese university (*yiben daxue*).

Unfortunately, while the success of previous students brought glory to these top high schools, and by extension to the elite-singletons who were current students, it also set up some extremely high expectations. Specifically, since these students were compared to their comparably smart and competitive peers at other elite high schools, rather than to the mass population of Chinese high school graduates, getting into a first-tier Chinese university was no longer considered enough of a success, but had instead become simply what was expected. As a male student from one of the top-ranked high schools in Shanghai explained:

At our high school, we are expected to get into a university like Fudan University or Jiatong University;[10] that has become a baseline for most students here. You also see some seniors admitted to Tsinghua University or Peking University.[11] You know the four best high schools in Shanghai? We are one of them. If you don't get into a first-tier university (yiben daxue), you are considered a failure at this high school!

For better or worse, such high expectations have resulted in tremendous pressure for elite-singletons, as not only top students but also as the only children of their parents. Depending on each student's academic performance in their high school and their own level of personal ambition, their definition of success in the *Gaokao* can vary greatly, but getting into any first-tier university in China is a consistent and common goal. Some aimed for Tsinghua and Peking Universities, the two most prestigious institutions of higher learning in China, both of which only recruit a handful of high school graduates from each province. Others expressed their hope of getting into one of the most prestigious provincial universities, which tend to require lower *Gaokao* scores than Tsinghua and Peking, but still demand much more than the usual cutoff score for most first-tier Chinese universities.

None of these objectives are easy to reach. Indeed, such goals were viewed as extremely challenging by many of the elite-singletons in my study, even though they were considered to be among the highest-achieving high school students in China. The brutally competitive Chinese education system, combined with an inflexibly high bar for success in the *Gaokao*, produced great anxiety among Chinese elite-singletons regarding domestic college admissions results; and this caused many of those in my study to shy away from the Chinese system because they thought they might have a "better" chance abroad than at home. One participant, a student from

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[10]Fudan University and Shanghai Jiatong University are top-ranked Chinese national universities that have especially good reputations in the eastern coastal region. Both institutions also have very low admissions rates.

[11]Tsinghua University and Peking University are considered to be the two most prestigious universities in China, and they require the highest *Gaokao* scores for admission. Their graduates are considered the apex of Chinese elites.

an elite high school in Hangzhou, provided a typical example. He had originally considered applying to a highly reputable Chinese university that was located in his hometown and ranked in the top five nationwide, but eventually chose to apply to American colleges in order to opt out of the competitive domestic track:

> I think I could only hope to attend Zhejiang University if I studied very hard for the Gaokao, but the same amount of effort would probably land me in a great American university – one that is better than Zhejiang University. I think any of the American universities on the top fifty list (from the U.S. News and World Report rankings) would be better than Zhejiang University, and it is worth it to try!

Although some participants in my study downplayed the idea that they were giving up and/or avoiding potential "failure" in their domestic educational endeavors, more of them admitted their fear of the fierce competition that exists in China, and acknowledged that this was the main unspoken reason they applied to American universities. As one girl confessed to me, laughing, "It is just too competitive in China!" While these students may have been elite-singletons, they were still faced with overwhelming worries over precarious futures, and experienced acute anxieties related to the pursuit of higher education, all of which speaks to a pervasive fragility amongst Chinese youth today (Bregnbæk 2016). Nevertheless, the elite-singletons of my study strongly believed that, with their overall academic competitiveness, they deserved a better chance at a high-quality education, if not in China then at a comparable or even better institution overseas. As long as their family finances allowed it, they preferred to turn their attention to opportunities abroad.

Another major set of factors at the personal level revolved around a student's academic interests, their potential career pursuits, and their individual personality. Students for whom this was most important often decided to apply to colleges overseas mainly because they felt their academic interests or personalities might not be aligned with the strictures of the Chinese higher

education system, rather than because they wished to opt out of the competitive domestic track. One student from Shanghai perfectly expressed this motivation, telling me that he decided to study in the U.S. in order to follow his dream of becoming a movie director, without having to give up his more academic pursuits; he felt he could not find a Chinese university that would meet both of these needs. Similarly, even among those who were lucky enough to secure early admission qualifications (*baosong zige*) from prestigious Chinese universities like Tsinghua and Peking[12], some were willing to give up this "precious" opportunity in favor of studying abroad, because they were not satisfied with the conditions attached to the offers. One young woman, who gave up an admission offer from Peking University (as a Dutch Language major) in order to attend Johns Hopkins University instead, explained her reason for applying to U.S. schools: "I think a good major from a reputable American university would make me more competitive than just studying a foreign language at Peking University. I love learning language. That's why I came to Hangzhou Foreign Language School. But I want to explore more things in college, which will provide me with a wider range of options after graduation."

Aside from the mismatch in academic interests, some students, interestingly, rejected the Chinese domestic track because they felt their personality or mentality would not fit in with the culture of a Chinese university campus. For example, one student said he preferred making his own choices, rather than taking orders from authorities without question, which is the more common dynamic in Chinese education, even at the college level. Another stated that she enjoyed studying in many disciplines rather than being extremely good at only one. Therefore,

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[12] The top-tier universities in China provide early admission qualifications to local elite high schools that have a high academic reputation, in order to recruit the best prospective students in that region. The students selected by their high schools for this type of early admission qualification are able to attend the university without taking the *Gaokao*.

she anticipated that it would be harder for her to adjust to a Chinese higher education culture and curriculum that is centered on strong disciplinary traditions.

Finally, there were several random cases in which family immigration plans played a role in affecting the decision to study abroad; for instance, one family finished the immigration process just before the student applied to college, while another had an unexpected chance to get a green card from the U.S. during the student's high school years.

From Chinese Elite Student to Future Global Elites

As members of China's singleton generation, born into the post-Mao era of intensive integration into the global neoliberal system (Fong 2011), the Chinese elite-singletons in my study were eager to explore the world outside China, particularly the knowledge, technology, and culture from the core countries in the world economic system (Wallerstein 1974). They believed this would equip them with advanced expertise and skills for the new knowledge society, and help them to gain the sort of multicultural understanding that is important in the age of globalization. The ability to deal with this set of worldly mores was viewed as essential for making the transformation from being an elite student from China to being a member of the global elites.

Coming from China's most developed areas, the elite-singletons in my study had experienced and enjoyed China's rapid economic development and its attendant social changes, and grew up in an environment suffused with social-capitalism and neoliberalism. They view studying overseas as a way to "broaden (their) horizons" (*kaikuo shiye*), "gain experience" (*zhang jianshi*), and "learn knowledge and skills" (*xue benshi*) from the developed countries that are considered more "advanced" (*xianjin*) than China. Many of them saw how their parents benefited from high levels of academic achievement, which allowed them to climb to the top of the social

ladder as professors, corporate managers or major government cadres. They noted the important role of education in upward social mobility, and wanted to maintain their social advantage by pursuing their own higher education in developed countries. Foreign degrees from developed countries tend to have a higher value in China's labor market, and can help one to gain more respect in a Chinese society that still places a greater value on Western culture due to the influence of globalization. In fact, because of the quick expansion in the number of Chinese international students who have studied abroad at the undergraduate level over the last ten years, a foreign college degree has become even more necessary to maintain elite status in China.

In addition, the Chinese cities in which elite-singletons live are strongly influenced by Western culture from the developed world. Growing up, many of my participants enjoyed Hollywood movies and British TV series, listened to Western pop music, relaxed at Starbucks coffee shops, bought Western clothing brands, and watched TED Talks and free online courses from Harvard for intellectual inspiration. Because of this intensive exposure at an early age to Western ideology, culture, and lifestyle, the desire to further experience what they think of as the "real world outside" comes naturally to them. They view the advantage of studying abroad as a necessary step in adapting to the Western culture and lifestyle that they admire; it is a way for them to gain "an intensive global exposure you can't have in China," which most considered a key part of being a global elite. As one female student from Shenzhen stated, "My dad wants me to study abroad and thinks I will be a totally different person afterwards. I believe this as well." Since many elite-singletons felt there was a high probability that they would return to China at some point after graduation, understanding and being able to navigate between Chinese and Western culture by studying and living in a developed country for several years was viewed as even more essential.

Why Choose the U.S.?

The Best Higher Education in the World's Strongest Country

Although the economic crisis in 2008 hit the U.S. hard and has created some doubts regarding America's dominant position in the current world economy, the strong overall impression of the U.S. as the world's most powerful country still holds steady in the minds of Chinese citizens. Compared to other developed countries that are popular with Chinese immigrants, such as Canada, the UK, and Australia, permanent residence in the U.S. – symbolized by the "green card" – is the hardest to obtain and is considered the most prestigious. The dominance of the U.S. in the world's political and economic hierarchy has resulted in a strong Chinese confidence in American higher education; Chinese students believe there is an "obvious link" between economic advancement and educational quality, even if they cannot explain why.

As one female student, who had been admitted to the University of Chicago, told me when I asked her why she chose to study in the U.S. rather than in another country, "The U.S. is the world's strongest country, and there must be a reason for it," which implied the relationship she saw between America's stature and the quality of its higher education. In the minds of many Chinese, developed countries, represented by the U.S., are "advanced" while China is "backwards" (Fong 2011), although this view is gradually changing due to China's rapid economic development over the past thirty-five years. Consequently, when more top-tier American HEIs started to actively recruit international students due to the financial pressures of the 2008 economic crisis, Chinese elite-singletons who were equipped with strong academic skills and financial resources saw studying at a U.S. college as a tremendous opportunity to seek an "even better" education than they could obtain in China.

As students who had always striven for high academic performance, the elite-singletons paid special attention to certain indicators of academic excellence when evaluating all the factors contributing to the superior quality of higher education in the U.S., such as the number of "Nobel Prize winning professors," the ability to attract the "most talented students from around the globe," a "rich learning environment," "sufficient education funding and advanced facilities," and a "beautiful campus environment." They formed this impression mainly from friends, Chinese students who had previously studied in the U.S., university admissions recruiters, and university websites. This view of American higher education was also significantly influenced and reinforced by the emerging phenomenon of global university rankings, where American universities occupy many of the top spots. In 2016, American universities occupied forty-six of the top one hundred spots on the Times Higher Education World University Ranking (Times Higher Education 2014) and fifty-two of the top spaces on Shanghai Jiatong's Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU 2013).

The elite-singletons who had already developed a particular career orientation when they applied to U.S. colleges tended to give an extremely high score in the field they would study. For example, a student from Nanjing who had been admitted to Harvard told me that she chose to study in America mainly because she believed the U.S. was more advanced in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields than any other country in the world. Another student from Hangzhou, who had accepted an offer from Washington University in St. Louis, indicated that she wanted to study in the U.S. because she was interested in the field of education, and considered the U.S. to be better in this area than China, even though knowledge in the education field is more closely related to a particular social context than the STEM fields. These two students were not rare cases. In fact, almost all student interviewees showed a clear and strong faith in the overall academic competitiveness of U.S. higher education across the wide range of

areas that they were interested in studying, from popular STEM fields and business to the social sciences, medicine and arts.

They also aspired to study at a campus encouraging academic rigor. "Challenge," "learn," and "grow" were the three words most frequently cited by these high-achieving students when referring to their imagined college life in the U.S. "I want to challenge myself during my college years and learn as much as possible. Canada and Australia are the places for retirement – too slow and laid-back. I want to 'fight hard'(*fendou*) during college," exclaimed one female student from Nanjing, when discussing the life she visualized in the U.S.

In addition, Chinese elite-singletons, as prospective international students, had the impression that the U.S. hosted a more talented and competitive group of students, largely because the country has historically recruited and funded international students at the graduate level for the purpose of enriching the American academic environment. In comparison, other developed countries, such as the U.K. and Australia, have tended to view international education more narrowly, as an important "export" and source of national revenue. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics valued exports from international education at A$18.8 billion in 2014-15, making it Australia's third largest export (Deloitte Access Economics 2016). Therefore, to protect their academic advantage, the elite-singletons were more inclined to consider the U.S. – a nation that would appreciate their intellectual contributions – as their study abroad destination.

Aside from its academic competitiveness, American higher education was also perceived as having a "better model" insofar as it assists student development by acknowledging individual interests, something which is highly valued in Chinese educational theory, but seldom actually implemented in the Chinese system. Born of the individualist values highlighted in American

society, U.S. higher education favors a flexible approach in which individual students can explore and develop their academic and personal interests during the college years. American universities allow students to change their majors during college, and supports them in becoming "well-rounded people" through the general education or liberal arts education exemplified by LACs. Students have a great deal of freedom to pursue their interests while at the same time taking responsibility for their own choices and behavior. This is a very tempting educational model for elite-singletons, who often felt they had been "taken care of too much" by their parents.

In addition, they valued the small-class model exemplified by the "low student-faculty ratio" at many elite private universities. They considered this to be a core part of the sort of elite education they wanted to receive, and something that was difficult to find in China due to its large population. Although their affluent family backgrounds provided them with much better resources than the average Chinese family, the overall shortage of high-quality educational resources in China still put elite-singletons in close competition with their peers. Receiving significant amounts of "attention" from their teachers was a sometimes-impossible luxury when they were sitting with more than fifty other students in a class, even though they may have had the "best teachers" in town. In contrast, one student expressed his surprise and admiration regarding the different sort of experience one could have with an "elite education" in America: "Can you imagine that a busy professor in a prestigious university would open a class for only one student? I heard a story from a Yale student who graduated from our high school that a professor kept his course open even though only she had signed up for that course. You would never find that in China! There are too many people here!"

Compatible College Admissions

In addition to their favorable impression of U.S. higher education, Chinese elite-singletons also preferred the U.S. as a host country because it was easier for them to make the transition from their high schools in China to a university in America when compared to institutions in non-Anglophone developed nations. Since only English is broadly taught in Chinese K-12 education, choosing a non-English-speaking country for undergraduate education, such as France, Germany, or Japan, created a delay in college graduation because of the extra time students had to invest in learning a new language. In addition, compared to the other major English-speaking countries to which most Chinese students chose to apply, it was somewhat easier for Chinese high school graduates to meet the requirements for U.S. college admission. Most American universities require an English language assessment for non-English speakers (such as TOEFL or IELTS), and subject tests (like the SAT) for critical reading, mathematics, and writing. Since most Chinese students do well on math tests due to the strong math curriculum in Chinese K-12 education, the only test for which most Chinese international students need to prepare is the test of English language. In contrast, in the U.K. – another country popular with Chinese international students – college admissions require A-Level exams, which test specific subject matter beyond simply English and math, and which require much longer preparation times.

The last and probably most important factor favoring the U.S. is that none of the other developed countries have quite the same scale of varied and high-quality institutions of higher learning as the U.S., from comprehensive research universities to elite liberal arts colleges. This breadth and diversity provided a wide range of choices for students, which they felt lowered the risk in their college application process; the chance of not getting into *any* colleges to which they applied was reduced in the U.S. compared to other developed countries.

A "Land of Dreams" for Openness and Diversity

As an immigrant country, the U.S. often promotes a national image of a "big melting pot" – a place that provides an "open, diverse and democratic environment" – in order to attract skilled international professionals. An open and friendly environment in the host country was important, and sometimes crucial, for Chinese international students when considering how they might adapt to and later succeed in an unfamiliar foreign country. The ethnic diversity of the U.S. – particularly on the West and East Coasts, which host large populations of international students – provided a welcoming environment for international students from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds, at least on the surface. Many participants in my study had heard positive reports confirming this impression from other Chinese international students in the U.S. As one student from Ningbo indicated in an interview, "My cousin, who had previously studied in the U.K. for her undergraduate education and then later moved to the U.S. for graduate school, told me that she felt less racism in the U.S. than in the U.K. I think that is very important to me as an international student. I want to be valued and respected while studying in another country." Although no one likes to be disrespected under any circumstance, the Chinese elite-singletons who were raised as the "little emperors" and the center of attention for their parents may have even less tolerance for contempt than might a child who grew up with many siblings, and who was more used to compromise. To some extent, they showed more fragility in their social lives and abilities.

Beyond the image of a welcoming society for newcomers, many of the elite-singletons in my study further conceived of "openness" as academic freedom and a more student-orientated pedagogy, which they considered attractive in an educational setting. A Shanghai student who spent a year as a visiting student in a Utah high school stated, "I think American education is more open than Chinese education. As I learned from my American teachers, there is no standard

answer to many questions. They always encouraged us to have our own opinions, which is seldom seen in my school [in China]. I like that type of education more."

Finally, the diverse international student body in the U.S., particularly at the top-ranked universities that attracted the highest-achieving Chinese students, was another important feature that attracted Chinese elite-singletons to study in America. As another Shanghai student who was admitted to Berkeley argued, "The U.S. has more international students than any other country. I am always interested in different cultures, which is one of the reasons I chose to study abroad. It is exciting to meet talented students from all over the world at Berkeley!"

Why the Undergraduate Level?

More Seats at Top-Tier U.S. Institutions

China has been the top sending country to the U.S. three times in its history – with the most recent period beginning in 2009 (Institute of International Education 2016c), when there was a dramatic increase in Chinese international students entering at the undergraduate level. The 2008 economic crisis, along with a broader international movement towards privatization in higher education, led to a decrease in higher education funding in the U.S. and a corresponding appetite for new "revenue" through international student enrollments, particularly at the self-supported undergraduate level. High-profile international undergraduate students not only quickly relieved university financial pressures, but also contributed to campus diversity and academic competitiveness. Therefore, many of the top U.S. public research institutions, which had always more heavily relied on government funding, began to open their doors to greater numbers of international students at the undergraduate level, which in turn encouraged even more well-off, top-tier Chinese high school graduates to apply. In many ways, it was the financial needs of U.S. HEIs that made the "American dreams" of many Chinese elite-singletons come true.

Appreciating the Value of Youth

Because of what they perceived as the lower quality of Chinese higher education, many of the elite-singletons in my study expressed the worry that they would be wasting their valuable youth in a Chinese university. This was aptly expressed by a female student who was admitted to Wellesley College:

> Although I have not had the experience of attending a Chinese university, I did see that my cousin, who graduated from a good university in China, developed little passion during his college years. I don't know how to say this, but I just don't want to waste my four years of youth like him. The current image of a Chinese college education is just so bad, since many students skip classes and are lazy. It is so easy to collect credits for graduation since most professors do not pay attention to undergraduate education. It's rare to see an undergraduate student working hard on papers. It is so sad and I can't do it.

The worry of wasting one's youth in college because of the low quality of Chinese undergraduate education was pervasive among my participants (forty-three out of fifty-two student interviewees shared this fear). In addition, many students also complained about spending their senior year in high school doing nothing but preparing for the *Gaokao*, and considered that to be a waste of their youth as well, even it was a necessary step on the path to the elite Chinese universities that they had dreamed of attending from childhood. In comparison, although applying to colleges in the U.S. – particularly when the goal was one of the more selective American universities – also required intensive preparation for standardized tests, such as the TOEFL and SAT, the American admissions process tends to take a more holistic, multi-dimensional view when selecting applicants. The students in my survey therefore felt that by applying to colleges in the U.S. they learned more than their Chinese classmates who stayed on the domestic track. Writing up a personal statement forced them to look inside themselves, which increased self-understanding, and spending more time out of class enriched their life experiences. Exclaiming on behalf of the entire group, one student pointed out the dichotomy between the two

systems: "Applying to top U.S. universities is easier, but definitely much more rewarding than taking the *Gaokao*!"

Seeking Independence and Self-Understanding

The college years are an important time of transition from teenager to adult, when independence and self-reliance are established through various new life experiences and challenges: the first time living away from home in a dorm, the experience of making independent decisions with less supervision from parents, and figuring out one's own life goals in a new environment. As only children who had always been watched over closely by their parents, attending college in another country so far away from home provided my participants with a rare chance to establish and exercise their independence. As one young woman from Hangzhou declared, "If I were to attend a college in China, I would probably end up going to a university near home because my parents did not want me to be too far away. But now I am going even further away because my parents agreed that studying abroad was a better choice for me. I think I will be much more independent and mature after spending four years in the U.S.!"

The Right Time: Neither Too Young Nor Too Old

For the students in my survey, college seemed to be the right time for them to travel to another country for study; they felt they were "neither too young nor too old." Although some students told me they had considered studying in the U.S. even earlier – during high school, for instance, when they may have gained an advantage in their American college applications – they eventually decided to stay in China to finish their secondary education. Many of the elite-singletons in my study chose not to go abroad in high school because their parents decided it was not suitable for them at such a young age. This was not only for the obvious safety concerns of parents, but also for the sake of their children's overall development as people. They felt their

children needed more parenting in high school in order to continue developing a good worldview and resilient personalities.

Meanwhile, the risk of attending an unfamiliar American high school was too high when compared with enrolling in a local elite high school that both students and parents were familiar with. They knew that elite Chinese high schools could guarantee superior educational quality, while American high schools were far away and their quality was harder to assess, particularly when Chinese parents had very limited knowledge of the high school system in the U.S. Although Chinese students and parents may have been concerned about the quality of Chinese higher education, they showed a great deal of confidence in the ability of the Chinese K-12 system to deliver a better learning outcome, especially when Chinese high school graduates are famous for their excellent performance in math and science, which in turn provides them with an advantage in STEM fields during their college careers in the U.S. By staying in a Chinese high school, elite-singletons also gained a deeper knowledge of Chinese culture and history, which had much value for these students and their parents, since they saw a high probability of returning to China after college in the U.S.

On the other hand, the Chinese elite-singletons in my study did not want to wait until after their college education to leave China for the first time. Aside from the factors related to educational quality and admissions opportunities in Chinese higher education, students also believed that one's college experience was critical in forming one's value system and attitudes, and they did not want to lose the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of U.S. culture and society during the college years. As one student concluded, "The younger you go, the easier it is to adapt!" The choice of studying abroad after graduating from high school, but no later than

college, reflected Chinese elite-singletons' desire to understand U.S. society and culture while not risking the loss of their own Chinese identity and roots.

The Differences in the Importance of Various Motivations

While my qualitative interview data revealed major systemic motivations that led students to want to attend college in the U.S., the quantitative survey data helped to identify the different degrees of importance for each motivation. The students were asked in the survey to vote for the five most important factors from among eighteen possible reasons for choosing a U.S. undergraduate education. The eighteen reasons were selected based on patterns that emerged from my pilot study, as well as from the research results of other motivation-related studies, which covered various possible motivations in five dimensions, including educational, political, economic, social and cultural, and family. The percentages for each reason indicated the proportion of students who considered that particular reason to be in the top five. The lower the percentage, the less important it was to the students. Proportion tests were performed to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between any two reasons. The results are illustrated in Figure 6.1.
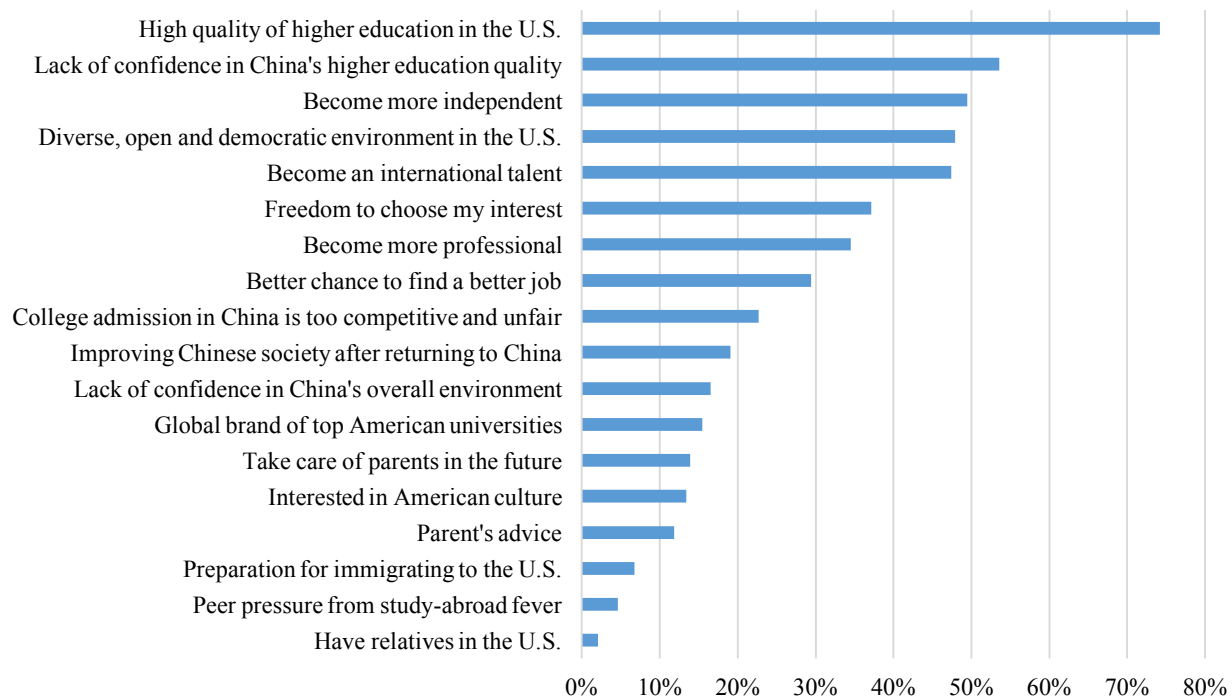
Figure 6.1. The reasons to study in the U.S. for undergraduate education.
Note: This list of selected reasons prompting students to consider studying in the U.S. was sorted by the percentage of votes. N=194 students.

Among these eighteen possible reasons, the motivations in the education dimension, particularly the belief in the higher-quality education available in the U.S., were the core dominant motives prompting Chinese elite-singletons to pursue an undergraduate education in America. The great confidence of Chinese elite-singletons in the quality of U.S. higher education was found to be the most important reason to choose a U.S. undergraduate education over its counterpart in China; this factor received 74.2 percent of the total votes, which echoed the sentiments expressed in the interview data. It was ranked significantly higher (p-value=1.57×10^{-5}) than the second most popular reason – "lack of confidence in Chinese higher education" at 53.6 percent – and all the other factors lower down the list. Although the importance of educational factors has been widely found in previous studies of Chinese international students (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Zheng 2003; Li and Bray 2007), none of them found that the

educational reputation of the host country was significantly more important than other factors, as was apparent in my study. Obviously, Chinese elite-singletons were greatly inspired by their perceptions of the superior quality of U.S. higher education, and influenced by this pull force from the U.S. It is important to mention that, although the "global brand of top American universities" was not listed as one of the primary factors affecting participants' decisions to choose a U.S. institution, that does not mean that the institutional brand was not important. To the contrary, many student participants explained in their interviews that they considered the brand to be highly valuable and an important part of their college consideration, because it represented the quality of education and the reputation of the institution, which is what they cared most about when making their college choice. Thus, even though survey participants may not have selected brand as a top factor in their college choice, the clear association that emerged in interviews between institutional brand and the quality of higher education in the U.S. – which was the number one motivation for elite-singletons to study in America – was very consistent with the findings that brands matter and have a positive impact on elite-singletons' college choices. This is something I will discuss further in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, the survey data also indicated that core motivations could be highly affected by students' personal characteristics. Although the interviews had already indicated that the search for independence was a major factor leading Chinese elite-singletons to the U.S. – where they felt they could embrace their adulthood after a lifetime as the only child in the family – it was still surprising to see that the desire to "become more independent" (49.5 percent) was listed as the third most important among all possible reasons. It was also ranked significantly higher than all the reasons below it, other than the "diverse and democratic environment in the U.S.," and to "become an international talent," both of which were in the top five. Of those two factors rounding out the top five, the former indicated a strong pull force related to the social and

cultural dimension of the host country, while the latter demonstrated a goal of personal internationalization and professional development.

What is perhaps more interesting is that the survey indicated the Chinese elite-singletons in my study had a much stronger interest in education itself rather than its outcome in the labor market – that is, an immediate job placement. Study abroad for a "better chance to find a better job" (29.4 percent) was deemed less important than to "become an international talent" (47.4 percent) (p value=2.1×10^{-4}), indicating that Chinese elite-singletons view learning and education more as a path to personal growth and self-actualization rather than simply a tool for direct economic return or upward social mobility.

At the bottom end of the list, the survey also showed the least important factors shaping students' decisions to study in the U.S., none of which were mentioned in the interviews. The lowest-ranked factors, with less than 10 percent each, were study abroad as a stepping-stone to immigration (6.7 percent); peer pressure due to study-abroad fever in China (4.6 percent); and the presence of relatives in the U.S. (2.1 percent). The poor showing of the immigration-related factor indicated that the Chinese elite-singletons in my study had little intention of becoming permanent immigrants in the U.S. As Cheung and Xu found in their recent research on the return intentions of elite Chinese students in the U.S., the most influential predictors of a student's decision to return home were job opportunities in China, family ties, and difficulty in obtaining a job in the United States (Cheung and Xu 2015). Coming from families with high socioeconomic status meant that their parents' greater social and economic capital could provide them with an advantage in the job market if the students chose to return to China after graduation. Meanwhile, the pull of having relatives in the U.S. was weak, since, as the only children in their families, the singletons had much stronger motivations to return to their parents in China than did Chinese

126

international students who were born before the One-Child Policy. Last, the low importance of peer pressure may have been partially caused by the students' perception of the phrase itself. "Peer pressure" sounded negative, and admitting that the decision to study abroad had been made mainly for that reason was perhaps considered embarrassing. Students may have subconsciously attempted to avoid thinking they were operating under peer pressure, even as more and more of their peers chose to study abroad. In fact, many of my participants openly addressed the positive influence that close friends or senior students from the same high school had on their own final decision to study abroad in the U.S., rather than framing that influence as a negative pressure.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the difference that gender made on the main motives in choosing an American undergraduate education. Both male and female students agreed on the five most important factors leading to their decision to study in the U.S. at the undergraduate level (Table 6.1), most probably because, as only children, they were all raised under a similar set of parental expectations, regardless of gender. However, the order of these five factors differed between male and female students, and there was a significant gender difference when it came to the weight of the top two factors – "the high quality of U.S. higher education" and the "lack of confidence in higher education quality in China." The perception of "the high quality of higher education in the U.S." was more important among female students (81.7 percent) than it was for male students (64.7 percent), with a statistically significant difference (p-value = 1.4×10^{-4}). On the other hand, the "lack of confidence in higher education in China" showed the statistically opposite gender preference (p-value = 1.9×10^{-3}), with more male votes (62.3 percent) than female votes (46.8 percent). Although the comparative quality of higher education in the two countries was taken into consideration by both genders, the pull factor from the U.S. – the high quality of U.S. higher education – had a greater impact on female students, while the push factor from China – the relatively low quality of higher education there – was more concerning

to male students. This reverse gender preference could provide valuable guidance for university

marketing efforts targeted towards men and women; a positive message laced with optimism (get

a bright future in the U.S. though better education) might work better on young Chinese females,

for instance, while a message focusing on a problem to be avoided (having an unpleasant student

life in China due to the low quality of higher education) might have more of an influence on

young Chinese males. It would be interesting to see further research that specifically addresses

this gender difference between Chinese international students in the future.

Table 6.1 The gender difference in the top five reasons to study in the U.S. for undergraduate education

Overall Rank	Reasons	Male		Female	
		Rank	%	Rank	%
1	High quality of higher education in the U.S.[**]	1	64.7	1	81.7
2	Lack of confidence in higher education quality in China [**]	2	62.3	5	46.8
3	Become more independent by studying abroad	3	49.4	2	49.5
4	Diverse, open and democratic environment in the U.S.	4	48.2	3	47.7
5	Become an international talent	5	47.1	3	47.7

Note: N=194 students. Student t-test was performed to investigate the significance of gender differences on the decision to study in U.S. colleges. Null hypothesis is there is no gender difference on these five motivations to study in the U.S. for undergraduate education.
[*] $p < .05$
[**] $p < .01$

The Dynamics of the Decision-Making Process

Although I have separately discussed the three components in the decision-making process

that led to students' final choice to pursue an American undergraduate education, none of these

components existed independently or was strong enough by itself to result in a final decision. In

fact, they were highly correlated to and supported by each other in the students' decision-making

process. For example, an unsatisfying college admissions result in China only became

unacceptable when a better admissions outcome in the U.S. was predicted. The decision to leave

China after graduating from high school was also a response to students' concerns regarding the

quality of Chinese higher education, particularly at the undergraduate level. Meanwhile, students did not necessarily make their final decision by following the three components in any particular order. One student may have first decided to study abroad because of the fear of a poor *Gaokao* result, and only then followed up with the choice of the U.S. as the host country. On the other hand, a different student may have wanted to study in the U.S. from the beginning because of their favorable impression of U.S. higher education, and only later decided to apply at the undergraduate level. Such students started from two different places but ended up making the same final choice. More importantly, not all three components were equally important. In theory, all three components would be carefully evaluated by students to make the "best" choice, particularly for a high-risk, high-cost investment like studying abroad. However in reality, most of my study participants jumped directly to their final decisions after paying attention to only one or two of these components, based on their previous school experiences, peer influences, parent's suggestions, or previous educational experiences in the U.S. For instance, a good number of participants had attended U.S. high schools as visiting students before they decided to apply to an American university. That earlier positive experience in the U.S. led to a natural inclination to study at a U.S. college, without investing the time to explore options in other countries or considering the possibility of study in the U.S. at the graduate level. In other words, the components of "why the U.S." or "why at the undergraduate level" were often not fully addressed in the decision-making process.

Summary

As typical eighteen-year-old youths heading to college, Chinese elite-singletons imagined that their lives at school would be filled with intellectual passion, personal accomplishments, and meaningful learning experiences. By choosing to attend college in the U.S., they were looking

for an "even better" education from top-tier American universities, where they might not only fulfill their academic ambitions, but also position themselves for upward social mobility in the world village, as future global elites. They also saw the opportunity to study abroad as a way to fulfill their personal interests and satisfy their need for more intensive global experiences than they might find in China. They viewed the distance and unfamiliarity of the American environment as an exciting challenge and an opportunity to develop independence and maturity, rather than as an unavoidable set of difficulties that they must endure as international students.

The decision-making process that led to a college education in the U.S. was complex and dynamic for elite-singletons, both as a group and as individuals. The relative importance of the different motivations demonstrated how the various personal characteristics of Chinese elite-singletons – their academic ability, gender, family socioeconomic status, and level of parental educational attainment – responded to and interacted with external push and pull forces between the home country (China) and the host country (the U.S.) in the social, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Chapter 7
College Choice: A Muddy Road to Global Iconic Brands

Strong personal motivation on the part of Chinese elite-singletons is a prerequisite to pursuing an "even better" higher education opportunity in the U.S., but it is only the first step on the long journey toward study abroad for these students. Once the important decision to study in the U.S. is reached, the next questions become: Which college to attend? Which university will cultivate my talent? Where do I want to spend four years in the U.S.? Which major do I want to study? Or most often, from what kind of university would I accept an offer of admission? These commonly-asked questions become crucial to students, who must then not only search out and analyze large amounts of complex information regarding the institutions they are interested in, but must also possess a good self-understanding of their own individual goals and personalities. Even as high-achieving students equipped with sufficient financial support, Chinese elite-singletons still face a difficult path when they seek to obtain one of the limited number of spaces at America's most renowned and iconic institutions of higher education.

In this chapter, I organize my empirical investigations of Chinese elite-singletons' college choice into two stages: search and choice. This was inspired by Hossler and Gallagher's classic three-stage model of college choice among U.S. students (Hossler and Gallagher 1987) which I have found to be useful and relevant to the experience of the Chinese elite-singletons in my study. Both groups look at essentially the same set of colleges for consideration and face a similar admission process. The three stages in Hossler and Gallagher's model are predisposition, search, and choice. Their definition of the predisposition stage revolves mainly around the student's threshold decision about whether or not to continue to pursue formal education beyond high school. This is similar to the first developmental phase for Chinese elite-singletons, in which they determine whether or not they would like to seek undergraduate education in the U.S.

after high school. This stage has already been discussed in the previous chapter, by exploring the major motivations behind a student's decision to come to the U.S. for their undergraduate education. The focus of this chapter therefore is mainly on the stages of search and choice:

1) Search – Searching for attributes and values which characterize higher education institutions in the U.S. as well as learning about and identifying the right attributes to consider.

2) Choice – Formulating a choice (or application set) and deciding which institution to attend (the final matriculation decision).

Stage 1: Search

Imagining the Ideal College

Based on the timelines of the study participants who decided to attend college in the U.S., the search for an ideal university could start as early as the first year of high school (tenth grade in the American high school system) and as late as the end of junior year. During the search period, students started to seek a deeper knowledge of the U.S. higher education system. They began to recognize a number of institutions they may never have heard of before, and to explore the potential values that different types of institutions could possibly provide them. It is during this stage that they formed an image of the "ideal college," reflecting the right mix of attributes. Although students had not yet chosen a specific institution, their nascent and developing image of the "ideal college" makes this stage particularly valuable in terms of marketing research. A number of researchers have noted that the concept of the "ideal college" provides a reference point for students when selecting institutions, by comparing the perceived images of the institutions they are considering with their individual vision of an ideal college (Coombs 1964;

Kuntz 1987) The importance of institutional image has also been identified by many other college choice studies (Silber et al. 1961; B. Clark 1972).

Because this imagined "ideal college" exists mainly in the minds of Chinese students at this stage, it possesses a similarly imagined and idealized institutional brand. In contrast, actual institutions of higher learning in the real world have brands that are actively managed by the institutions themselves, and their brand equity is highly reliant on their customers. The brand of each real-world institution, shaped by both institutional and consumer imperatives, may therefore only partially meet the needs of a particular student. In comparison, because the brand of the imagined "ideal college" is only shaped by the student who creates it, and is based on his or her own educational aspirations, values, and personal needs, it can reveal all the preferences and requirements of this student customer. The image of an "ideal college" in turn uncovers the important attributes that help students to search for and identity the institutions they see as a "best fit." The ten words or phrases most frequently cited by the students in my study when describing their ideal colleges were:

1) "academic excellence"

2) "competitive"

3) "high teaching quality"

4) "small class"

5) "abundant resources"

6) "famous" and "well-recognized name"

7) "highly-ranked"

8) "prestigious"

9) "reputable"

10) "more American"

These phrases reflected the most important brand associations of the "ideal college" in the minds of student participants, and indicated three key categories of institutional traits to which Chinese elite-singletons paid particular attention: quality, reputation, and authenticity. Of these three, quality-related terms such as "academic excellence," "high teaching quality," "highly-ranked," and "abundant resources" were the most frequently mentioned. Students imagined seeking knowledge from Nobel-prize winning professors, sitting in small classes with competitive peers, and enjoying advanced facilities on campus. Words related to institutional reputation were also highly cited by participants, including "prestigious," "reputable," "famous," and "well-recognized." A majority of the participants emphasized the importance of a high reputation both in the U.S. and in China. One offered, "My ideal college should be well-known in China." Another stated, "It should be loved by current Chinese students. I can't imagine that a university would be called great but be hated by its students." Last, but probably the most interesting phrase cited by the participants, was "more American," indicating the value of authenticity. A good number of participants stated that their ideal college should provide them with an "authentic American experience." Interestingly, study participants felt that the ideal college should recruit only a relatively small number of Chinese international students, so that those actually on campus would have a better chance to interact with and learn from American domestic students. The emphasis on institutional quality, reputation, and authenticity when conceptualizing the ideal college all resonated with students' primary and original motivations when making the initial decision to attend school in the U.S.: that is, to seek a high-quality college education from a world-renowned institutional brand that is "made in America."

It is interesting to note that the answers of participants were very similar and consistent across the provinces in China where my data were collected. Students' overall vision of an "ideal college" seemed to vary little from individual to individual, indicating that participants shared a collective brand image of the "ideal college" as a group, rather than having developed a specific brand image of the "ideal college" as individuals. Indeed, this consistency among individual students regarding their imagined ideal college may be a reflection of the collectivism of Chinese culture, emphasizing interdependency and placing group goals above individual needs or desires (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Hsu 1981; Hofstede 1980).

Any variation that did exist from student to student revolved mainly around the different levels of emphasis they placed on these ten most frequently cited terms. From a branding perspective, the different levels of emphasis indicated the varying strength of particular components of the brand associations linked to the broader brand of the "ideal college" in the minds of participants. For example, some participants who were attracted by liberal arts colleges highlighted "high teaching quality" and "small class" over "well-recognized name" in their answers. Similarly, those who admired comprehensive research universities emphasized "academic excellence" and "famous" over "high teaching quality" in the descriptions of their ideal colleges.

In addition, many students offered in interviews that their "ideal college" falls within a category of institutions literally translated as "American most-prestigious institutions" (*meiguo mingxiao*). The character *ming* (名) in the term *mingxiao* (名校) has multiple related meanings in Chinese, including "prestigious" (*mingwang*), "highly reputable" (*mingqi*), and "well-recognized [brand]" (*mingpai*). Because there is no single word in English that encompasses all these meanings, I use the term "the most-prestigious American institutions" in this paper to convey the

essential concept of "*meiguo mingxiao*" simply for translation purposes. The original Chinese

phrase was used in my survey and interviews in order to limit unnecessary confusion on the part

of respondents. The survey data in Table 7.1 indicate, on the basis of brand recall, which

universities most strongly represent the "most-prestigious American institutions" to Chinese

students; further, the frequency of recalls indicates the degree of brand awareness enjoyed by

these institutions among Chinese students. According to Keller, brand recall is "consumers'

ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by

the category, or a purchase or usage situation as a cue" (Keller 2012).

Table 7.1 Brand recall of institutions from the category of "most-prestigious American institutions" by Chinese elite-singletons

| Brand Recall Rank | Institution | Recalled Times | % of total recalls | National University | | LAC | Ivy League | USNWR Rankings | |
				Private	Public			National University	LAC
1	Harvard University	180	26.2	×			×	2	
2	Yale University	172	25.1	×			×	3	
3	Princeton University	124	18.1	×			×	1	
-	HYP (Harvard, Yale and Princeton)	67	6.4				×	-	
4	MIT	44	4.5	×				7	
5	Stanford University	31	2.2	×				5	
6	UC Berkeley	15	1.9		×			20	
7	Caltech	13	1.8	×				10	
8	UCLA	12	1.2		×			23	
9	University of Pennsylvanian	8	1.2	×			×	7	
9	Brown University	8	1.0	×				14	
11	Cornell University	7	1.0	×			×	16	
11	Duke University	7	.9	×				7	
13	Columbia University	6	.7	×			×	4	
14	Northwestern University	5	.6	×				12	

				USNWR	LAC	
15	University of Chicago	4	.6	×		5
16	Johns Hopkins University	3	.4	×		12
16	Wellesley College	3	.4		×	7
16	Williams College	3	.4		×	1
19	Amherst College	2	.3		×	2
19	Claremont McKenna College	2	.3		×	9

Sources: U.S. News & World Report Rankings 2013/2014
Note: USNWR refers to U.S. News & World Report. LAC refers to Liberal Arts College. The count for HPY is when Harvard, Princeton and Yale were recalled as one unit instead of individual institution.

This brand recall ranking shows many interesting and important results. First, the top twenty spots on the list are heavily dominated by private national universities. Only two are public national universities (UC Berkeley and UCLA), and the four liberal arts colleges that appear on the bottom of the list each have a very low number of recalls (only two to three times each). This is probably because the concept of a liberal arts college is unfamiliar to the Chinese general public; nevertheless, some students were attracted to the educational philosophy and quality instruction offered by the liberal arts colleges on the list.

Second, each university on this top twenty list is also ranked highly by U.S. News & World Report (USNWR). In fact, with the exception of the two public universities, all the other institutions appear among USNWR's top twenty rankings. The four liberal arts colleges are on the top ten list of USNWR's Best Liberal Arts Colleges ranking. As for the two public universities, UC Berkeley and UCLA, they are also ranked highly by USNWR, as the first and second-ranked public universities in the U.S., respectively. This suggests that USNWR rankings may have a strong influence on an institution's brand awareness as represented by the number of brand recalls; in other words, the higher the USNWR ranking, the greater the chance that an institution's brand will stick in the memory of Chinese students.

Third, the number of brand recalls for each institution decreased dramatically from the top to the bottom of the list, indicating significantly different depths of brand awareness for each institution. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had the highest number of recalls; together they claimed 75.8 percent of all recalls in the survey. Harvard, as the top-recalled institution, had 181 individual mentions. This was as much as twenty-three times higher than the tenth most frequently recalled institutions (the University of Pennsylvania, with eight recalls and Brown University, with eight recalls), and ninety times higher than the two colleges occupying the bottom of the list (Claremont McKenna College, with two recalls, and Amherst College, with two recalls). Even more compelling was the fact that Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – sitting on top of the ranking pyramid in their individual capacities – were often thought of together by Chinese students, with the shared abbreviation "HYP." As a collective brand comprised of these three institutions, HYP was recalled sixty-seven times, more than any individual institution on the list other than Harvard, Yale, and Princeton themselves. This impressive result vividly illustrates the "winner take all" aspect of the higher education global marketplace, a phenomenon which was initially brought up by Robert Frank (R. H. Frank 1996) to explain economic globalization.

Fourth, seven out of the eight Ivy League schools (except Dartmouth) appear on the top twenty brand recall list. This indicates that Chinese elite-singletons may consider the Ivy League to be a sub-brand under the overarching brand of the "ideal college." In fact, "Ivy League" (*chang chun teng*) is a term often used by Chinese media as a shorthand for the most prestigious American universities. As demonstrated by the impressive number of brand recalls garnered by Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in this study, most Ivy League schools have very high levels of recognition in China, not only among students interested in studying in the U.S., but also among the general public. The "Ivy League" brand symbolizes personal educational achievement and

family glory in China because it indicates academic excellence, admissions selectivity, and social elitism. Although institutions known as "Public Ivies" (Moll 1985) have also gained a good reputation for providing an Ivy League experience at a public school price, the respondents in my study included only two such universities (Berkeley and UCLA) among "the most prestigious American universities" on the top twenty brand recall list.

As a final note, no colleges or universities from the American South appeared on the brand recall list.

The Dream School in Reality

When asked to think of the "most-prestigious American institutions," universities such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were the clear leaders in terms of brand recall. But their domination of the "most-prestigious institutions" list did not mean that these same universities automatically became students' "dream schools," that is, the institutions students felt most inspired to attend. On the brand recall list of the top twenty "dream schools" (Table 7.2), Harvard ranked number seven, Princeton dropped to number sixteen, and only Yale successfully kept its position as number two. Indeed, majority of the institutions appearing on both the "most-prestigious" and "dream school" lists had different rankings on each.

Table 7.2 Brand recall of dream schools by Chinese elite-singletons

Rank	Institution Name	Count	%	Private	Public	LAC	Ivy League
1	Stanford	18	11.04	×			
2	Yale	12	7.36	×			×
3	MIT	9	5.52	×			
4	University of Pennsylvania	9	5.52	×			×
5	Duke	8	4.91	×			
6	UCLA	8	4.98		×		
7	Harvard	7	4.29	×			×
8	Cornell	7	4.29	×			×
9	UC Berkeley	6	3.68		×		
10	NYU	6	3.68	×			
11	University of Chicago	5	3.07	×			
12	Wellesley College	5	3.07			×	
13	Columbia	4	2.45	×			×
14	Brown University	4	2.45	×			×
15	Princeton	3	1.84	×			×
16	Caltech	3	1.84	×			
17	Vassar College	3	1.84			×	
18	Northwestern University	3	1.84	×			
19	Williams College	2	1.23			×	
20	University of Southern California	2	1.23	×			
Total				15	2	3	7

In addition, Chinese students in the survey indicated that they had a more widely-spread list of dream schools. The distribution of brand recalls on the dream school list was much more even than on the prestige list. Stanford University (eighteen recalls), Yale (twelve recalls), and MIT (nine recalls) had the highest number of recalls on the dream school list, and represented 11.04 percent, 7.36 percent, and 5.52 percent of the survey participants, respectively; hence the total share of these three institutions on the dream school list was only one-quarter of the total. In comparison, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton together represented 70 percent of the responses on the prestige list. This difference in the order and weight of each institution on both lists indicates

a significant opportunity for brands that are ranked relatively lower on the top twenty prestige list.

In contrast to the dominant presence of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton on the prestige list, the total share of these three institutions on the dream list was only 13.48 percent The popular image of these three schools as the most difficult colleges to get into, a perception that is reinforced by their extremely high reputations and low admissions rates, may have contributed to this interesting finding; students recognize their prestige but seem less motivated to seek admission. To some extent, applying to college is like looking for a partner in marriage: a person possessing the most desirable attributes and the best reputation may be admired by many suitors, but only a small number of them will have the self-confidence to pursue such an individual.

The last important pattern emerging on the dream school list is that there is a great deal of overlap with the prestige list, including fifteen of the same private universities (seven of which were Ivy League schools), the same two public universities (Berkeley and UCLA), and three LACs. Only four institutions on the top twenty dream school list were not included on the top twenty prestige list. The consistency of the brand names on both lists confirms the function of the "ideal college" as a prototype and guide for Chinese students in their search for which institutional brand to pursue.

The concept of a "dream school" is worth exploring not only because it showed the branding opportunities for a wider range of institutions but also because of its importance for students' final brand choice. The survey data show the chance that an applicant might decline an admission offer from their dream school was extremely low among Chinese participants; when they received an offer from their dream schools, 95.34 percent of them accepted it. Nonetheless, not all students developed a strong preference for one school over the rest when they sought their

"ideal college." While 71 percent of survey participants (166 in total) indicated that they had a dream school in mind, the remainder, a not insignificant minority, indicated no dream schools.

Stage 2: Choice

As it does for many other college applicants in the U.S., the process of college choice for Chinese elite-singletons consists of two parts. First, students compose a list of institutions, which they believe could potentially satisfy their higher education needs, and to which, after self-assessment, they believe they have a chance of being accepted. This important list is called an "application set" by admissions professionals, and from a branding perspective it reveals the array of alternative institutional brands that a student-consumer might consider. It was originally referred to as the "evoked set"(Howard and Sheth 1969) in the marketing field and was later labeled the "consideration set" (Shocker et al. 1991).

Second, students must ultimately decide which college to attend once they receive admissions offers from the institutions to which they applied. In this second part of the college decision-making process, Chinese students often have a smaller number of alternative institutions from which to choose. In marketing terms, this is referred to as the "choice set," originally described by Kotler, Keller and Brady (2006) as the narrowed-down, smaller number of strong choices within the consideration set, from which the consumer actually decides and makes a purchase.

Most Chinese students in my study encountered both phases in the college choice process, with the exception of those who applied for early-decision programs (EDP) and who received an EDP acceptance. Because these students had already committed to attend the institution to which they applied for early decision, they did not encounter the second phase of college choice. Indeed, in many cases they did not even complete the college selection process for their

consideration set, as some institutions send out EDP offers earlier than the application deadlines for other institutions.

In this section, I will first discuss how the consideration set is formed by Chinese elite-singletons (the application strategy), along with two important characteristics of a consideration set: namely, the size and types of institutions in the set. Then, I will discuss how the final choice of institution is made from the choice set, as part of a two-way selection process between the student-consumer and the university. Finally, I will examine the most important determinate factors influencing Chinese elite-singletons' ultimate college choices.

Brand Consideration Set

The application strategy

Despite differences in their educational goals, actual academic ability, and geographic location, all the Chinese students in my study rather surprisingly employed the same application strategy – that is, to "shoot high and then walk down." One possible explanation for the ubiquity of this strategy was the fact that 88 percent of the respondents in my survey hired a study abroad agency to increase their chances of gaining admission to a U.S. college, and these agencies almost universally used this model. Chinese study abroad agencies, for their part, have developed this strategy by using various rankings in order to evaluate students' comparative quality and their best options among all the available institutional alternatives.

As for the specifics of this common application strategy, Chinese students generally divided their application sets into tiers by comparing the selectivity of particular institutions with their own academic ability (mainly SAT and TOEFL scores). The application sets usually included three tiers, namely: 1) the top tier, consisting of "high reach schools," or institutions that students view as high quality but difficult to get into; 2) the middle tier, consisting of "reachable schools,"

or schools that are less desirable but also less in demand, where students feel there is a good chance of being accepted; and 3) the bottom tier, containing "backup schools," or institutions that are the least desirable but also the most likely to admit a student based on his or her self-assessment. Students used college rankings, particularly those published annually by U.S. News & World Report, as a primary source of information by which to sort institutions into tiers. For example, the majority of students in my study who were interested in large research universities only applied to institutions ranked in USNWR's list of the top fifty national universities.

After drawing up this initial list of potential colleges, respondents then further divided these institutions into three tiers. Students generally divided institutions into tiers strictly according to their numerical order in college ranking lists: the first tier consisted of the top ten colleges in the rankings, the second tier included places eleven through thirty, and the third tier contained those schools occupying spaces thirty-one through fifty. Depending on an individual's assessment of his or her own academic ability, the cut-offs for each of the three tiers could differ from student to student. The same strategy was also employed for rankings of specific academic programs or majors.

This three-tier strategy maximized the probability of being admitted to at least one campus, which is extremely important for Chinese students. To be rejected by every institution to which they had applied and to have no college to attend was a huge "loss of face" (*diu lian*), particularly since these students had already given up their chance to attend school in China.[13] The fact that many respondents were the only child and therefore the "only hope" of their families made this high-pressure situation even worse; the potential for deep parental disappointment and worry was often unbearable. One respondent related that, "I was advised by

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[13] Because the requirements for college admissions in China and the U.S. are very different, it is almost impossible for students to apply to both systems simultaneously due to the normal limitations of time and energy.

my mom that I should apply to at least one school that I think I could definitely get into. I guess

we just can't afford to have no school to attend after high school. It would be too shameful." A

similar strategy was also used by academically talented students in the U.S., who submitted

multiple applications based on a range of acceptable college choices (Silber et al. 1961); but as

we will see, the main difference between the two groups was the size of the consideration set, or

the total number of institutions to which they applied.

Size

On average, the Chinese students in my study had 11.88 institutions in their consideration

sets, which varied from 11.07 to 12.69, with a 95 percent confidence interval. The number of

applications ranged from one to thirty-two, including applications for EDP (early-decision

programs). Generally, Chinese elite-singletons as student-consumers tended to include a large

number of institutional alternatives in their consideration sets. In fact, more than half of the

Chinese students (53 percent) in my study submitted twelve or more college applications, and

only one-fifth of them applied to fewer than eight colleges.

In contrast, U.S. domestic students who applied to the same range of institutions as my

survey participants had much smaller consideration sets. For example, a College Board report

(Smith 2013) using the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 found that the average number

of American domestic applications submitted to traditional four-year colleges was 3.16 in 2005.

The number was slightly higher among students in the top socioeconomic quartile, who

submitted 3.70 applications per student. In addition, the overall range of applications submitted

varied from one to eighteen. According to *The American Freshmen Survey* (Eagan et al. 2016),

another national longitudinal study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute

(HERI) at UCLA, this number has not changed very much during the last ten years. The *Survey*

showed a slightly higher but still small number of alternative institutions (between 4.39 and 4.90) in the application sets for all American freshman in the class of 2013-14 – the same class to which the participants of my study belong. In fact, a majority of American freshmen (76.5 percent) – a group composed almost entirely of domestic students[14] – included fewer than eight colleges in their consideration sets. Only 6.7 percent of American freshmen in the same year had larger application sets of twelve or more schools. Similar results were found in other countries. A study of Canadian college students for example, found the average consideration set size to be 3.98 (Laroche, Rosenblatt, and Sinclair 1984). Similarly, Dawes and Brown (Dawes and Brown 2002) found a consideration set size of 6.01 in the U.K.

The large number of applications from Chinese elite-singletons not only reflected their eagerness to obtain a high-quality U.S. education and their ability to afford it financially, but also indicated their strong fears of rejection and the amount of effort they were willing to expend in response to the fierce competition for admission to top-tier institutions. By increasing the size of their consideration sets, they hoped to maximize the likelihood of admittance into the most selective American universities. As one student from Shanghai noted, "I applied to fifteen institutions in total, including three in the University of California system – UC Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego. Although I really want to attend Berkeley, I still applied to UCLA and UC San Diego. I am willing to pay that extra $80 application fee for each school, because what would happen if I didn't get into Berkeley? This way, I still have a shot at UCLA and UCSD. They are all good schools."

This finding challenges the work of previous scholars in the marketing field who noted that it was common to have a small number of alternative brands contemplated in the consideration set

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[14] The *IIE Open Doors Report 2016* shows that international students made up 5.2 percent of the total student population in higher education in the U.S. in 2015/16.

(Howard and Sheth 1969) , which was later found to be between 1.2 and 4.3 (Turley and LeBlanc 1993). Chinese students face a great deal of uncertainty in the college choice process because they are unfamiliar with the admissions environment in the U.S. This, combined with their relative disregard for the high cost of application fees, seems to result in the larger size of their consideration sets. Although all international students face levels of uncertainty similar to Chinese elite-singletons, not all of them applied to such a large number of institutions. A recent large-scale survey of international students from 195 countries (Hobsons 2014) found that 40 percent of the student participants at the undergraduate level in the U.K. applied to five institutions and 9 percent included more than five schools in their application set. Among the participants studying in Australia, only 3 percent had applied to five or more schools. It seems that Chinese elite-singletons were exceptions to the marketing rule that "the brands which are alternatives of the buyer's choice decision are generally small in number" (Howard and Sheth 1969).

Overall, the fact that Chinese students consider a wide selection of universities provides a promising branding opportunity for American HEIs in the early phase of the college choice process, when students first formulate their consideration sets. Institutions that can offer high educational quality, but that have less-renowned brand names in China should take advantage of these larger consideration sets by developing strategies to raise their institutional brand awareness. For Chinese students, on the other hand, a more pressing concern is how to lower the number of applications but still get into a desirable institution. Having a large application set is not only costly but also time-consuming, which may distract applicants from the ultimate goal of finding the institution that best fits their educational and personal needs.

Types of institutions

A large majority (87 percent) of the Chinese elite-singletons in this study included different types of institutions in their consideration sets, based on public versus private, size, degree levels, and academic focus. This was a result in line with what Howard and Sheth (Howard and Sheth 1969) suggested in their classic work on buyer brand choice – that is, brands in the consideration set do not need to be in the same product class. They provided the example of a consumer who considers both coffee and tea to satisfy their aim of beverage consumption. Although students included different types of institutions in their application sets, their college preferences were heavily focused on two categories; based on *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, they were 1) research universities with very high research activity (RU/VH), and 2) baccalaureate colleges with an arts & sciences focus (Bac/A&S), mainly liberal arts colleges (LAC). My survey results showed that 79.72 percent of the top three most-desired institutions to which Chinese students applied were in the category of RU/VH and 17.28 percent were in Bac/A&S, a finding that seems to reflect respondents' view that a high-quality American education is typified by either an advanced research institution or a prestigious LAC.

Ultimate Brand Choice: A Two-Way Selection Process

Unlike the purchase of a regular commercial brand, which is mainly dependent on the consumer's decision, college choice becomes a two-way selection in its last stage, when student-consumers are limited in their choice depending on which institutions have accepted their applications. The final brand choice of which institution a student will attend, therefore, has become a collective decision on the part of both parties. The brand choice set, or the group of institutions to which a student has been accepted, reflects the institutions' decision-making role;

the student's agreement to attend one of these institutions, on the other hand, reflects the student's role as consumer in making his or her ultimate college choice.

Brand choice set

Size: On average, the participants in my study received 2.79 admission offers in the choice set. This number ranged from 2.51 to 3.05 with a 95 percent confidence interval, which means the head-to-head competition for Chinese elite-singletons is only among two to three higher education institutions in the final stage of college choice. However, the size of the choice set may be a bit larger in reality because the information I gathered was self-reported and the student participants might not have taken the time to record all the institutions to which they had been accepted. Still, this result indicated that the size of the choice set is much smaller than the consideration set; and the final brand competition is among a small number of players.

Types: In terms of types of institutions, a majority of the survey participants (72.55 percent) indicated that the admissions offers they received were from institutions in a single category (using the Carnegie Classification 2010), while one-fifth (20.59 percent) of them received offers from institutions in two categories, and less than one-tenth (6.37 percent) had offers from three categories (Table 7.3). This result indicated that the final head-to-head admission competition for high-achieving Chinese students was mainly among institutions with similar characteristics, since they were classified in the same category. Institutional brand, therefore, becomes extremely important as it helps an institution distinguish itself from competitors providing a similar educational service. For Chinese elite-singletons, brand competition was, once again, mainly between two types of institutions: research universities with very high research activity (RU/VH) and liberal arts colleges (Bac/A&S). The former occupied 74.81 percent of the total number of offers that students received, while the latter occupied 15.93 percent of total offers. Based on the

survey data, competition for students occurred most frequently between sets of universities that consisted of exclusively research universities with very high research activity (57.84 percent), or exclusively liberal arts colleges (12.75 percent), or a mix of research universities and liberal arts colleges (9.80 percent).

Table 7.3 Types of institutions in choice set by Chinese elite-singletons

Choice set	Count	%	Category	Count	%
Same category	148	72.5	RU/VH	118	57.8
			Bac/A&S	26	12.7
			RU/H	3	1.4
			Spec/Bus	1	0.4
Mixed of two categories	42	20.5	RU/VH & Bac/A&S	20	9.8
			RU/VH &RU/H	17	8.3
			RU/VH & DRU	2	0.9
			RU/VH & Spec/Bus	2	0.9
			RU/H & Bac/A&S	1	0.4
Mixed of three categories	13	6.3			
Mixed of four categories	1	.4			
Total count	204	100.0			

Note: Institution category is based on The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education 2010 (Basic classification). RU/VH: Research Universities (Very high research activity); RU/H: Research University (high research activity); DRU: Doctoral/Research Universities; Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs); Bac/A&S: Baccalaureate Colleges - Arts & Sciences; Spec/Bus: Special Focus Institutions - Schools of business and management; Spec/Eng: Special Focus Institutions--Schools of engineering; Spec/Arts: Special Focus Institutions - Schools of art, music, and design.

The ultimate brand choice

Among 264 student samples, 184 students provided information on their final college choices, with three-quarters (75.54 percent) choosing a research university, one-fifth (22.28 percent) choosing liberal arts colleges, and the rest (2.17 percent) choosing institutions with a special focus. This result was highly consistent with the distribution pattern shown in their consideration sets and choice sets (Table 7.4). In other words, students' brand choice seemed to gravitate toward a certain category of institutions, and was consistent from the beginning of their

search through their final decision, indicating the importance of branding in the earliest stages of the college choice process.

Table 7.4 Types of institutions of the Chinese elite-singletons' consideration set, choice set and final college choice

Institution Category	Consideration Set (Top three choices)		Choice set		Final choice	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
RU/VH	452	79.7	404	74.8	134	72.8
RU/H	9	1.5	36	6.6	4	2.1
DRU	1	.1	6	1.1	1	.5
Master's L	1	.1	0	.0	0	.0
Bac/A&S	98	17.2	86	15.9	41	22.2
Spec/Bus	2	.3	2	.3	2	1.0
Spec/Engg	1	.1	5	.9	1	.5
Spec/Arts	3	.5	1	.1	1	.5
Total Count	567	100.0	540	100.0	184	100.0

Note: Institution category is based on *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education 2010 (Basic Classification)*. RU/VH: Research Universities (Very high research activity); RU/H: Research University (high research activity); DRU: Doctoral/Research Universities; Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs); Bac/A&S: Baccalaureate Colleges - Arts & Sciences; Spec/Bus: Special Focus Institutions - Schools of business and management; Spec/Eng: Special Focus Institutions--Schools of engineering; Spec/Arts: Special Focus Institutions - Schools of art, music, and design.

The strong preference for research universities, especially those with very high research activity (72.83 percent), demonstrated the importance of academic rigor for high-achieving Chinese elite-singletons. "I'm going to the U.S. to learn," explained one student, expressing a sentiment common to most of the study participants. In addition, because respondents viewed rankings as a strong indicator of an institution's academic performance, their final brand choices were concentrated primarily on highly ranked institutions (Table 7.5). About two-thirds of the survey participants decided on a national research university ranked in USNWR's top fifty, and one-fifth chose to attend a liberal arts college ranked in its top thirty.

Table 7.5 Final college choice of Chinese elite-singletons by rankings & types of institutions

Tier	Rankings	National Universities		LACs		Special Focus Institutions	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
1	1-10	14	7.6	12	6.5		
2	11-20	38	20.6	13	7.0		
3	21-30	20	10.8	11	5.9		
4	31-50	44	23.9	1	.5		
5	50-100	20	10.8	3	1.6		
6	>100	4	2.1	0	.0		
Total		140	76.8	40	22.5	4	2.2

Source: The U.S. News World & Report Best Colleges Rankings 2013/14
Note: Special focus four-year institutes include engineering schools, arts, music & design schools, and business and management schools

Whether an institution was public or private seems to have had a limited influence on students' final brand choice. Among the institutions ultimately chosen by Chinese students, 42 percent were public while close to 60 percent were private. This is probably because, as international students, the cost of a public versus a private school does not differ greatly for Chinese elite-singletons; furthermore, the affordability of the school was generally not a major concern, as most respondents were from affluent families.

In terms of the field of study, Table 7.6 shows that the three most popular areas for the students in my survey were engineering (21.3 percent), social science (18.7 percent), and undeclared (16.0 percent). This cohort had a much higher interest in the field of social science and less interest in the field of business and management when compared to the overall international student population, as well as to the total Chinese international student population in the U.S. Meanwhile, a higher proportion of survey participants had an undeclared major, indicating the openness of Chinese elite-singletons to exploring different interests during their college years.

Table 7.6 Comparison of the percentage of Chinese elite-singletons, Chinese international students and all international students in the U.S. by field of study, 2013/14

Field of study	Chinese elite-singletons (%)	All Chinese int'l students (%)	All int'l under-graduate students (%)
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math)	48.0	43.0	29.6
Engineering	21.3	19.8	15.2
Social science	18.6	8.1	9.9
Undeclared	16.0	3.0	5.3
Math/ Computer science	14.0	11.5	7.0
Physical/ Life science	12.0	8.9	6.0
Business/ Management	9.3	28.0	27.7
Humanities	2.6	0.9	1.3
Other fields of study	2.6	8.6	15.2
Fine/ Applied arts	2.0	5.3	7.0
Education	0.6	1.7	1.1
Health professions	0.6	1.4	2.9
Intensive English	0.0	2.8	0.6
Agriculture	0.0	0.0	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Data of all Chinese students and international students by field of study from IIE Open Doors Data 2013/14.

Major Determinate Factors

My survey data not only revealed which kinds of schools finally won the brand competition, it also gave insight into the reasons why a particular institution was chosen. Specifically, the data highlight five determining factors that most influenced Chinese elite-singletons' college choice, reflecting institutional characteristics including rankings, campus culture, future job opportunity, safety, and cost; location was discussed as well because it greatly overlapped with some of these five factors. These institutional characteristics were closely associated with the brand image and performance of the institutions, which in turn influenced students' perception and choice of institution.

Rankings

The institutional characteristic that most attracted survey participants was a high ranking; when asked what drew them to an institution, many students responded that it was simply its

rank alone. As one student said, ''I chose Berkeley because it ranked highest among all the institutions that accepted my application.'' He was not alone. Close to 60 percent of the survey participants ultimately chose the institution ranked highest among all those schools from which they received offers (Table 7.7). The focus on ranking was less marked for the students who had acceptances only from national universities (56.94 percent) rather than from LACs (80.77 percent), probably because most of these students were more concerned with a particular college major, while students headed to LACs were more interested in a general education.

Table 7.7 Final college choice of Chinese Elite-singletons by institution rankings

Source of admission offers	Final choice of institution with highest institution rankings		
	Yes	No	% of Yes
All universities	82	62	56.9
All LACs	21	5	80.7
Mixed of universities and LACs	17	16	51.5
Total	120	83	59.1

Participants often had to make a choice between an institution's overall quality and the quality of a specific major. In cases where students had already decided on a major, they understandably wanted to attend an institution that ranked highly not only overall but also within their chosen field. The reality, however, was not always so straightforward. As one participant explained, "I had a hard time choosing between UVA [University of Virginia] and Georgia Institute of Technology. UVA ranks higher as an institution, but Georgia Institute of Technology is better in computer science, which is what I am really interested in. I finally decided to go to Georgia Institute of Technology, because when it comes to my college education I think it is important to follow my interest." In contrast, other participants considered the institution ranking to be more important; they placed a higher value on the institution's brand reputation, overall quality, and academic environment.

Figure 7.1 shows how closely Chinese students weigh the importance of both rankings when selecting institutions. Student participants were asked to distribute a total score of 100 to each provided factor based on its importance to their college choice.[15] "Institution ranking" had the highest weight among all factors (20.71 percent), followed by "major ranking" (19.72 percent); the difference in importance between these two rankings was not statistically significant (P value=3.75×10^{-1} >0.05). Together, "institution ranking" and "major ranking" accounted for 40.43 percent of student college choice, which was highly consistent with the results of my pilot study, in which "rankings" was provided as a single factor in the survey and accounted for 42 percent of college choice. Clearly, the weight of rankings was much higher than all other factors.[16]
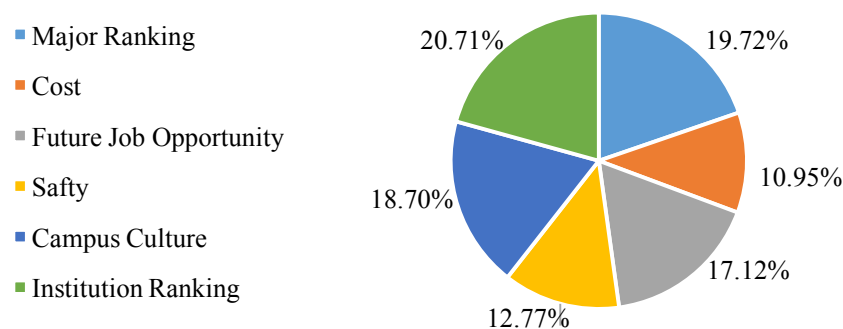
Figure 7.1. Major institutional determine factors affecting Chinese elite-singletons' college choice.

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[15] The six factors, including institutional ranking, major ranking, future job opportunity, safety, cost, and campus culture were selected based on the results of my pilot study. A traditional five- or seven-point grading scale was not used in this question, because weighting the importance of each of these factors based on their relations to one another is closer to the nature of the decision-making process in college choice. Students are also required to think more carefully about their answer through a thorough calculation.

[16] Though I recognized that combining "institution ranking" and "major ranking" as one factor might be statistically less rigorous because students may give more weight to two options than one, there was still good reason to believe, based on my pilot study results and interview data, that rankings in general were a much stronger indicator than other factors in determining Chinese students' college choice.

Beyond that, interview data showed that the different emphasis between institutional performance and major performance depended on students' maturity level and readiness to pursue a particular career path. Interestingly, male participants, many of whom were interested in STEM fields, indicated a stronger inclination toward a specific major when they applied to college, while female participants were more open to exploring different majors. The gender difference revealed in my samples echoed the opinions voiced by college counselors at a Chinese study abroad agency: "I find our male students are more clear about what they want to study. To some extent, female students are less sure, but their parents are more open to whatever they choose." This gender difference is probably related to the patriarchal nature of Chinese society, where men are expected to provide the main financial support for the family and therefore need to consider jobs or earnings to a degree that women do not. This finding also suggests that the branding emphasis for high-achieving Chinese students should be on both the overall image of the institution and on specific academic programs, particularly for different genders.

The interview data also confirmed the overarching importance of rankings for Chinese students by revealing why and how rankings were used in selecting colleges. Almost all student interviewees noted that they used rankings as a major reference to search for and identify potential colleges. For example, majority of the Chinese students in my study believed that the schools on USNWR's list of the top fifty national universities, as well as its top thirty LACs, were high-quality institutions worth applying to. They used rankings as a handy quality assurance tool to eliminate the possibility of accidentally choosing a low-quality institution or even worse, a diploma mill (*yeji daxue*). Students also used rankings as a quick way to judge the reputation of an institution: the higher the ranking, the stronger the reputation. Indeed, in a self-repeating cycle, highly-ranked institutions were also more frequently mentioned in the Chinese

public media as examples of the "best universities," thus further reinforcing an institution's brand recognition among its student-consumers and their parents.

It is interesting to note that among all the university rankings, U.S. News and World Report was much more frequently referenced than other rankings. Fully 63.7 percent of the students in my survey indicated that they heavily relied upon USNWR rankings when selecting institutions, and they considered it to be one of the premier authorities on college rankings and comparisons. In contrast, the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) from Shanghai Jiaotong University, which is widely used by academics and higher education administrators for judging institutional academic performance, was rarely referred to (0.03 percent) by Chinese students when evaluating universities in the U.S. As one student explained, "I think Americans know their universities best. The Shanghai ranking is not reliable. It is created by Chinese, so it must try to make Chinese universities look better." This answer seemed to reflect a decreasing level of trust in Chinese society, where the fast-developing economy, combined with an absence of regulation, has often resulted in a large amount of fraud. In addition, even with regard to another well-known global university ranking created by the British – the London Times Higher Education Rankings – its "frequently-referred" rate was also low (10.20 percent) among Chinese students in the study. Furthermore, two other widely-read American university rankings were similarly unpopular. Only one-tenth of the survey participants rated the Forbes College Rankings highly, and only 5.71 percent favored the Washington Monthly Rankings. Although some student participants in the later interviews indicated that they were aware of the distinctions between different rankings – for instance, many students understood that U.S. News and World Report gives greater weight to an institution's endowment than do other lists – most of them used USNWR as the single default reference due to its longer history and ongoing popularity; it was a common phenomenon. As one student said, "I don't know why everyone only talks about

USNWR rankings. It's probably because they were the first rankings that we knew of in China. Yes, I've heard of other rankings, but my friends and I do not talk about them that often." This myopic focus on only one ranking by the majority of Chinese elite-singletons indicated a great limitation on their worldview; they employed a single lens to take in a complex and multi-dimensional world.

Rankings serve as a "positional good" (Hirsch 1976) or "international currency" (Marginson 2006) and create a "mutual understanding" of institutions among international students, parents, and colleges in the international education market. They have quickly become the major and only legitimate references for the quality of institutions in a high-context culture such as China. One typical conversation between Chinese parents, as related by a student interviewee was, "My son is going to UCLA. It ranked number twenty-three." In this conversation, only the name and rank of the institution were provided to indicate both quality and reputation. No other information was necessarily needed because rankings are self-explanatory in a high-context culture (Hall 1976), indicating at once institutional quality, reputation, prestige, brand recognition, and popularity.

Campus Culture

"Campus culture" was the third most important determinate factor, representing 18.70 percent of the total weight of participants' college choice. In the survey, it was only 1 percent lower than the second most important factor of "major ranking," and 2 percent lower than the most important factor of "institution ranking." No statistical differences were found between campus culture and these two ranking factors (Table 7.8). There was, in fact, only a negligible difference between campus culture and the two ranking factors, indicating the almost co-equal importance of campus culture in students' college choice.

Table 7.8 Statistical difference between determining factors of college choice by Chinese elite-singletons.

	Institution Ranking	Campus Culture	Safety	Future Job Opportunity	Cost	Major Ranking
Institution Ranking	1.00					
Campus Culture	8.28×10^{-2}	1.00				
Safety	5.51×10^{-13} **	1.89×10^{-8} **	1.00			
Future Job Opportunity	5.41×10^{-4} **	1.14×10^{-1}	1.35×10^{-6} **	1.00		
Cost	2.08×10^{-19} **	6.16×10^{-14} **	$4.25 \times 10^{-2*}$	1.43×10^{-12} **	1.00	
Major Ranking	3.75×10^{-1}	3.43×10^{-1}	6.09×10^{-12} **	5.98×10^{-3} **	7.86×10^{-19} **	1.00

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Interview data also confirmed this finding, showing that campus culture was consistently referenced by the participants as an important factor in selecting institutions. While rankings represented to participants the "hard power" of an institution – quantifiable characteristics such as academic performance, financial resources, and student selectivity – campus culture showed the "soft power" that grew from its mission and school spirit. This factor helped participants to see the personality of the institutional brand and better distinguish it from its competitors.

Three aspects of campus culture were most frequently mentioned in the interviews: namely, a strong academic atmosphere, student culture, and campus diversity. Almost every participant highlighted the importance of a strong academic environment when they talked about campus culture. They thought highly of campuses that encouraged diligence and self-realization in academics. A typical example is the University of Chicago, which was described by participants as a "bull university" (*niuxiao*): an institution with a strong academic orientation and performance, which was filled with "academic giants" (*xueba*). Although not every participant

aspired to be an "academic giant" and study at the University of Chicago, each of them sought to avoid a "party school" at all costs.

Another highly valued aspect of campus culture was student culture. From the participants' perspective, what students think, how they talk, and how they behave in school reflects an institution's values and traditions. One individual stated, "I want to attend a university whose students chase their goals and are full of passion. This shows the culture of the university." Another said, "The students in my high school think much more independently than students from other top high schools because our school encourages independence from the principal down to subject teachers. So I think it is very important to find out what students value and how they behave on and off campus, because the quality of the top U.S. institutions differs only slightly, while their cultures vary greatly." In short, on the basis of their experiences at Chinese elite high schools, the participants all agreed that "who I go to school with is very important," once again indicating the significance of dependency in China's collectivist society.

Finally, many participants also indicated the importance of campus diversity, with a special focus on the international dimension. They greatly appreciated institutions that valued multiculturalism and welcomed international students; such an environment of openness helped them to develop a reciprocal fondness towards the institution. One student who chose to study at Stanford described the university in this way: "Stanford is my dream school because of its excellent academic performance and strong multicultural environment. It has a good mix of international students. I feel it is a school in harmony, that appreciates social justice. I think I could easily blend in there."

Future Job Opportunity

The "future job opportunit[ies]" that their U.S. educations could yield were seen by participants as a very important return on their educational investment, and this factor determined 17.12 percent of respondents' decision regarding which institution to attend. It was much more important than the factors of "safety" and "cost," but significantly less important than the two ranking factors (Table 7.8), once again emphasizing the importance of institution quality and major.

Quantitative data on participants' motivations for pursuing higher education (Figure 7.2) provided an indication of why job opportunity was an important factor, but still not as important as the education itself. About 70 percent of respondents indicated that "to gain professional skills in the field" was a "very important" reason to pursue higher education, while close to 60 percent of them considered "getting a better job" to be very important as well. In addition, almost half of respondents voted "making more money" as "very important." However, the respondents attached an even higher value to non-vocational-oriented educational outcomes, including "having a wider range of knowledge and insights" (83.74 percent), "being able to explore personal interests" (73.58 percent), and "becoming a more cultured person" (70.73 percent).
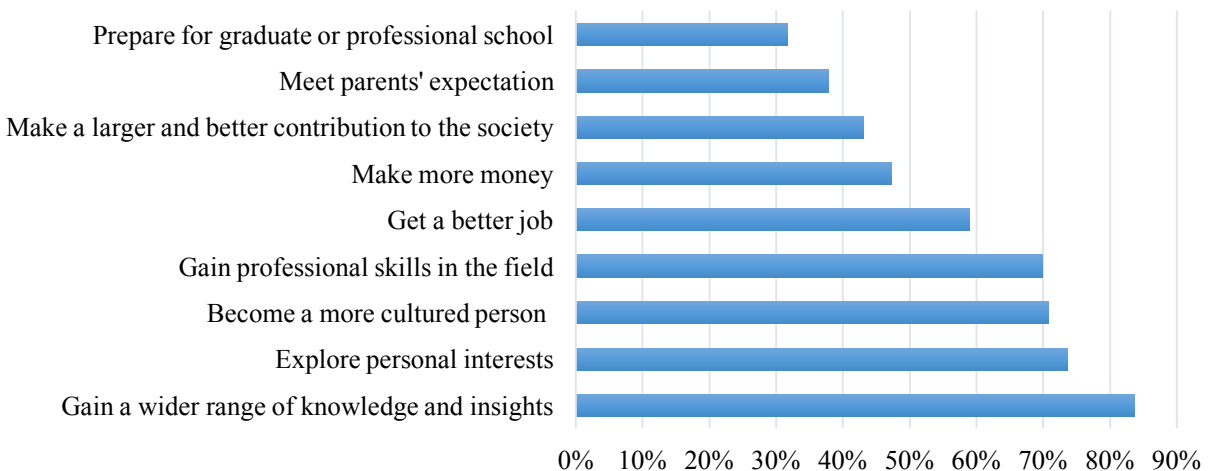

Figure 7.2. Importance of motivations of pursuing higher education by Chinese elite-singletons.

Seeking upward mobility and higher socioeconomic status in a "world village" encouraged Chinese elite-singletons to pay greater attention to job opportunities after graduation. However, coming from financially well-off families also allowed them to view education as a pathway to personal growth rather than simply a tool for living.

Safety

In contrast to the other major factors in this question, the importance of safety remained relatively low (12.77 percent). This finding seems to contradict the common belief that the safety of these "only children" is extremely important to families that have only one descendent. The interview data explained this conflicting result by showing that safety while studying abroad was still a major concern for Chinese singletons, and even more so for their parents, but it only became a crucial factor in selecting institutions when there was a well-publicized tragedy. In general, this factor was given less weight because most students had the feeling that "everyone is safe on campus." As one student explained, "Of course, safety is very important. But it is not something I think of every day when choosing a university. Shootings on U.S. campuses sound scary, but they are random and rare cases. Most of the time people are safe on campus, so I think I would be safe too." In fact, most participants indicated that they believe the majority of U.S. institutions to be safe, otherwise they would not consider the country as a destination at all.

The differences among institutions on safety grounds were, as a rule, small. But should an accident or tragedy occur on or near a campus, that institution's brand image could suffer a huge negative impact. The University of Southern California (USC) provides a perfect example of this phenomenon. The deaths of three Chinese international students at USC in 2012 and 2014 caused a dramatic decrease in applications from China, according to a USC admissions officer. Chinese students in my study characterized USC as a "university of death," and many of them

did not even consider it as a possible destination. The strong response of Chinese students to the USC shootings indicates the significance of communication and crisis management for maintaining, and when necessary, rebuilding trust in an institutional brand.

Cost

Study abroad is not a cheap proposition, especially when the U.S. remains the world's most expensive destination for international student populations. Without a scholarship, one full year of undergraduate education at the very top-tier U.S. universities costs between US$50,000 (for a public non-profit) and US$65,000 (for a private non-profit), including tuition and fees, books and supplies, living and personal expenses, mandatory health insurance, and international travel between the home country and host country. According to the U.S. Department of Education (Cataldi et al. 2011), the median time to earn a bachelor's degree in the U.S. is fifty-two months, thus the average "total purchase" of an American B.A. at a top-tier university is between $216,666 to $281,666.

However, cost seems to be the least important factor for Chinese elite-singletons in selecting a U.S. college. Compared to other major factors, it only accounted for 10.95 percent of the total decision of student participants. The fact that participants were "only children" from well-off families could be one major reason for this finding. Although one-fifth (21 percent) of student participants indicated that they received a fellowship, only 6 percent noted that their primary sources of financial support were scholarships; meanwhile, 93 percent indicated that their primary support was from parents.

For Chinese elite-singletons, scholarships and fellowships were viewed more as personal achievements, rather than as necessary financial supports. As one student said in the interviews, "There are limited scholarships for international undergraduate students [in the U.S.], and at the

very top private universities and liberal arts colleges they are even harder to get, so we are aware of the high cost from day one. Relying on scholarships is just not realistic, although some of us still applied for them, mainly just to 'give it a try.' Receiving a scholarship would mainly make us look great and relieve some of the financial pressure on our parents."

Although affordability seems not to be a major issue for Chinese students, that does not mean that the cohort of elite-singletons was less cost-conscious than others, including both U.S. domestic students (Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger 2016; Eagan et al. 2013); and other international students (Hobsons 2014). In many cases, the participants in my study exercised cost-consciousness as a part of the college decision process, especially when only half of them (53 percent) suggested that they were financially "very confident" about studying abroad. One student shared, "Either way, studying in the U.S. is expensive. To me, there is a difference between paying $50,000 per year and $60,000 per year, but if the more expensive school has higher quality and a better reputation, I am still willing to pay for it. It's worth the money and I want to go to the best school." Another offered, "I don't like a school that charges extra but offers the same or less. It makes me feel robbed. I think it is only fair that top schools charge more." This finding suggests that Chinese elite-singletons, as high SES consumers, were more sensitive to the value they received than to the exact price of the brand. As Narayana and Markin (1975) stated, a change in SES may cause a change in the consumer's perception of a brand. Finance, for Chinese elite-singletons, was not an inhibitor that served "as a constraint due to lack of resources that can create a barrier to purchasing the preferred choice brand"(Howard and Sheth 1969), but rather an advantage that provided an opportunity to pursue a brand that they perceived to have higher value.

Location

Many studies on college choice discussed "location" as a major factor influencing students' college decisions. My pilot study confirmed the importance of location in the student decision-making process but also found that it consistently overlapped with other major factors provided in the survey question, such as "cost," "future job opportunity," and "safety." This overlap is the main reason that location was excluded from the question. For example, as international students, the participants were not eligible for in-state tuition fees, which typically save almost half the cost of attendance for U.S. domestic students. Meanwhile, the students in the interviews also shared with me that they consider a campus located in a big city to be more expensive and less safe, but possessing more potential job opportunities, while a campus located in the suburbs provides the opposite.

Besides cost, job opportunity, and safety, participants also revealed other meanings that "location" may hold for them. One, for instance, is related to their perceptions of the East Coast versus the West Coast. Some student participants showed a strong preference towards institutions located on the East Coast because they felt it represented the traditions and mainstream of the U.S., while the West Coast was viewed as a land of newcomers. In expressing a preference for the East Coast, one student offered, "I want to see the real U.S.!" Nonetheless, only a very small number of the student participants actually limited their applications to institutions on the East Coast alone. In fact, it was much more common for participants to apply to multiple regions of the U.S.

Yet another aspect of "location" mentioned by interview participants was the distance from home. By attending an institution on the East Coast, or in a smaller city, it could take up to twenty or more hours (including required transfers) to travel to and from the host institute.

However, all the participants indicated that longer travel times had little impact on their college choice compared to other major factors, particularly the quality of the institution. One student explained, "If Harvard was in the middle of a desert, I would still go!"

Summary

For the Chinese elite-singletons in my study, selecting an ideal institution in the U.S. was a complicated and uneasy journey, which included two stages: search and choice. During the search stage, students developed a concept of the "ideal college" in their minds, which then became an important reference point for searching out and identifying potential institutions that met their educational needs. Meanwhile, the majority of students also developed a special preference towards one or two particular institutions – their "dream schools" – that they were most inspired to attend. They furthermore showed a strong brand loyalty towards their dream schools, as evidenced by students' extremely high acceptance rate of admission offers from these schools.

Additional important decisions regarding institutions were made in the choice stage. However, due to their unfamiliarity with U.S. higher education institutions and a low tolerance for the risk of choosing the "wrong" institution when one is the "only hope" of the family, Chinese elite-singletons applied to a large number of schools. Their brand consideration sets were much larger than that of American domestic students and other international students, which was both time-consuming and costly for my respondents. In addition, although students included different types of institutions in their consideration sets, their college preferences were heavily focused on two types of institutions: research universities with very high research activities and prestigious liberal arts colleges. This strong preference reflected some of the major

motivations behind choosing a U.S. college education – that is, to experience academic excellence, develop self-understanding, and benefit from the prestige of an American degree.

The institutions themselves played a crucial role in the final, two-way phase of the selection process, by offering limited enrollment opportunities to student applicants. In the end, this phase greatly narrowed down the number of institutional brands from which students could choose. This smaller choice set not only showed that the final competition for Chinese elite-singletons was mainly among two to three institutions, but also demonstrated that students had very limited choices of institutions for their final consideration. Their ultimate brand choice was mainly focused on top-ranked research universities and liberal arts colleges, and the top three majors they finally chose were engineering, social science, and undeclared. Finally, among many important factors that influenced students' college choice, rankings, including institutional rankings and major rankings, played the most important role in the student decision making process. For Chinese elite-singletons, high rankings reflected academic performance, educational quality, and institutional reputation. Campus culture and future job opportunities were somewhat less important than rankings but still crucial, while safety and cost were, under normal circumstances, of the least concern to the study respondents.

Part III The Institutional Pursuit

Chapter 8
Building a Global Iconic Brand: The Case of UCLA

Located in the hills of Westwood Village in West Los Angeles, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) is right next door to the world-famous Beverly Hills and only five miles away from the Pacific Ocean. Its beautiful and sprawling campus is a favorite location for Hollywood movies, while inside its classic Spanish-style buildings hundreds of advanced labs are hidden away, undertaking world-class, cutting-edge research. Yet this campus, now one of the world's greatest research universities, had a modest start as a two-year teacher's college, and the "southern branch" of the University of California at Berkeley. Its rapid growth to a truly global institution has paralleled the rise of Los Angeles itself, as a dynamic city "sufficiently vital to be perpetually changing" (Robinson 1968); and its remarkable accomplishments have been built on generations of dedicated California pioneers who believed in this young university and its rising prospects. Undeniably, these four simple letters, U-C-L-A, carry powerful intellectual and emotional messages to many generations in California and beyond.

Part III: The Institutional Pursuit examines UCLA as a case study, investigating how a higher education brand was built to first meet local needs, and was then later transformed in the age of globalization. This transformation, in turn, demonstrates the enormous impact of the external environment, whether local, national or global, on the development of branding in higher education. In Chapter 8, I begin with a brief review of UCLA's historical roots and the first ninety years of its development, a period which fundamentally shaped the identity, performance, and personality of the UCLA brand. I then discuss the ongoing rebranding efforts UCLA has undertaken over the past six years, as part of its ambitious goal to build a global presence through an iconic and recognizable worldwide brand. Last, I discuss how international admissions became an integral part of UCLA's rebranding efforts during the recent American

recession, and the impact they have had on the university brand, taking it from a highly reputable American institution to a university with global visibility. Ultimately, all of this provides the context that allows us to better understand the allure that UCLA holds for Chinese elite-singletons.

UCLA's Brand History

A Reluctant Birth

UCLA was born amidst the dramatic demographic and political changes of the early twentieth century in California. It was an uneasy time, full of conflict. Shortly before the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of Californians still lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the University of California – later known as the Berkeley campus – was located. At that time, it was the only public university in the state. But the booming population in the Southland was soon to change all of that; by 1910, the newer and more sprawling city of Los Angeles had a population greater than San Francisco, and a mere two years later, it was sending more freshmen to the University of California than was San Francisco (B. Clark 2001).

The pressing need for a state-funded university in Los Angeles was clear. Edward A. Dickson, a UC Regent, and Ernest Carroll Moore, an educator, became advocates for the idea of a southern campus, and they would ultimately become the two founders of UCLA. They argued that the establishment of a campus in Los Angeles would not only provide necessary access to higher education for the increasing number of high school graduates in Southern California, but would also acknowledge the manifest rights of the south with regard to higher education. As Dickson pointed out, in 1913 Southern California taxpayers had contributed two-thirds of the funds supporting the state's only public university (Dundjerski 2011), which was 400-500 miles away from Los Angeles, making it impractical and costly for Southland residents to pursue

higher education. While it seemed clear to Angelenos that Southern California needed its own campus, both the legislature and the Regents, along with the Berkeley faculty, all strongly opposed this move – they specifically disliked the idea of dividing the university into two potentially major campuses (Douglass 2000). This pervasive resistance mirrored broader tensions between Northern and Southern California, at a time when political power was shifting southward along with population growth. After several years of intense disagreement over the idea of a second campus, the university eventually agreed, in 1919, to take over the site of the Los Angeles Normal School in downtown Los Angeles; the new UC campus was christened the "Southern California Branch." UCLA had finally achieved its hard-won and long-awaited birth. Ten years later, the Southern Branch moved to its current Westwood campus, a much larger area in the west of the city. The Board of Regents renamed the institution the University of California at Los Angeles (Dickson 1955), giving it greater autonomy than it had enjoyed as the Southern Branch of the Berkeley campus. From that point on, UCLA's development as an independent entity was free to proceed in earnest.

A Maturing Campus

Over the next four years, despite inter-campus jealousies, delays, and opposition from Berkeley, UCLA developed rapidly from a modest branch of the University of California into a major campus serving the educational and cultural needs of a burgeoning Southern California population. The institution granted its first bachelor's degree in 1933. By 1934 it had also begun to challenge Berkeley's role as the exclusive provider of graduate education, awarding its first Ph.D. in the Department of History in 1938. The southern campus also then started to take off as a research institution. Up through the late 1950s, a number of professional schools were established at UCLA, including the School of Education and the School of Business Administration in 1936, the School of Agriculture and the College of Applied Arts in 1939, the

School of Medicine in 1946, the School of Law in 1947, the School of Nursing in 1950, and the

School of Dentistry in 1958. The establishment of professional programs was a significant

development, and the quality of the programs increased along with their quantity. Even more so

than Berkeley, the development of UCLA as an institution was dominated by strong professional

programs that tied into local professional communities (Geiger 1993, 139), and this tradition has

continued through the present day.

Fighting for Identity: A Californian Flagship University

The 1960s were another defining decade for UCLA's brand. At a time when California's

higher education system was undergoing major reform, UCLA was busy establishing itself as a

young research university. During this period, California's overall population was rapidly

expanding, and more specifically, the first wave of baby boomers was approaching college age.

With an eye towards building its economic future through an educated workforce, California

decided to reform its higher education landscape by creating a three-tier system,[17] set out in *The*

Master Plan of Higher Education, to balance its goals of "broad access," "affordability," and

"quality" (Douglass 2000). As one of the nine campuses of the University of California (UC)

system (later to expand to ten), UCLA was officially identified as a public research university by

the state, with a primary emphasis on "excellence in research and instruction" (Geiger 1993,

143); as such, it would only admit the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates. The mission of

UCLA as a public research university was defined in three areas – education, research, and

service – and this has continued up to today:

> UCLA's primary purpose as a public research university is the creation,
> dissemination, preservation, and application of knowledge for the betterment of

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[17] The three-tier system included the California Community Colleges, the California State Universities and the University of California (with ten campuses), which stood at the top of the academic hierarchy and only admitted the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates.

our global society…In all of our pursuits, we strive at once for excellence and diversity, recognizing that openness and inclusion produce true quality. These values underlie our three institutional responsibilities. Learning and teaching [education]…discovery, creativity and innovation [research]…civic engagement [service]…UCLA endeavors to integrate education, research and service, so that each enriches and extends the others. This integration promotes academic excellence and nurtures innovation and scholarly development. (UCLA Missions and Values 2017)

In addition to the major research component, UCLA was also able to establish a full set of academic programs, and its overall academic profile steadily rose during the period of "happy anarchy" (Glenny 1959), when America's post-World War II prosperity allowed for the generous funding of the higher education sector. Furthermore, faculty enjoyed significant financial freedom to pursue research and teaching projects that were more closely linked to their own academic interests rather than to the market. This intensive investment in pure research and overall academic excellence began to pay off, when, for example, a professor in the Department of Chemistry earned UCLA's first Nobel Prize in 1960.

However, while the academic profile of UCLA continued to rise, and its identity as a distinct entity gained greater acknowledgement from the state, there was not a concomitant recognition that UCLA's status – as one of California's elite flagship universities – should approach parity with Berkeley. Under a strong new Chancellor, Franklin D. Murphy (1960-68), UCLA fought hard for its identity and autonomy, and the struggle eventually bore fruit. The UC Regents, along with the then-President of UC, Clark Kerr, at last officially accorded the same elite status to both Berkeley and Los Angeles, which led to substantial increases in income and resources from the state, along with additional new revenue from federal and private sources. New construction projects expanded the campus, and faculty positions grew by one-third (B. Clark 2001).

The success of Franklin Murphy's campaign to define UCLA's status became a milestone in the institution's brand history, and helped to form a tighter campus community, all members of

which could share in UCLA's new brand identity. In the late 1960s, UCLA's current alma mater – "Hail to the Hills of Westwood" – replaced the earlier school song, when students formally objected to its reference to UCLA as the "California of the South." The UCLA Marching Band also replaced UC Berkeley's "Big C" and "Sons of California" with a new Bruin-oriented fight song and cheer – "Sons of Westwood" followed by the UCLA "Eight-Clap" – indicating the further development of a cohesive school spirit and "competitive attitude" (Clark 2001, 155).

Sons of Westwood

We are Sons of Westwood,
And we hail the Blue and Gold;
True to thee our hearts will be,
Our love will not grow old.

Bruins roam the hills of Westwood,
By the blue Pacific shore;
And when they chance to see a man from USC,
Ev'ry Bruin starts to roar.

U! (3 claps)
C! (3 claps)
L! (3 claps)
A! (3 claps)
U-C-L-A! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Hail to the Hills of Westwood

Hail to the hills of Westwood,
To the mighty sea below;
Hail to our Alma Mater,
She will conquer every foe.

For we're loyal to the Southland,
Her honor we'll uphold;
We'll gladly give our hearts to thee,
To the Blue and to the Gold.

(UCLA Alumni 2015)

174

UCLA's Early Branding and Rise as a Leading American Research University

By the 1970s, UCLA had "definitively entered the ranks of the major research universities"; it was among the top ten recipients of federal research funding, with the life sciences leading the way (Geiger 1993, 145). In 1974, it had been elected to membership in the Association of American Universities, the group of leading North American research universities devoted to maintaining a strong system of academic research and education. Yet while the campus developed "distinguished departments in a large number of fields," there were "[still] few nationally leading ones" (Kerr 2001, 343).

Chancellor Charles E. Young (1968-97), the youngest person to helm any major American university, was selected to succeed Franklin D. Murphy, and as he said in his inaugural speech, his goal was to support UCLA's long-range academic development and advance the university "from the second level of good universities to the first rank of excellent universities" (Dundjerski 2011, 174). The pursuit of top ten standing was a constantly motivating target at that time, and remains so today. However, beginning in the 1970s, this ambitious goal was soon hampered by a decrease in state funding. This decrease came about partially because of the sagging U.S. economy and high inflation, but was mostly caused by the changes to government budget priorities that accompanied the rise of neoliberalism as the guiding ideology for some state leaders. Ultimately, the long-term decline of core state support was to trigger a number of system-wide changes to UCLA as an organization.

Under Chancellor Young's leadership, UCLA began to set up specific priorities to optimize university academic performance, a practice which was uncommon in higher education organizations at the time. Resources were carefully controlled and allocated, while departments and professional schools were reorganized and merged to enhance UCLA's academic strength.

This new management strategy and style was highly successful. In 1983, the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils ranked UCLA as the second-best public university in the nation – just behind Berkeley – and it was tied at number five overall with Princeton, just behind Berkeley, Stanford, Harvard and Yale (Dundjerski 2011, 151). Chancellor Young had succeeded in fulfilling his inaugural promise to move UCLA from the "second level of good universities" into the "major leagues."

Meanwhile, undergraduate admissions had become more selective as UCLA's profile rose. In 1980, UCLA's admissions rate was 75.4 percent, compared with 53.9 percent in 1984 (Dundjerski 2011, 193). However, Young was not satisfied with this early accomplishment; in his words, "We can't rest on our laurels…There is much to be done as we continue our efforts to reach our full potential" (Dundjerski 2011, 194).

In addition, Chancellor Young could foresee that funding from the state was likely to be reduced, thus it was clear that a more diversified income consisting of new revenue sources was going to become increasingly important if UCLA was to reach its full potential. Indeed, the year-to-year uncertainty of the state's funding level made planning for and running a large university like UCLA difficult, which was, according to Young, one of the "most frustrating" problems UCLA had to overcome in order to reach its goals (Dundjerski 2011, 196). Establishing alternative sources of revenue beyond state funding became necessary as a cushion for unpredictable state budget swings, and cultivating private dollars to make up the difference in state funding seemed an obvious course. However, in the 1980s, soliciting private dollars from businesses or individuals other than alumni was still a rare practice among America's publicly-supported state institutions; furthermore, many premier private colleges considered such fundraising to be off-limits for a public institution like UCLA. Approaching this challenge with a

pioneering spirit, UCLA eventually convinced its private rivals that the overall size of the private

money pie was not fixed, but could be increased to accommodate more players. In 1982, UCLA

held its first large-scale fundraising campaign, and raised $373 million by 1988, which placed it

among the top five public universities in fundraising nationwide (Dundjerski 2011, 196).

Although UCLA, like many other colleges in the U.S., had a history of practicing "branding"

through college sports (a recognizable mascot, songs, slogans, t-shirt logos, etc.), the products

arising from the brand were mainly meant for internal consumption, and to build a strong school

community. This first large-scale fundraising campaign –which sought to attract financial

benefits by capitalizing on the university's brand name and reaching out to a much broader

external audience – could be considered UCLA's first real "brand campaign" and foray into the

realm of branding and brand management, as that term was beginning to be used in the 1980s.

The success of this branding campaign provided UCLA with greater confidence in seeking

alternative sources of financial support; at the same time, university income had begun to

privatize in many other ways, from increased tuition fees to returns from intellectual property,

and licensing the university brand. Starting in the 1980s, the rapid success of UCLA's Bruin

Wear apparel line, and of accessories printed with the UCLA logo, was another prominent

example of branding activity as a means of seeking new revenue for the university. UCLA-

themed products promoted the idea of youth, sunshine, health, and sports – attributes with which

everyone would like to identify – and quickly became such a phenomenon that people across the

globe with no immediate connection to the campus began to purchase Bruin Wear. UCLA

became the first university to license its brand name to clothing companies, and the university

trademark became the world's top-selling collegiate emblem. It was not uncommon to see Bruin

Wear among college-age students in China in the 1990s; in fact, its popularity over time led to

the establishment of many high-end "UCLA stores" selling UCLA-branded clothing in major Chinese cities. According to Cynthia Holmes, Director of UCLA's Trademarks and Licensing, UCLA has licensees in markets all over the world, which brought in nearly $1 million in annual revenue in 2015. As Holmes further explained in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, with regard to markets such as China, "[the term] 'UCLA' signifies not just the university but also a whole host of positive attributes that makes the name work as an 'aspirational' fashion brand with products far beyond Bruin T-shirts and caps" (Makinen 2015).

The increased income from these various new revenue sources was a great help to UCLA in solidifying its standing among major universities. By the early 1990s, the campus had moved from fourteenth to tenth in the number of "distinguished departments" in letters and science, and had even higher ratings in some professional schools (Clark 2001, 151); in addition, its library was placed among the top two or three of all American university libraries (Kerr 2001, 342-5).

By the end of the twentieth century, UCLA's income had been solidly diversified by new sources of revenue, including annual private gift-giving, endowment income, large federal research grants, increased tuition fees, returns from intellectual property, and profits from licensing the university brand name in all manner of commercial products. According to Chancellor Albert Carnesale (1997-2007), who was appointed after Charles Young's retirement and who led UCLA into the twenty-first century, each of these new sources of revenue had become absolutely necessary and essential for the continued success of UCLA as an institution (Carnesale 2002). UCLA, therefore, had become an exemplar of the new "self-reliant university" or "entrepreneurial university" (Clark 2001), with close ties to its external market and to the new knowledge society. Indeed, as core state support has fallen to 20 percent of all income, it has transformed from a "public-funded" university to a "public-assisted" university (Clark 2001,

151); furthermore, the continuous changes to UCLA's financial structure have blurred the lines between public and private, which has challenged the institution's brand image, familiar to generations of Californians, as a traditional public university.

Another important change to the UCLA brand over the course of its history was related to the decentralization of its systems, which was partially caused by the continual diversification of income. Departments were asked to take more responsibility for seeking new revenue to support themselves, and as they found their own funding, the authority of deans and department heads steadily increased, while the autonomy of the faculty also rose. More diversified and multi-faceted research traffic was generated by the spread of Organized Research Units (ORUs) that were based on faculty research interests; overall, UCLA became a campus characterized by intense research activity on a large scale. Between 1997 to 2000, UCLA moved from twelfth to third in the nation in federal research funding, surpassing Stanford, Harvard, and MIT (Dundjerski 2011, 240). Meanwhile, the growing scope and intensity of faculty research reshaped both graduate and undergraduate education. The all-faculty Academic Senate's control over courses and curricula contributed greatly to educational quality at UCLA; in addition, by 2000, the undergraduate admissions rate had dropped to 29 percent, making UCLA one of the most selective universities in the U.S. Thus, the decentralization that was in part necessitated by funding imperatives ultimately encouraged bottom-up efforts, which, to a great degree, strengthened UCLA's brand performance in the realms of research and education, and helped to secure its brand reputation as a leading research university in the U.S.

On the other hand, as the system continuously decentralized, UCLA transformed into a "loosely coupled" organization (Weick 1976; Weick 1979); this raised significant obstacles and challenges for the UCLA brand, since effective brand management requires much more

179

centralized efforts and system-wide consistency when communicating to both internal and external audiences. By the early twentieth-first century, UCLA had become a sprawling campus with a list of "research centers, labs, and institutes" that extended over six single-spaced pages (Clark 2001, 152); it was impossible for administrators from the disparate corners of campus to understand each other fully, and they were no longer able to speak about UCLA as one unified research entity to external audiences. Departments had been allowed to decide who they were and what they wanted to be, as though they were running their own businesses. There was no consistency across UCLA with regard to its overall brand image, resulting in what UCLA's Central Communication office called "logo chaos"; incredibly, almost every department had come up with their own design for a UCLA logo (Appendix A: UCLA Logo Chaos), an important institutional brand asset that should always be consistent and unified across the entire university. The UCLA brand image had become highly fragmented. Fortunately, despite the chaos in brand management, the UCLA brand itself never stopped growing, as the university continued to pursue excellence and achievement in its core business: research and education.

By the early 2000s, UCLA had not only solidified its brand as a leading research university in the U.S., characterized by its large-scale intensive research and highly selective student body, but had also garnered an international brand reputation as a world-class institution, helped in large part by the dominance of American research universities in the international context. It was consistently placed in the top fifteen by major international ranking systems, such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), put out by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Meanwhile, over its ninety-year history, UCLA had also acquired the "habits of institutional change on a large and complex scale" (Clark 2001, 155); a competitive attitude, entrepreneurialism, and a resilience of character had all been built into its brand personality as it grew. As Clark (2001) observed, "There is little

or no chance in the early twenty-first century that [UCLA] will now settle for the status quo or hanker for the status quo ante. If it errs it will err on the side of optimism about future possibilities. Yesterday and today have been noteworthy. Tomorrow will be even better." As UCLA moves towards its first-century celebration, this particularly Californian sense of both optimism and a pioneering spirit has been captured and rebuilt into its new brand campaign.

Reframing the UCLA Brand: "The Optimists"

The Rationale Behind UCLA Branding

In the early twenty-first century, American higher education has, more than ever, been subject to market forces, and has therefore often come to actively engage in "academic capitalism" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). A strong institutional brand can give a university a great advantage in the competition for resources that plays out among top-tier American institutions. Although UCLA has been among the leading research universities for many years, outside of California it still has not achieved a nationwide brand image that reflects its academic quality. On the East Coast, for instance, with its large concentration of elite private colleges, UCLA is often well-known not for its outstanding academics, but rather for its excellent college sports programs.[18] In a recent interview that I conducted with one top leadership from central administration who overseas campus daily administration, he stated, "It is important to get UCLA's brand into people's minds…But we don't just want them to know the name; we also want people to realize that UCLA is associated with academic quality and high standards, and that it's a destination for people who are very bright, very eager, and very ambitious". To that

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[18] UCLA has a very strong tradition in college sports. In 1964, UCLA won its first of ten NCAA men's basketball championships under Coach John Wooden. In 2007, it became the first university to win 100 NCAA team championships.

end, a new national brand campaign has been put on the agenda as part of a long-term goal to increase UCLA's brand visibility and to achieve the right brand image.

At the same time, UCLA has been facing budget shortfalls due to the long-term decline in state funding, which had dropped to 12.6 percent of total campus revenue in 2007. Branding has become more important than ever to UCLA, as the university must develop greater financial self-reliance that is to a large extent based on private money, such as higher tuition fees, annual private gift-giving, and endowment income. In addition, the 2008 economic crisis caused a further sharp drop in state funding, which made branding yet more urgent. Compared to the previous academic year, state funding to UCLA was cut by $120 million in 2008-2009 and continued to decline afterwards, which caused an almost 40 percent loss of state funding over the course of four years. Even after state funding was stabilized following the passage of California Proposition 30[19] in 2012, the size of the allocation was only half of what it had been before the economic crisis (UCLA Annual Financial Reports 2017b).

As a response to the financial crisis, in 2008-09 the UC system decided to decentralize the allocation of nonresident tuition, and for the first time, campuses had a financial incentive to consider increasing nonresident enrollment. In an example of a decisive organizational reaction to "environment shifts" (Bolman and Deal 2003), UCLA responded to the sharp drop in state support and to the UC system's new nonresident financial incentive by deciding to increase the admissions of nonresident undergraduates; this would at once generate additional tuition income, and increase the geographic and intellectual diversity of the student body. UCLA therefore began

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[19]Proposition 30 is a California ballot measure that was passed on November 6, 2012. It increased taxes and prevented $6 billion in cuts to the education budget of California state schools. Although UC does not directly benefit from the increased tax, it would have faced another round of budget cuts from the state if Proposition 30 had not passed.

a new round of campus-wide branding after the financial crisis, and entered into the fierce competition with other top-tier American universities for the best students in the nation and the world.

The Process of UCLA Branding

Although several initial branding efforts aimed at student recruitment were made after 2009, when UCLA had first decided to increase nonresident undergraduates, the formal campus-wide, national brand campaign did not begin in earnest until the beginning of 2012. At that time, UCLA first launched its "optimist" ad campaign – in the form of a thirty-second television spot that aired during a men's basketball game against UC Berkeley – which highlighted the "can-do spirit" of the university (UCLA television advertisement 2012). The new campaign reached nationwide audiences through television, radio, and print outlets, as well as through UCLA's website. It reframed UCLA as a place for "the optimists," and showcased the university and its denizens as ambitious, perseverant, and revolutionary. This reframing then led all branding efforts afterwards.

According to one top leadership who oversees campus daily administration at UCLA, the two priorities of this brand promotion were student recruitment and the centennial fundraising campaign. The latter component was launched in May 2014 in order to "celebrate a century of growth and achievement as a top-tier university and seek to secure the institution's future as a center for higher education, where innovative teaching, groundbreaking research, and dedicated service advance the public good" (UCLA Newsroom 2014). The UCLA Centennial Campaign set a goal of raising $4.2 billion by 2019 – the 100th anniversary of UCLA's founding – and became the largest fundraising effort ever undertaken by a public university in the United States.

The current ongoing branding efforts for both increased student recruitment and the Centennial Campaign have been intensive and strongly supported by the university, as demonstrated by the large number of new branding initiatives in the last seven years, and the creation of new leadership roles for those who have expertise in branding and enrollment management. Meanwhile, the UCLA brand has also been widely promoted through multiple communication channels, from traditional media like television, newspapers, and advertising boards, to websites and digital marketing. The key steps in the process of branding for both the recruitment push and the Centennial Campaign are illustrated in Appendix B: Timeline of UCLA Branding Process (2009-2016). Crucially, all the new branding practices listed above were centralized efforts, and the promotional materials were largely controlled by UCLA Communications in order to maintain consistency through defined fonts, layout styles, graphic elements (such as the use of stylized molecules and overlay boxes), imagery, and copy tone. Figure 8.1 illustrates the new unified UCLA logotype; it is well-defined by its relative size, positioning, and color treatment, and was disseminated as "the only graphic device to be used to signify UCLA" (UCLA Brand Guildline 2017c), which largely ended the logo chaos of the preceding years.

Figure 8.1. A demonstration of the new UCLA logotype and boxed logotype.
Source: UCLA brand guideline 2017.

In addition, in the guidelines for all the new branding practices across campus, the

Chancellor urged everyone to align their communication practices with the renewed UCLA

Master Brand, in order to achieve a campus-wide unified brand:

> As we approach our second century, it is vital that we speak with one voice about
> UCLA's importance to society, dedication to academic excellence, and
> unwavering commitment to service. A unified UCLA brand is critical to increase
> the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our communications efforts,
> celebrate our strengths and amplify our impact. Unity of message isn't
> conformity; it's the wellspring from which we all draw the distinctions that make
> UCLA special. Please use these brand guidelines in all of your communications.
> Because together, we are stronger than we are apart. And together, we will reach
> even greater heights in the next 100 years. (UCLA Brand Guideline 2017a)

Such a centralized approach has indeed been quite rare at UCLA, where in many respects the

system remains decentralized and loosely coupled; departments still have a great deal of

autonomy to "run their own business," including defining who they are before the public.

Although some of the professional schools and certain departments that deal more extensively

with external audiences – such as the School of Education and Information Studies, UCLA

Health, and the Anderson School of Management – quickly aligned their brands with the

redefined UCLA Master Brand, many more units on campus have yet to come on board. In the

opinion of the one senior leadership from central marketing office at UCLA, greater uniformity

is necessary, especially if UCLA is aiming to achieve a strong brand that is up to private-sector

standards. Maintaining consistency in brand management through a centralized effort across the

entire campus has presented a typical challenge in a loosely-coupled organization; the struggle to

enforce uniformity is less a matter of effective communication and more a political battle. As a

senior marketing officer from the Communication Department said in a record interview with

me, "A company CEO would shake his head…We can't order, but only advise." In light of

UCLA's situation, it would be interesting to further examine if branding efforts will, over the

long term, continue to blur the line between public and private in the higher education sector, by changing university behavior to more closely mimic that of a private company.

The Redefined UCLA Brand

The renewed UCLA brand sought to capture the university's many accomplishments as it approached its first-century mark. The new message highlighted UCLA as a global brand that conveys optimism as well as excellence, as explained in the new UCLA brand guidelines:

> UCLA is an acclaimed public university with a renowned faculty and extraordinary student body dedicated to education, research and public service, with the size and scope to allow for unequalled diversity, unmatched breadth and depth, and worldwide impact. No other university can match UCLA's unique mix of academic strength and vibrant Los Angeles location. (UCLA 2017)

This description showcased UCLA's identity as a major public research university characterized by its three core missions: education, research and service. The use of compelling words like "renowned," "extraordinary," "unequalled," "unmatched," and "worldwide," were used to highlight the university's excellence in brand performance and prestige in brand reputation. This was critical for UCLA, because one of the goals of the new brand campaign was to reinforce the image of UCLA as a "high quality" institution. To bolster this image, rankings were widely used on UCLA's official website to illustrate its quality and reputation. In fact, one entire webpage is dedicated to rankings, under the "About UCLA" homepage. However, many top-tier universities can argue the same things, and there is always another elite university that can claim even better rankings than UCLA. In order to truly make UCLA more "unique," impressive, and memorable, the renewed brand featured the theme of "optimism," reflecting the university's spirit, as it has developed from UCLA's history and its close connection to Los Angeles. As the brand guidelines continue:

[T]he "think" part of our brand…[is] a critical part of the truth of who we are. But it's the "feel" part of the UCLA brand—what we stand for—that truly sets us apart. Here, on one of the most beautiful campuses in the country, located in a dynamic global city, risks are taken, barriers are broken and the world is changed. Bruins are optimists who believe that anything is possible—and frequently prove it. (UCLA 2017)

In many of the major communication channels that are managed by UCLA, its "optimism" was emphasized as something that is in the very DNA of the university. For example, "A century of optimism" was the featured item on the "overview" page of UCLA's official website; it utilized a background picture of California palm trees stretching into the distance under blue skies and sunshine, conveying an optimistic feeling through both words and images. A sentence in bold font followed, with the message: "For nearly 100 years, UCLA has been a pioneer, persevering through impossibility, turning the futile into the attainable" (ucla.edu 2017a). In this new "optimist campaign," UCLA described itself as consisting of "the class of optimists," which delivered a key brand message that sought to define UCLA as "an engine of opportunity and progress, propelling action and change around the world" (ucla.edu 2017c). Figure 8.2 illustrates how this key brand message was delivered through a major ad campaign using the slogan "We, the optimists."

Figure 8.2. A billboard in Los Angeles illustrating UCLA's "optimistic" spirit. The ads highlighted the Operation Mend program at UCLA, in which UCLA health care professionals perform reconstructive surgery for injured veterans.
Source: UCLA Newsroom, 2014

In addition to optimism and a pioneering spirit, the reimagined UCLA brand highlighted other core values of the university, including "limitless opportunity," "versatile influence," "celebrated culture," and "inspired excellence" (Marketing & Special Events 2012). Interestingly, although the brand campaign was mainly focused on a domestic audience, the university carefully tied these core values to an effort to build UCLA as a "global university." For example, to illustrate its "inspired excellence," the UCLA homepage used references to internationally recognized standards, such as Nobel Prizes and international rankings, to promote its global reputation; furthermore, the university website presented international rankings before national rankings. The term "versatile influence" was linked to a slogan in the Centennial Campaign that exhorted Bruins to "Solve it here and solve it for the world" (UCLA "Let There Be" brochure 2014). Even "service," one of the three core missions of UCLA, was modified from "serve California" to "serve the world." This global focus was illustrated by the following description of UCLA's relationship with the world beyond Los Angeles, and indeed, the United

States: "Located on the Pacific Rim in one of the world's most diverse and vibrant cities, UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships locally and globally"(UCLA Gateway 2017b). "World," "global," and "world-class" were the three words that appeared most frequently throughout the new communication materials; this repetition, when combined with the spotlight on UCLA's location in Los Angeles, was meant to illustrate not only the institution's cosmopolitan setting, but also its international presence and reputation (Figure 8.3). Clearly, UCLA was not satisfied with its status quo as a top-tier national university, but was actively seeking greater global prominence by redefining its brand identity and image.

Figure 8.3. A view of UCLA's campus and downtown Los Angeles. The proximity of the campus to downtown illustrates the close link between the university and the city, and the impact that UCLA's location has on the institution, as a "global university."
Source: UCLA Viewbook 2015 from UCLA Undergraduate Admissions website.

International Admissions for the UCLA Global Brand

Going Global?

In the year 2000, although UCLA had already earned a global reputation for its excellent academic and research performance, its student demographics were still highly focused on domestic enrollments, with international students comprising only13.13 percent at the graduate level and only1.34 percent at the undergraduate level. If its graduate student demographic profile made UCLA a "national university," then UCLA was truly a "California school" at the undergraduate level, based on the mere 4.87 percent of nonresident undergraduate enrollments in the same year. In fact, enrollment of nonresidents at all UC campuses has historically been low. Only Berkeley and UCLA have had significant numbers of nonresident students, and even these numbers have consistently remained under 10 percent of the undergraduate student body (UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor Office 2009).

One major reason behind the low number of nonresidents among its undergraduate population is UCLA's identity as a public school, and its promise of enrolling the top 12.5 percent of California high school graduates, as mandated by the UC Master Plan. In addition, California's rapidly-growing population over the past twenty years has put great political pressure on UCLA and other UC campuses to maintain, if not expand, their enrollment of California high school graduates. Furthermore, UC campuses have historically had little financial incentive to increase admission of nonresident students, because nonresident tuition income was allocated to the UC General Fund, not to individual campuses. As a result, UCLA, along with other UC campuses, held nonresident applicants to a higher academic standard than California residents, and financial assistance for out-of-state students was either limited, or, in the case of international students, almost nonexistent. Until 2008, the limited presence of nonresident

undergraduates at UCLA had not markedly changed, increasing only slightly, to 7.49 percent overall (with 4.13 percent out-of-state and 3.36 percent international).

However, the 2008 financial crisis triggered a fundamental change to this picture. In 2009, UCLA established separate enrollment targets for resident and nonresident students, and set an ambitious goal of increasing nonresident freshmen from 500 (10 percent) to 1600 (28 percent) over four years. Meanwhile, because the motivations behind this action were primarily financial, and there was no difference between the nonresident fee amounts paid by international and out-of-state students, UCLA did not distinguish between out-of-state and international students when it established enrollment targets. A senior administration staff who has much knowledge of international undergraduate admissions at UCLA revealed in an interview that: "For our target of 1,600 nonresident students, it is more of a soft target. If the goal was 1,600, is it 800 [out-of-state] and 800 [international]? That is a more fluid line. But ultimately, we have to get to 1,600". In other words, the goal of increasing the number of international students was more closely associated with the university's financial need than with any particular drive to increase international diversity.

While the push for greater nonresident enrollment was underway, UCLA remained mindful of domestic political pressures, promising to maintain its obligation to California as a public university and to offer admission to in-state students at a level equal to prior years, so that "the overall character of UCLA as a University for California residents [is] maintained" (UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor Office 2009). In fact, the increased diversity provided by international students was often touted as a benefit for California students, as they would soon be entering a global society. As that senior staff from Undergraduate Admissions continued in the interview:

[It] is no secret [that] funding from the state has been cut to public universities, but the cost of running the universities continues to increase. That gap needs to be filled somewhere. The fact is that we charge additional supplements from the students coming from outside the state, not insignificant supplements. That is a really quick and easy way to increase your revenue. But I would also say, for the record, that although that is the primary motivation, that was not the sole motivation. I do believe that there is a philosophical shift that took place around increasing world-class leaders….They [California's students] need to be getting exposure to world-class individuals. That means students coming from around the world.

The conflict between "local," "national," and "global" priorities in undergraduate admissions reflected a deeper tension between Californians and non-Californians, and was sometimes even elevated to the level of Americans versus "the others." This is not an uncommon phenomenon at other American public universities, but nonetheless it is complicated in practice. While the increasing number of international students served to enhance UCLA's brand image as a "global university," the sorts of conflicts this increase engendered also presented UCLA with significant challenges in seeking to secure its reputation as a "global" public university. A fundamental question behind the tension has been: "A global university for whom?"

The Branding Process for International Recruitment

Once it had become an institutional priority to recruit larger numbers of nonresident undergraduates, the strategic planning and management of undergraduate enrollment at UCLA became more significant than ever. Within a year after this new priority was set, two new positions were created to lead this proactive change; at the top of the administrative ladder was the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, who would oversee the reorientation of UCLA's undergraduate admissions towards the new goals, and the Director of International Admissions, who would develop UCLA's international recruitment strategies and efforts, none of which existed under the previous system. At the same time, a new Director of Admissions was

hired from UCLA's crosstown rival, the University of Southern California (USC), for their greater experience in active recruitment from private schools.

Under the leadership of these three new administrators, the focus of UCLA Undergraduate Admissions moved from simply reading the large volume of college applications to actively reaching out to prospective students and their parents outside of California and the U.S. The new Director of International Admissions and her staff traveled extensively around the world to recruit the best international students to the Westwood campus; they visited many of the best-performing high schools in various different countries to build up new student pipelines. They delivered informational sessions in major cities to publicize the new educational opportunities for international students at UCLA; and they told the story of what it means to attend UCLA and be a "Bruin"[20]. They also hosted annual "yield events" in five-star hotels around the world, in order to impress admitted international students and their families, and persuade them to choose UCLA over other institutions.

The UCLA brand image abroad was shaped to a great extent by these international admissions officers, who served as "spokespeople," and delivered "official" information about the university. Their attitudes, behavior, and even style of dress all became a part of the UCLA brand image, as they were UCLA officials and hence the faces of the university abroad. In many ways, these international admissions officers were like "salespeople" in their overseas trips, relentlessly promoting UCLA and persuading student consumers to "buy" a UCLA education. However, unlike a salesperson from industry, university officials did not have total control of their product. They could neither "sell" a UCLA education purely based on a customer's

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[20] "Bruins" originally referred to the athletic teams that represent UCLA, but the term is now also used as a nickname for all UCLA students and alumni.

willingness to buy, because students must first get admitted by the university; nor could they "sell" a UCLA education in unlimited quantities because the university had limited enrollment capacity. Therefore, "selling" a university brand is very different from selling Coca-Cola – a commercial product can be relatively unlimited in a free market. In addition, student-consumers make the assumption that the most prestigious institutions do not need to "sell" themselves.

When cultural differences present unforeseen obstacles, promoting a higher education brand like UCLA becomes even more complicated. In order to disengage UCLA's image from a purely commercial purpose, UCLA Admissions claimed in its China-specific informational flyer that the institution did not work with any Chinese study-abroad agencies. However, this did not stop UCLA from joining the circle of HEIs that constantly "brag" about themselves through targeted language, especially when the organization had the motivation of a threatening financial situation to spur it on.

Along with the brand-delivering efforts of Undergraduate Admissions, brand strategy and communication materials were created at UCLA's central marketing office, as part of a combined campus-wide effort. This cross-department collaboration was financially supported for the most part by UCLA External Affairs rather than Student Affairs, which traditionally housed Admissions, reflecting the strategic importance of recruiting nonresidents as an institutional priority. Significant amounts of time, money, and human resources were dedicated to branding projects for Admissions, including creating new communication materials, such as the UCLA Viewbook, Admit packet, recruitment video, and campus visual tour website, all of which highlighted the revised UCLA master brand. There were other brand promotion events as well, such as "optimism" sky writing for Parents' Weekend and Bruin Day, and email campaigns to top-tier prospective students. (To see the full list in Appendix B). It is important to mention that

most of these new communication materials were developed for all prospective students, while only the international student video was designed specifically for the international market. This reflected the overall goal of increasing nonresidents, whether domestic or international, rather than exclusively recruiting international students. In fact, the international student video was made much later than most other new communication materials and took almost two years to complete.

Aimed at prospective undergraduates, a younger audience overall, the UCLA brand image in these materials was presented as energetic, proactive, brave and aspirational. All prospective students, including prospective international students, were invited to align their own identities with UCLA's institutional identity as future "optimists"; the introduction page of UCLA's 2012 Viewbook delivers exactly this message (UCLA Viewbook 2012):

> Bruins.
>
> A whole different animal…
>
> We refuse the status quo. We think above the consensus. When the world says "no" – We say "no problem."
>
> …Optimism allows us to see past the current landscape. It breaks barriers and propels giant leaps forward…That's why realists are bound to the present and optimists are free to define the future. This perspective resonates with a certain type of student – those who don't change the world by closing themselves off in an academic bubble…We are active. Passionate. And perhaps, YOU.

To attract top-tier international applicants who are seeking the best education in the world, UCLA sought to enhance its brand image as a "global university" by highlighting its world-class research, and its location at the heart of a dynamic global city like Los Angeles: "Most universities have campuses. We have the world" message (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions 2012) The Viewbook also featured the many ways UCLA allows students to broaden their international exposure, whether through study abroad opportunities, or through their interactions with the large number of international students on campus, as illustrated in Figure 8.4. Indeed, the increasing number of international students who chose UCLA as their host institution not only enhanced the UCLA global brand, but also became a selling point that allowed UCLA to attract more prospective international applicants.

Figure 8.4. Countries with which UCLA shares students and exchange programs. This page from UCLA's 2015 Viewbook illustrates UCLA's status as a global university, with an active level of international exchange among students.
Source: UCLA Viewbook 2015.

Increased Number of International Students at UCLA

UCLA's strong brand reputation as a leading American research university, combined with welcoming signals to international applicants and aggressive branding efforts abroad, has resulted in ever-increasing numbers of international applications. The last flyer for international students, for instance, was typically effusive and inviting: "The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) welcomes applications from students around the world, and students come from all over the world to attend UCLA" (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions 2017a). The number of international freshman applications at UCLA grew to 17,385 in 2016, more than ten times what it had been in the early 2000s. As demand continues to grow, UCLA international admissions has become more selective. The international admit rate was 22 percent in 2008, but dropped to only 14 percent in 2015 and 2016 (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions 2017b), enhancing UCLA's brand image as a highly selective university in international student circles. As applications continued to grow, the total enrollment of international undergraduates increased accordingly, from 891 in 2008 to 3,505 in 2016. By 2016, international undergraduate enrollments comprised 11.35 percent of all undergraduate enrollment, and for the first time equaled international enrollments at the graduate level (UCLA Academic Planning and Budget 2017). With this boost at the undergraduate level, UCLA was ranked seventh in the nation overall in the number of international students it hosted in 2015-16 (Institute of International Education 2017c). The historical trend of international students at UCLA is illustrated by Figure 8.5.
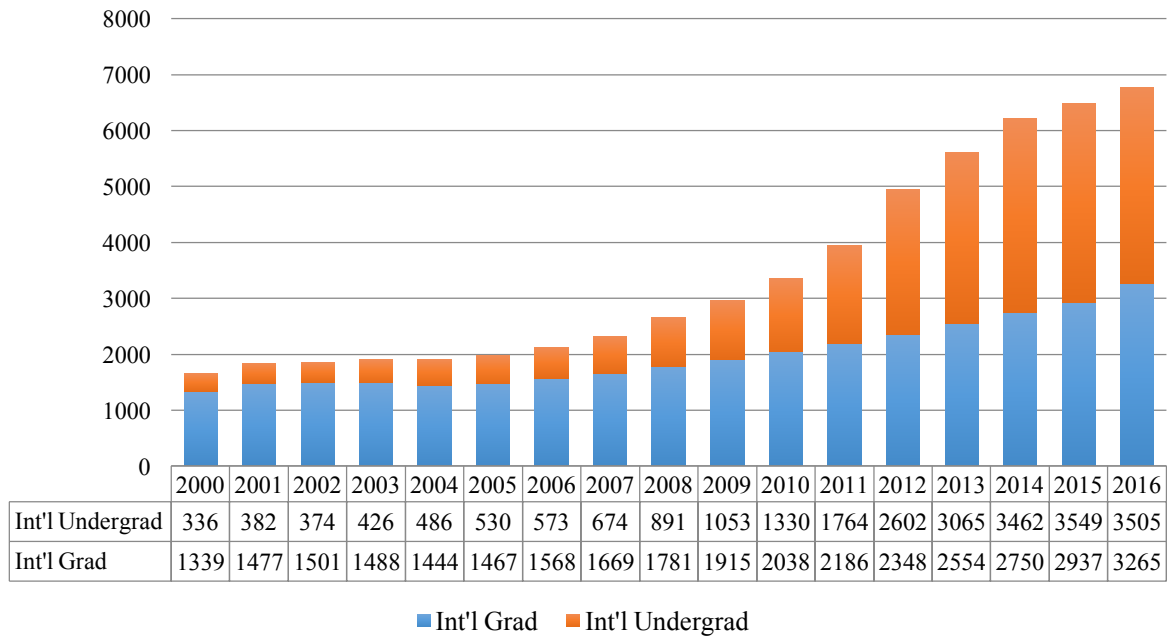
Figure 8.5. Number of international students at UCLA by study level.
Source: UCLA Academic Planning and Budget 2000-2016.

After the 2008 financial crisis, China, South Korea, and Hong Kong were consistently listed

as the top five sending countries/regions at UCLA, while Canada replaced Indonesia in 2011 and

India replaced Japan in 2012. Among these five leading countries, China obviously made the

largest contribution, with its recent and sharp increase in international undergraduates at UCLA.

In 2008, there was only 63 Chinese international undergraduates at UCLA, which accounted for

5 percent of total international undergraduate enrollment. In four short years, this number

jumped to 1,324, with Chinese students accounting for almost half of the total international

undergraduate population; and this trend continued through 2016, with the proportion of Chinese

students at UCLA outstripping the national rate, in which Chinese students made up 31 percent

of international students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education 2016a). The large

proportion of Chinese international undergraduates within the top five sending countries meant

that Chinese students made up almost 80 percent of all international undergraduate enrollment at

UCLA, while that number had been only 51 percent in 2008, before the financial crisis. (See detailed numbers of UCLA international undergraduate enrollment in Appendix C).

It is ironic that diversity within the international student population had greatly decreased, when the initial effort to increase international student enrollment at UCLA was meant to add a deeper dimension of diversity to the university. The positive impression that may have come from making one in ten undergraduates international was perhaps offset by the fact that one of every two international undergraduates was Chinese. In addition, the rapid rise of nonresidents at Berkeley and UCLA (about 30 percent of the freshman class in 2015) triggered much controversy among legislators and families in California, according to the Los Angeles Times 2015). It was not surprising to see the highest demand from both in-state and nonresident students at these two campuses, as they are the two most prestigious universities in the UC system; and ultimately, under pressure from Governor Jerry Brown and the legislature, UC President Janet Napolitano was forced to freeze the number of non-Californians at UCLA and Berkeley. This controversy reflected the changing perspectives on UCLA's original brand identity as a publicly-funded state university. Who should UCLA really serve and how?

Obviously, this has become an on-going challenge for UCLA, which now operates in an environment where top-ranked HEIs are not only tied to local and national needs, but are also strongly affected by global demands. As Executive Vice Chancellor Scott Waugh indicated in a message to UCLA's steering committee, "new revenue generation has been and will continue to be an important area of focus," and as the university moves to a more self-reliant funding model in the twenty-first century, it is unlikely that UCLA will end its new and highly effective strategy of seeking exceptional international students who contribute intellectual, cultural, *and* financial benefits to the university.

Summary

In its nearly one hundred-year history, UCLA has not only grown into the public flagship university in California with the largest enrollment and annual budget, but has also solidified its preeminence as a leading research university in the U.S. and the world. The evolution of UCLA's message demonstrates how a public higher education brand was born from local needs and developed in step with national trends. By overcoming a number of major tests over the course of its history, UCLA has grown into a mature institution with a competitive attitude, pioneering spirit, and resilient character. Its recent decision to increase the number of international students in order to strengthen the university not only reflected the increasing impact of the external environment on UCLA, as a public institution seeking self-reliance, but was in many ways also a natural consequence of UCLA's history and the brand personality that evolved over its course. Although the recent branding push for international recruitment was mainly revenue-driven, it had the not incidental effect of enhancing UCLA's brand image as a "global university"; as the number and quality of international students on campus increased, UCLA moved closer to its goal of building a global iconic brand. Last, the process of building a strong UCLA brand in the minds and hearts of its audience through emphasizing consistency and uniqueness was another compelling demonstration of higher education management and marketing.

Part IV The Dream and Reality

Chapter 9
A Desired Global Iconic Brand: Match and Mismatch

We experience our way of life in the same way that fish live in water. Our own cultural ways, "how we do things around here," are often invisible to us because we see them simply as the way things are—and ought to be.

--Bolman and Deal, Reframing Organizations

In the previous chapters, I examined the pursuit of a global iconic brand from the perspective of individual students – in my study, Chinese elite-singletons as prospective international students – and the perspective of an individual institution – in this case, UCLA. In this last part of the dissertation – The Dream and Reality – I move my focus to the interplay between the student pursuit and the institutional pursuit for a global iconic brand. I first track UCLA brand equity in China by examining the perception of UCLA's renewed global brand from the point of view of Chinese elite-singletons, as they are the major international student consumers. Then, I discuss the match and mismatch between the brand that UCLA would like to project to its audience, and the UCLA brand as it is actually perceived in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons. In this, we see the gap between the dream and the reality that both UCLA and its prospective students pursued and lived.

Tracking UCLA Brand Equity in China

"Brand equity" is a key concept in brand management; it refers to the value that comes from customers' perceptions of a brand, rather than the value that derives from the actual product or service itself (Washburn and Plank 2002). It was defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" by Keller (2012) in his customer-based brand equity (CBBE) theory. Based on this brand theory, which is now well-established in the management discipline, the value of the UCLA brand as demonstrated by its

brand equity is largely embedded in the perspectives of its "customers," a group that includes the prospective international students who have lately become a crucial source of new revenue for the university.

In this section, I track and measure UCLA brand equity in the Chinese market by uncovering the impressions and perceptions of the UCLA brand from the perspective of Chinese elite-singletons, as valuable student consumers. The fact that almost half of the international freshman cohorts have been from China in recent years, and furthermore belong to the Chinese singleton generation, made their perspective on the UCLA brand name extremely important. The measurement of UCLA brand equity through the perspective of Chinese elite-singletons followed the four steps of brand building in the customer-based brand equity pyramid (explained in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), including:

1) Brand identity: what was UCLA in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons?

2) Brand meaning: what was the imagery and performance of UCLA from the perspective of Chinese elite-singletons?

3) Brand response: How did Chinese elite-singletons think and feel about UCLA?

4) Brand relationships: How much of a connection would Chinese elite-singletons like to have with UCLA?

This analysis proceeds from both the sources of brand equity (customer mind-set) and the outcomes of brand equity (market performance).

Brand Identity

Brand awareness within higher education categories

From the perspective of the CBBE concept, the first step in building a strong brand is to achieve the right brand identity, which means creating brand salience within customers. Brand

salience measures "various aspects of the awareness of the brand and how easily and often the brand is evoked under various situations or circumstances" (Keller 2012, 79). The awareness of UCLA's brand, therefore, was measured by its brand recognition performance as well as brand recall performance. In terms of the former, as the survey data showed, UCLA possessed an extremely high brand recognition among the Chinese elite-singletons who participated in my study. By providing the UCLA name as a cue in a survey question, all participants (264 in total) except one reported that they had heard the UCLA name prior to taking the survey. In other words, they were highly aware of the existence of the UCLA brand. Although most of the participants in the follow-up interviews could not recall when they had first heard of UCLA, they said that the brand name was frequently mentioned by their peers, Chinese study-abroad agencies, and Chinese media. The sufficient repetition of the university's name in different circumstances (or, repeated exposure in different circumstances) had therefore become the key to the success and familiarity of the UCLA brand. As these participants concluded in their interviews, UCLA is a "well-known" university.

Compared to brand recognition, brand recall – the consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category or other cue – deserves more attention for a higher education institution such as UCLA, because decisions regarding colleges are mostly made in settings away from the point of purchase (Ross and Bettman 1979). Student consumers spend a long time, several years for many of the Chinese elite-singletons in my study, to develop their awareness, knowledge and preferences regarding alternative institutional brands in the market before they make a final purchase (that is, accept an admission offer and enroll in class). They have to *actively* store information regarding institutional alternatives in their minds, and retrieve it from memory when appropriate. Brand recall helps to understand institutional brand identity by linking its brand elements to higher education categories.

Chinese elite-singletons' assisted brand recall of universities from the category of "most-prestigious American institutions," which I discussed in Chapter 7, shined a light on the depth of UCLA brand awareness in the brand category that most appeals to Chinese elite-singletons. Ranked as the number eight most-frequently recalled institution in this category, UCLA had a deeper level of brand awareness than most other institutions. However, compared to the institutions which were recalled more often than UCLA in this category, especially the top three (Harvard was recalled 180 times, Yale was recalled 172 times, and Princeton was recalled 124 times), the frequency of UCLA brand recall (12 times) was much lower, indicating a distance between UCLA and these top brands. Interestingly, when there was no cue or higher education category provided (unaided recall), UCLA was often recalled by the participants as "a typical large U," which is, based on the participants' descriptions in the interviews, a special category of public institution characterized by a wide range of academic programs, large student population size, and excellent academic quality and reputation. Figure 1.1 illustrates where "a typical large U" fits into the structure of American higher education categories in the minds of student participants.
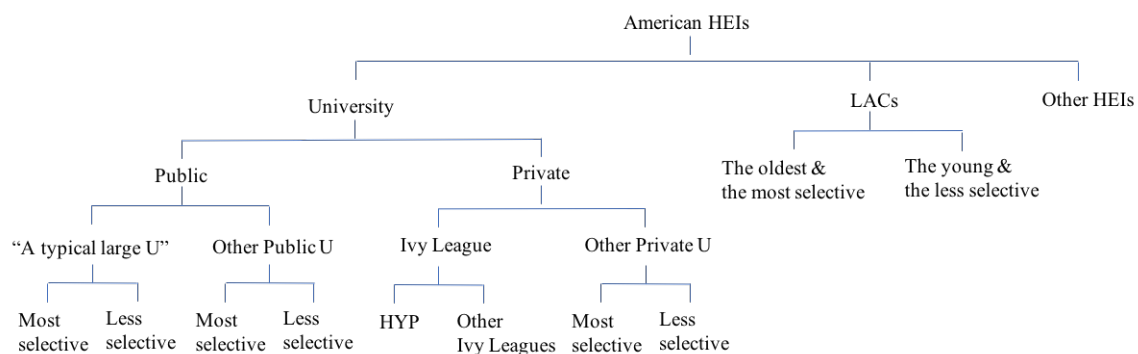

Figure 9.1. The hierarchy of American higher education categories in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons.

Chinese brand name

Another important finding regarding UCLA's brand identity was related to the translation of its brand name in China. Although the UCLA name ("UCLA" and "University of California, Los Angeles") was protected by law, whether California state law, common law, or federal and international intellectual property law (UCLA Trademarks & Licensing 2017), there remained no official Chinese translation of it. Different UCLA departments and third parties delivered their own translations whenever it was needed. For example, "洛加大" (*luojiada*), a translated abbreviation of "University of California, Los Angeles," was widely used by the Chinese Consulate-General in Los Angeles for their communications with Chinese nationals in Los Angeles and throughout the country. UCLA Admissions once used "洛杉矶加州大学" (*luoshanji jiazhoudaxue*) in their Chinese flyer, which placed "Los Angeles" before "University of California" in the translation, while the UCLA International Institute translated the "University of California, Los Angeles" semantically, as "加州大学洛杉矶分校" (*jiazhoudaxue luoshanji fenxiao*). The inconsistency of these translations caused much confusion around UCLA's brand identity among Chinese audiences. What is worse, although the most frequently used and more "official" translation, "加州大学洛杉矶分校," accurately depicted the identity of UCLA as part of the UC system, it accidently caused a misunderstanding regarding UCLA's brand identity, because the word "分校" (campus) has a very different meaning in the context of Chinese higher education. It usually indicates a new college, established as an extension of an existing university to meet the needs of China's rapidly-expanding enrollments over the last two decades. Most of these "campuses" are second or third-tier institutions with lower quality, less selectivity, and a primary focus on teaching, all of which pointed to a different higher education category, far removed from the reputation and quality that UCLA sought to represent in its brand name. Although the student participants indicated that they learned more about UCLA as a

highly reputable American university during the process of their college applications, the general Chinese audience, including their parents, usually first learned of the UCLA brand through the official translation of its name; this then caused a misunderstanding of its brand identity, which in turn caused a devaluation of its brand reputation. As a final difficulty, this translation was too long (nine Chinese characters), and did not fit the typical Chinese communication style. In comparison, many other prestigious American universities had much shorter names in Chinese; for instance, Harvard University was known as "哈佛" (*hafo*), Massachusetts Institute of Technology was "麻省理工" (*masheng ligong*), and the University of California, Berkeley was "伯克利" (*bokeli*). As is the case with multinational companies that seek to promote their brands in the international market, choosing the right brand name in a foreign language is crucial for building a strong brand overseas. Thus, while UCLA must protect its trademarks, and aggressively combat counterfeits, it must first have an official translation of the name that effectively conveys its image to the Chinese audience. Indeed, if a brand name cannot be recalled easily or translated in a way that resonates with its audience, then intangible benefits like brand equity will not accrue for the brand. This illustrates the close link between a brand's label (e.g., names or logos) and its intangible benefits, as emphasized by information-oriented brand definitions and intangible brand definitions, respectively.

Brand meaning

Brand performance

Nowadays, the performance of HEIs is often measured by rankings, both domestic and international. Although UCLA is ranked high globally – it has placed in the top fifteen on many major international rankings over the last decade – only 27 percent of my student participants voted for UCLA as a "well-known world-class university" in the survey, while almost half of

them instead considered it to be a "well-known top-tier American university" and a quarter of them considered it a "well-known top-tier California university," all of which indicated a lower confidence in UCLA's overall performance in the international context. In addition, when considering where UCLA stands in relation to other institutions within the U.S., a clear majority of student participants (60 percent) placed UCLA in the upper-middle tier of the American higher education system, while the rest, 40 percent, considered UCLA to be in the top tier. This impression was most likely associated with UCLA's position on the U.S. News & World Report National University Rankings (number twenty-four in 2013); as the discussion in Chapter 7 demonstrated, Chinese international students depend heavily on this ranking to make decisions about institutional quality (brand performance) and reputation (brand reputation and prestige) in the U.S.

In addition to the perception of UCLA's overall performance, student participants also rated the quality of its intangible "products," as reflected by its core missions (education, research and service), on a five-point scale. Among these three, research was the highest performing trait of the UCLA brand, with 83 percent of participants giving "academic and research performance" a score of "4" or "5," indicating a strong confidence in UCLA's research performance. Service was another key performing trait; 78 percent of participants gave the same high scores to "public service and contribution to society," acknowledging UCLA's social impact and contributions to the public good. However, only 63 percent of participants gave "teaching and learning quality" a similarly high score, demonstrating that the message regarding educational quality at UCLA, which was the top priority of Chinese elite-singletons when studying abroad, had not sufficiently saturated the Chinese student market.

Brand imagery

Another main component of brand meaning is brand imagery. "Brand image" is the

consumer's perception about a brand, as reflected by the brand associations held in the

consumer's memory. This is one of the key sources of brand equity, and can be measured in

three dimensions – strength, favorability, and uniqueness (Keller 2012). In a free association

task, student participants were asked to provide the first three words that came to mind when

they thought about UCLA. Their answers uncovered the different types of specific brand

associations making up UCLA's brand image. In total, they provided 293 brand associations in

fourteen major categories, which are illustrated in Table 9.1. The most frequently recalled

categories – location, size, and food – made up 70 percent of the total brand associations,

indicating that the image of UCLA's brand is largely dominated by these three institutional

characteristics.

Table 9.1. Categories of brand associations by Chinese elite-singletons.

Category of brand associations	Count of brand associations in the category	%
Location	95	32.4
Size	69	23.6
Food	45	15.4
Academic performance	20	6.8
Diversity	15	5.1
Institution type (UC, public, Berkeley)	15	5.1
Campus culture	8	2.7
Cost	7	2.4
Selectivity	7	2.4
Reputation	6	2.1
Sports	3	1.0
Ranking	1	0.3
Safety	1	0.3
Opportunities	1	0.3
Total	293	100.0

In these three categories, the frequency with which participants recalled various brand associations indicated their level of strength, and illustrated the main features that defined the UCLA brand image in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons. In terms of location, the brand associations in this category were not just limited to UCLA's geographic location – participants recalled California thirty-three times and Los Angeles seventeen times – but also referred to location-related features, such as sunshine (recalled nineteen times) and good weather (nine times) in California, as well as "Hollywood" (five times) and "movie" (four times) in Los Angeles. These location-related brand associations helped the participants to distinguish UCLA from many other American institutions, and were key to the uniqueness of UCLA, which UCLA's renewed brand sought to highlight.

When it came to the size category, participants paid particular attention to the size of the student population at UCLA, thinking of "many students" (thirty-three times) and "many Chinese" (twenty-one times). UCLA's active recruitment of international students, and the rapid expansion of that population, contributed to this impression, which was associated with negative feelings about crowdedness and unnecessarily fierce competition at the university. "Large" (thirteen times) was another highly-recalled association related to size, and it carried both positive associations (limitless opportunities) and negative ones (crowdedness).

Finally, and surprisingly, food ranked unexpectedly high as the third most-frequently cited category, largely helped along by the brand association of the "student cafeteria" (recalled 33 times). One major factor contributing to this result was the fact that UCLA had just opened several new high-end student cafeterias, featuring healthy dining (such as an all-organic cafeteria) and culturally specific locations (like the all-Asian-cuisines cafeteria); this occurred in the year just before my participants applied to college, and many pictures of these stylish cafeterias were posted on WeChat (a major social media application in China) by Chinese

students who were already studying at UCLA. This result not only reflected the importance of food in Chinese culture, but also showed the extent to which social media could influence the brand image. The overall impression that was created by these strong brand associations in the top three association categories was one of UCLA as a typically Californian university located in the cosmopolitan city of Los Angeles, with a large student population featuring many Chinese students, where one could enjoy nice weather, lots of sunshine, and great food.

However, the favorable brand associations that UCLA had worked hard to create in order to convince prospective students of UCLA's academic excellence and excellent reputation – the attributes that were the most crucial and relevant to high-achieving students – were not at the forefront of participants' minds when they thought of UCLA, and were mentioned much less often in the survey. These were qualities such as academic performance (6.8 percent), selectivity (2.4 percent), reputation (2.1 percent), and rankings (0.3 percent). What is more, the most unique brand associations, those that had been encoded in the renewed "optimists" brand campaign in order to set UCLA apart – such as being unconventional, catalytic, perseverant, and having a pioneering spirit – were not mentioned at all, indicating that these brand messages had not registered in the minds of student participants. Figure 9.2 illustrates a knowledge circle of the UCLA brand, consisting of brand awareness and brand image in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons, as represented by various brand associations. The closer the brand association is to the center of the knowledge circle, the more frequently it was recalled and the stronger it was.

The associations outside the circle were the ones that had been promoted by UCLA but that did not yet seem to exist in the minds of Chinese students.
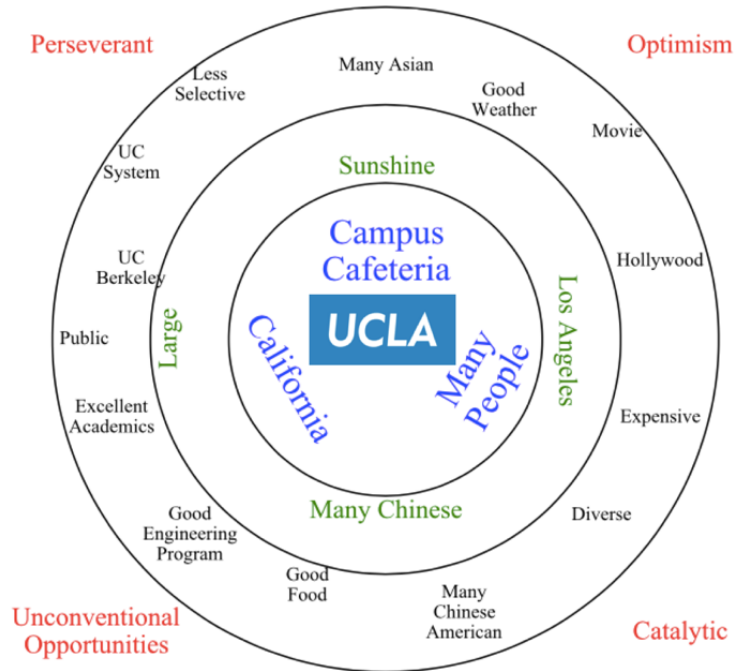

Figure 9.2. Knowledge circle of UCLA brand in the minds of Chinese elite-singletons.

A narrative from a participant who attended Yale provided a vivid depiction of UCLA brand imagery; it compared UCLA and Yale using the metaphor of cars, and it summed up the contrasting images that existed in the minds of many elite-singletons in my study:

> It is such an attractive car with shining paint. The car is well-equipped but also user-friendly. This car rides very smoothly, and is fast. The seats are comfortable. (Yale)

> It is a big car. Not terribly fast, but also not slow. The fixtures in the car are not so elaborate. I do not see it is a luxury brand. But maybe it is more suitable for California students. The car has many features, however, you may not be able to find them all easily. You may also feel some bumps when you drive the car, and sometimes the seat belt doesn't work well. From the outside, the car still looks impressive. Most people will still enjoy the journey with this car. (UCLA)

Brand response

Brand judgement

When asked about the degree to which UCLA satisfied their needs for higher education, about half of the survey participants gave a positive answer (12 percent answered "very good," and 36 percent answered "good"). This was consistent with the result showing that 53 percent of the participants included UCLA in their college application set (consideration set). The main reasons for applying to UCLA reflected the perceived advantages of UCLA compared to its competitors, including a good institutional reputation, the high quality that was indicated by its ranking position (a top thirty school in the U.S.NWR rankings), and a well-known brand name in China. They also reflected the students' main motivations for studying abroad: namely, the search for a higher quality of education, and the high value that Chinese culture places on fame, prestige, and status. On the other hand, the main reasons for not considering UCLA as a potential host institution were closely connected to participants' perceptions of UCLA's disadvantages; these disadvantages mainly revolved around the feeling that there would be fewer educational resources per person, due to the large student population, which in turn signaled lower educational quality to my participants. The amount of attention that participants paid to the size of the student population was closely linked to their experiences of living and studying in China, where the large population contributes to overcrowding and limited resources. Indeed, it demonstrated the crucial influence of a customer's previous experiences, and how those experiences interacted with socioeconomic and cultural conditions to form their judgment of a brand.

Brand feelings

Brand feelings are the "customer's emotional responses and reactions to the brand" (Keller 2012). The general feeling towards UCLA's brand were quantitatively measured in two

dimensions: the intensity of negative or positive feelings towards the brand, and the effect of the brand on students' feelings about themselves. First, approximately half of the participants showed a favorable feeling towards UCLA, with 14 percent and 34 percent of them indicating they either "like it very much" or, simply, "like" it. On the other hand, a small proportion of the participants showed a negative feeling towards UCLA's brand, with 9 percent indicating "dislike" and "extreme dislike," while the other half (43 percent) had a neutral attitude, indicating a good chance for improvement. Second, the participants who were admitted to UCLA were asked to describe their feelings about receiving an educational opportunity there, which served to demonstrate how the UCLA brand affected the feelings these most-desired students had about themselves. Surprisingly, only about a quarter of these participants reported that they were "proud of receiving an offer from UCLA," while one-third had a neutral feeling towards the offer, and another one-tenth indicated that they were "not proud." This result indicated a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with the UCLA brand among the very top Chinese students, and a lower chance that they would "purchase" (accept an offer from UCLA) if there were other better options.

In addition, certain specific feelings that were highlighted in the renewed UCLA brand were also measured on a five-point scale, with the choices to "agree" and "strongly agree" on the higher end. Figure 9.3 illustrates the extent to which Chinese elite-singletons resonate with these

brand feelings, demonstrated by the frequency with which they chose "agree" and "strongly agree."

Rigorous
Warm
Excited
Competitive
Fun
Forging ahead
Open and inclusive
Vibrant
Socially approved

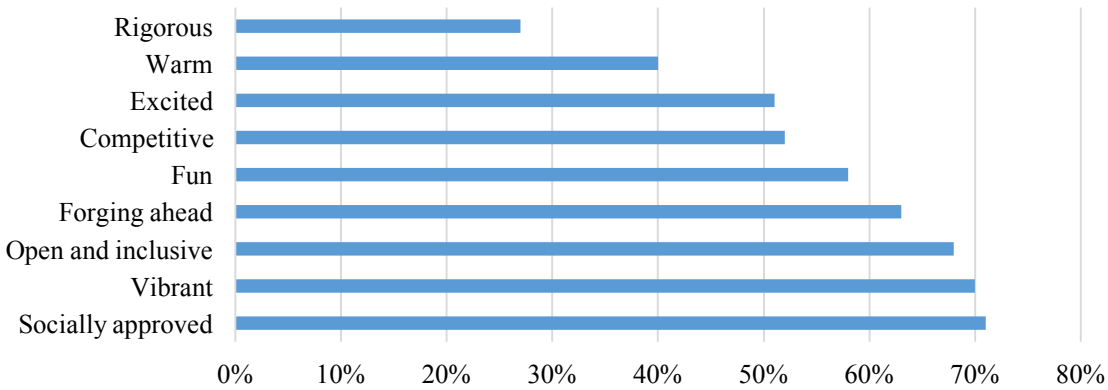0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%

Figure 9.3 The measurement of brand feelings towards UCLA's renewed brand.

Among these nine key brand feelings, student participants strongly felt that UCLA was socially approved (72 percent chose "agree" and "strongly agree"), which resonated with their impression of UCLA as a "well-known" university. They also strongly felt that UCLA was a "vibrant" (70 percent) and "open and inclusive" (67 percent) campus; this was followed by its association with a pioneering spirit, with a majority of students (63 percent) choosing "agree" and "strongly agree" when asked if UCLA was "forging ahead." In addition, it was also interesting to see that Chinese elite-singletons felt UCLA tended more towards "fun" (58 percent) than "rigorous" (27 percent). These two concepts usually sit on opposite ends of the spectrum for Chinese students, because the "rigorous" sort of education they experienced in China was rarely associated with the concept of also having fun. In contrast, these two concepts are generally not mutually exclusive in American conceptions of education. Finally, because of UCLA's image as a large public university, it was not surprising to find that student participants felt somewhat less warm towards the UCLA brand.

Brand relationship

Intensity

The final step of the CBBE theory focuses on the ultimate relationship that the customer has with the brand, which is identified as brand resonance, and is placed on the top of the brand equity pyramid. It describes the extent to which customers feel that they are "'in sync' with the brand" (Hoeffler and Keller 2003). This can be measured in two dimensions: intensity and activity. According to Keller, intensity is reflected by the strength of *attitudinal attachment* and *sense of community*, while activity is indicated by *behavioral loyalty*, as in how frequently customers made the purchase, and *active engagement*, in which customers engage in other activities not related to purchase and consumption. Both dimensions are measured in this study.

In terms of the intensity of the resonance with UCLA's brand, participants conveyed a weak sense of community as well as low attitudinal attachment towards UCLA. For example, although some participants stated that they actively sought information from former Chinese students who had already studied at UCLA, the kinship or affiliation my participants felt with these "older brothers or sisters" (*xuezhang* or *xuejie*) was loose during the application stage. Therefore, they only conveyed a very limited sense of community to the UCLA brand.

Some attitudinal attachment to UCLA was also found in students' reasons for choosing UCLA as their host institution. Among the participants who applied to UCLA, more than half of them (41.4 percent) received an admission offer from the university, which was two times the admit rate of all admitted international applicants (20.8 percent) in the same year. The enroll rate among these admitted Chinese students was 27.3 percent, which was slightly higher than the average enroll rate (25.3 percent) of admitted international students overall (UCLA Undergraduate Admissions 2013). Although it seemed that Chinese elite-singletons were more attached to the UCLA brand based on their enroll rate, their reasons for attending UCLA told a

different story. Many of them, in fact, indicated later in their follow-up interviews that they chose UCLA mainly because it was the highest-ranked school from which they had received an offer, and it was highly likely that they would have chosen another, more highly-ranked institution if they had that choice. In other words, participants chose UCLA more out of necessity than out of attitudinal attachment or brand loyalty. The fact that only 23 percent of participants expressed an exclusive and deep love for UCLA echoed the main reasons behind their "purchase" of a UCLA college education.

Activity

Regarding activity that resonates with UCLA's brand, its measurement was taken by examining attitudes and actual actions of engaging with the UCLA brand, as well as the correlation between these two important stages of engagement. Because the most common engagement between a university and its prospective students was knowledge-seeking regarding the institution, survey participants were asked about their intention to seek knowledge about UCLA, and their action of paying special attention to news related to UCLA. As the survey data showed, about half of the participants indicated that they had always had the intention to learn more about UCLA (attitude), and only 30 percent reported that they always paid attention to news about UCLA (action), suggesting a somewhat lower level of active engagement. However, the significance test showed that among those students who had an intention the percentage taking action was significantly boosted, rising from an 8.2 percent action rate overall to about 48 percent (Table 9.2 Correlation between attitude and action of active engagement with UCLA's brand by Chinese elite-singletons). Such analysis shows that encouraging the intention is a necessary and key step to achieving an action, for active engagement with Chinese elite-singletons.

Table 9.2 Correlation between attitude and action of active engagement with UCLA's brand by Chinese elite-singletons

		Action	
		Yes	No
Attitude	Yes	61	66
	No	9	107

Note: $\chi^2 = 46.002$, df=1, p-value= 1.181×10^{-11}

Match and Mismatch

Based on the evaluation of brand equity discussed above, it is obvious that there was a match and mismatch between the proposed UCLA brand and its perception by Chinese elite-singletons. In a sense, both UCLA and the Chinese students taking my survey were in search of the same thing, but from the opposite perspectives of institution and student: they each wanted to attain an iconic brand in the global higher education market. Such a brand would be characterized by high rankings, abundant resources (both human, in the form of top students and faculties, and financial, in the form of research grants, physical resources, and advanced facilities), prestige and reputation, and global relevance and impact (reflecting a wide acceptance of neoliberalism and academic capitalism on the part of both Chinese students and American institutions). The goal of building an global iconic brand reflected UCLA's pursuit of global prominence in its second century, while, in the new age of globalization, Chinese elite-singletons pursued their own personal fulfillment through association with a global iconic brand. However, both parties looked at their goals through very different lenses, which were created from their particular social and culture milieus (Figure 9.4).

Figure 9.4. The match and mismatch of seeking a global iconic brand.

China is a homogeneous society characterized by collectivism, which leads to unified goals and a lower social tolerance for difference. Such an environment is a large part of why the Chinese elite-singletons in my study intended to make similar choices of institution largely on the basis of only two categories; this was not only to lower the risk of making a mistake but also for the sake of social acceptance. As collectivists, Chinese cared more about group identity than individual identity. Therefore, the prestige and reputation associated with a university's brand name were extremely important to Chinese students, as they could more easily place themselves with respect to one another based on these concepts. China is also a country with a high-context culture – people communicate in ways that are implicit and rely heavily on context (Hall 1976). This was also why one ranking in particular – the U.S. News & World Report rankings – was

widely used by Chinese students, even though there were many competing ranking systems in the market; without offering a more detailed explanation, students could simply reference a ranking position from this widely-accepted source in order to communicate everything that they wanted to convey about a particular institution. In addition, with respect to the process of pursing a global iconic brand, Chinese elite-singletons showed that they are a group of realists who believed in pragmatism. They see the world as an extremely hierarchical place, as this is what they had always experienced in Chinese society; and the only way to reach the top is to climb the ladder with hard work, acceptance, and adaptation. Therefore, the educational model that most appealed to them consisted of elite institutions featuring student selectivity, which would indicate the student's success in "climbing to the top," where resources were shared within an exclusive and small group.

In contrast, the U.S. is a multicultural country, celebrating independence and cultural difference. It has a much higher tolerance for social and individual variation. UCLA's renewed brand was built around the idea of success and excellence through "doubt[ing] the critics, reject[ing] the status quo and see[ing] opportunity in dissatisfaction" (UCLA Gateway 2017c), concepts which are not just acceptable, but encouraged, in the context of America's multiculturalism and individualism. Since brands can often function as authentic cultural resources (Holt 2002), the brand campaign at UCLA not only demonstrated something essential about UCLA, but also illuminated several key cultural values making up the dominant ideology in American society. Without an understanding of this social and cultural context in the U.S., it would be difficult for Chinese students and parents to accept, understand, and appreciate the different basis of success that the UCLA brand presented, and in turn resonate with the proposed UCLA brand.

Summary

Overall, my participants perceived UCLA as a large public university with a name that was well-known in China. It enjoyed a reputation for superior academic quality, but was not among the very top-tier of all prestigious universities in the U.S. In the hierarchy of global higher education, Chinese elite-singletons viewed UCLA as a top national university rather than a leading global university. Its geographic location, Los Angeles, California, made UCLA stand out from the crowd, distinguished by its great weather, food, and entertainment options. However, instead of viewing UCLA's large scale as an advantage for limitless learning opportunities, Chinese elite-singletons perceived it as a shortfall of the brand; the impression they formed was one of crowded student conditions featuring a high concentration of Chinese international students.

In the end, both UCLA and the Chinese elite-singletons are pursuing a similar goal – the achievement of institutional or personal preeminence through association with a global iconic brand, characterized by high quality, prestige, and reputation. However, their disparate perceptions of the ideal global iconic brand, rooted in the cultural and social differences between the U.S. and China, caused a mismatch between the UCLA brand as it was proposed by the institution itself, and the brand as it was received by this particular segment of its intended audience. UCLA and Chinese elite-singletons lived in different realities while chasing the same dream.

Chapter 10
Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, against the backdrop of globalization, higher education has become a hyper-competitive industry. Universities, particularly the world's most reputable universities, have entered an age when multiple resources are allocated within strict national boundaries, but also within a global marketplace. These universities know they must possess an iconic brand in order to compete in the fierce global race for top international students, exemplary faculty, and generous donors. UCLA provides an excellent example of this phenomenon; while it is well-established as a leading American research university, it has only recently entered this brand competition by actively modifying its branding to attract top-tier domestic and international students.

At the same time, China's growing economic power, and a strong desire for high-quality education on the part of its young people, has produced a booming market of international students coming from China. Its most elite students, a special cohort arising from the Chinese singleton generation and characterized by strong academic achievement and affluent family backgrounds, are actively seeking personal sovereignty in the age of globalization through association with an iconic higher education brand. And according to Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, Vice Chancellor for enrollment management at UCLA, these very students have become, in turn, some of the most desirable human and financial resources for UCLA as an institution (Koseff 2014). My study has focused on these two significant players in the game of higher education global brand campaigns. It aimed to discover the nature, process and impact of a university brand campaign in interacting layers, through a deep analysis of the interplay between the institution and its prospective students.

I will begin this last chapter with a brief overview of the study purpose, its methodology, and the research questions used. This will be followed by a summary and discussion of the key research findings regarding this higher education global brand campaign through a trans-disciplinary theoretical framework, including theories of globalization, neoliberalism and academic capitalism, organizational change and reframing, and customer-based brand equity. I will then touch upon this study's implications for higher education transformation in the age of globalization and the new knowledge economy, and provide my recommendations for both HEIs that intend to participate in brand competition and for international student-consumers who seek to choose a brand. Finally, I close with a discussion of the limitations of the study, and topics for further discussion.

Overview

As the higher education sectors of many countries steadily move away from the state and towards the market, branding, originally a concept from the field of management, has become a common component of university administration; indeed, the emerging trend of university branding campaigns has arisen to help institutions retain a comparative advantage in the ever more fierce competition for students and resources. This dissertation project explores the new branding trend by examining the interplay between two of the significant players in the competition for a global iconic brand: a prestigious U.S. research university, in this case UCLA, and top-tier Chinese students, known in this study as Chinese elite-singletons. It contextualizes the issue of university brand campaigns against a broader background of globalization and neoliberalism by addressing three research questions: (1) What is the rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization? (2) What is the process of building a brand campaign in a specific university, using UCLA as a case study? And (3) What is the

impact of UCLA's brand campaign on the institution itself as well as on prospective Chinese international students, specifically, the elite-singletons? These questions were articulated in four previous parts of the dissertation: the overview of the global context in Chapter 4 (macro-level), the analysis of the individual pursuit in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 (micro-level), the examination of the institutional pursuit (institutional level) in Chapter 8, and the discussion of the match and mismatch between individual and institutional perceptions in Chapter 9 (the interplay among three levels).

I applied a multi-method approach to address these research questions in the data collection process, employing both quantitative methods (survey) and qualitative methods (document analysis, interviews, and participant observation). Data were collected both in China and at UCLA over a three-year period. The field research that was conducted in China between September 2012 and June 2013 is positioned to be pioneering work in understanding Chinese elite-singletons' motivations to study abroad in the U.S., and how their decision-making process in choosing a college is impacted by the goal of pursuing a globally-recognized brand. During this period, I collected 264 effective survey samples from senior students at eight elite Chinese high schools in the eastern coastal region; my participants fit the criteria of Chinese elite-singletons, and planned to study in the U.S. for their college education. From among this group, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the fifty-two participants who accepted a follow-up interview request. I also informally interviewed their high school principals, and college counselors from Chinese study-abroad agencies. In addition, I collected documents related to studying in the U.S. from both high schools and study-abroad agencies.

The field research that I conducted at UCLA between January 2012 and December 2014, on the other hand, helps to understand (1) the motivations behind both the university's recent brand

campaign and its changes to international undergraduate admissions policies; (2) the renewed UCLA global brand within the national brand campaign; and (3) the new branding initiatives for international recruitment. I collected documents relating to UCLA's brand history, new admissions policies, enrollment numbers, annual financial reports, and new communication materials from the Marketing Office. I also conducted participant observation in the Office of UCLA Marketing & Special Events, the main generator of UCLA branding strategy and practice, by attending meetings related to both the new brand campaign and the branding projects specific to undergraduate admissions. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with eleven UCLA leaders from Undergraduate Admissions, Marketing & Special Events, International Institute, the Vice Chancellor's Office for External Affairs, the Vice Chancellor's Office for Finance, and the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost. The wide variety of rich data from both China and UCLA generated interesting and insightful research findings, which will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of my findings is mainly constructed along three dimensions: a macro-level analysis, looking at national forces in the global context; a micro-level analysis, examining the individual student pursuit; and an institutional-level analysis, exploring the institutional pursuit. I also examine the interactions in previous chapters among these three dimensions of analysis. The key findings presented in earlier chapters provide the answers for the three research questions I have proposed. For the sake of clarity, I will discuss these findings in the context of answering each of the research questions, and will summarize them using the structure of the three analytical dimensions from the previous chapters.

1) What is the rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization?

The rationale behind the rise of university brand campaigns in the context of globalization can be explained using all three levels of analysis listed above. At the macro-level, globalization and neoliberalism have increased international student mobility by making higher education available as a commodity at different pricing levels for students all around the world. For those Chinese international students who decide to pay for an American higher education brand, they are, on the one hand, strongly influenced by pull forces from the U.S., such as the superior quality of the higher education sector, better opportunities for future jobs, and the open visa and immigration policies of the Obama administration. On the other hand, they are also motivated by push forces from China, such as limited higher education resources, the rise of the Chinese upper-middle class and new elites, and the rapid expansion of an international education infrastructure. In turn, this increasing demand for higher education brands overseas, from not only Chinese international students but from international students all over the world, has created the need for global brands that can effectively represent institutions that are now in competition with one another for these students.

Taking Chinese elite-singletons as an example, the personal and family backgrounds of international students help to shed light on the rationale, at the micro-level, for pursuing a global brand during the college choice process; overall, personal factors play important roles in students' decisions to study abroad – whether it is the decision to go overseas itself, or the specifics of when and where to travel for school. The Chinese elite-singletons who are the focus of this study are a special cohort within the Chinese singleton generation, the large group made up of single children born after the implementation of China's One-Child Policy in 1978. As the

children of China's upper-middle class and new elites, the sub-group of elite-singletons has enjoyed abundant material resources and the full attention of their parents; they have grown up to become promising young men and women equipped with solid secondary education training; and they aspire to become professionals on the global stage, following in the footsteps of their well-established parents. In general, they are accustomed to having abundant resources from their families, and they tend to expect the best in their academic futures.

Their choice to pursue an American higher education, therefore, seems to be a natural consequence of their view that U.S. universities and colleges form "the best higher education system in the world" and possess the strongest global brands. By choosing to study abroad at the college level, they are looking for an "even better" education – compared to what they, as top-tier students, would receive from Chinese higher education institutions – and they feel that the higher-quality experience they seek can be specifically provided by top-tier American HEIs. By pursuing such educational opportunities in the U.S., they want to not only fulfill their academic ambitions, but also position themselves for upward social mobility in the world village, as future global elites. They see pursuing a global iconic brand in higher education as a necessary step on the path to securing personal sovereignty in the age of globalization.

At the institutional level, competition has become much more fierce, as higher education in many countries continues to move from a public-good knowledge/learning regime to an academic-capitalist knowledge/learning regime (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) that more fully embraces neoliberalism. Taking UCLA as an example, HEIs in the U.S. have faced the long-term decline of state funding by adopting a strategy of reliance on the marketplace rather than the government. University income has been greatly diversified through the cultivation of private money, in the form of higher tuition fees, private donations, profit from intellectual property, the

licensing of products, and affiliated hospitals. Building a strong institutional brand in the minds of its "customers" is now seen by UCLA's leadership as the key to gaining an advantage in the national and global competition for resources. Spurred on by the 2008 economic crisis, UCLA's recent decision to develop a brand campaign aimed at multiple audiences, including valuable top-tier international students, is a very good example of how such a campaign can arise at an individual institution as a response to "environment shifts" (Bolman and Deal 2003). By pursuing a global iconic brand, UCLA not only seeks to solidify its preeminence in American higher education, but also looks for new opportunities in the global higher education market.

2) What is the process of developing a brand campaign in a specific university, using UCLA as a case study?

This research question is answered using an institutional-level analysis. When one considers that a brand represents the "core purpose, the organization's fundamental reason for being" (Spence 2009), it is apparent that all HEIs own a brand, however unformed it may be, from their very birth. The UCLA brand had modest beginnings, as the "southern branch" of the University of California. However, during its first fifty years, the institution and its image quickly grew to assume the stature of a California flagship university, with a mission of education, research and service. As it moved on toward its first 100-year anniversary, UCLA transformed further, into a leading American research university with a global reputation for excellent academic performance.

As for the growth of its brand, although UCLA college sports have long been firmly part of "branded culture" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) in American higher education, the related brand products, such as T-shirts or caps printed with the UCLA logo, were at first intended to primarily build brand loyalty within the internal university community. The sorts of branding practices that

conform to more contemporary branding concepts, and which have more of a focus on external markets, can be traced back to the 1980s, when UCLA formally launched its first large-scale fundraising campaign. In this campaign, the university sought to capitalize more broadly on its brand name, and its success in licensing the UCLA name to clothing companies, for instance, now brings in nearly $1 million in annual revenue from worldwide royalties (Makinen 2015).

In 2012, UCLA began its most recent, and still ongoing, branding campaign, employing an outside branding agency to conduct a "discovery project." The main purpose of this new branding push is to seek the financial support that the university needs to maintain its growth, as UCLA moves toward the model of a "self-reliant university." The new campaign focuses on two institutional priorities: student recruitment with an emphasis on nonresidents, and the university's Centennial Campaign. Branding to attract exceptional international students is part of this picture, because international students are able to provide an important new source of revenue for the university and increase the diversity of the student body.

The current campaign introduced a renewed UCLA brand, which features the university's excellent academic quality and global reputation (point of parity), and its "optimistic" spirit (point of uniqueness), based on both the institution's culture and its historical accomplishments. The "uniqueness" is an essential part of the renewed brand, as it helps "customers" to differentiate between UCLA and other similar institutions. This is a key brand-positioning strategy that is frequently practiced in the business world, and among other things, it transforms the university's focus from introspective to extrospective. In addition, the recent brand campaign has also emphasized and sought to enforce a campus-wide consistency in branding practices, in order to achieve a single voice to reach all external audiences. Guided by the renewed brand, various new ads, communication materials, and branding events have been developed for the

Centennial Campaign and the international student recruitment push, in an effort to increase the university's visibility and likability. In all, the process of building a strong UCLA brand in the minds and hearts of its audience, by emphasizing consistency and uniqueness, has been a compelling demonstration of one aspect of contemporary higher education privatization, namely, marketization.

3) What is the impact of UCLA's brand campaign on its prospective Chinese international students, the Chinese elite-singletons, and the institution itself?

The impact of UCLA's brand campaign on its prospective Chinese international students can be seen when we analyze the difference between the UCLA brand as it is projected and as it is received. In general, a brand can be described as "something that has actually created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence, and so on in the marketplace" (Keller 2012); and in this instance, it is the awareness and reactions of a particular segment of the market – Chinese elite-singletons – that is of interest.

An evaluation of UCLA's brand equity was carried out from the perspective of Chinese elite-singletons through the administration of surveys and interviews that measured four dimensions of brand equity, including brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and brand relationship. In the minds of Chinese elite-singletons, UCLA's brand name evokes a high level of awareness as a "well-known American university," featuring excellent academic quality and a good research reputation, indicating the success of the brand's visibility in China. However, UCLA was also largely perceived as an institution that belonged to the "minor leagues" among American universities, and at the level of global competition, which UCLA aimed to enter, it was thought of as more of a "national university" than a "world-class university."

Three institutional characteristics – size, location, and a campus life featuring attractive food options – were, for Chinese elite-singletons, UCLA's most memorable traits. But the most important institutional features – those that had the largest part in determining Chinese students' college choice, including institutional quality and reputation as indicated by rankings, good job opportunities, and campus culture – were less associated with the perceived UCLA brand. Overall, this image was far removed from what UCLA tried to project in its brand campaign, which placed a spotlight on UCLA's top academic quality, the diversity of its student body, the breadth and depth of academic choice thanks to its large size, its worldwide impact, and the uniquely optimistic spirit growing from its origins in Los Angeles and California.

In general, Chinese elite-singletons had favorable feelings towards UCLA and liked its academic quality and reputation, which ultimately became the major reason they choose to apply to and attend UCLA (purchase the brand). However, they had concerns about, for instance, limited educational resources per student, which arose from their impression of UCLA as a crowded public university with a large number of Chinese international students (size). In addition, they were dissatisfied with UCLA's domestic ranking as an indicator of brand performance, particularly when compared to Ivy League schools; UCLA ranked twenty-fourth overall on U.S. News & World Report's National University Rankings in 2013, which was a perfectly respectable rank, but not one that placed UCLA among the very top institutions. All of this led to comparatively lower levels of active engagement with the UCLA brand and a lower brand loyalty overall. Yet while this may not have been the result that UCLA's branding campaign was meant to achieve, it is important to note that the presentation of the brand, and hence its perception, remain flexible. As the university pays greater attention to the international student market, the opinions of groups like the Chinese elite-singletons have the power to influence university branding. For example, the renewed UCLA brand now emphasizes the

impact that the university has on society, and rankings, one of the major factors influencing international students' college choice, have been more frequently highlighted in marketing materials aimed at international students.

Ultimately, the motivations for studying abroad, as well as the nature of the college choice process for Chinese elite-singletons, explained why the UCLA brand was perceived in the way it was, and why some institutional characteristics attracted a great deal of attention, while others were overlooked. The social and cultural differences between the U.S. and China led to different rationales for seeking a global iconic brand on the part of UCLA and Chinse elite-singletons, which thus understandably caused a match and mismatch between the projected and the perceived brand.

Research Implications

The case study of UCLA's brand campaign – including its specific branding practices for international recruitment – shows that university brand campaigns are a complicated issue in the higher education field, with wide links to socioeconomic factors in the national context, and close ties to the worldwide market in the age of globalization. The timing of UCLA's entry into the realm of brand competition, following directly upon the 2008 economic crisis, vividly demonstrates the huge impact of external environmental factors on higher education institutions. Furthermore, the study also shows how branding as a tool was borrowed from the private sector by a higher education institution in the public sector to search for new opportunities in the face of troubling economic circumstances. This study also provides another compelling example of higher education privatization and marketization, as branding practices move the university's focus more closely to the market in this new economy.

Branding principles borrowed from the private sector, such as projecting a consistent yet unique message, have greatly increased the effectiveness of brand communication at UCLA. However, these centralized efforts have also created conflicts and problems among the decentralized systems of UCLA, indicating the potential pitfalls of adapting business models to the higher education sector, where most of the institutions are, like UCLA, loosely coupled. In addition, the single definition of a university brand, usually expressed by a short and simple slogan (e.g., "the optimists"), may also put university brands at risk of losing their complexity and their relevance to a diverse audience, something which is a unique strength of higher education brands. The conflict and compromise of the branding process at UCLA has shown the continuing need for studies on this topic.

On the other hand, the match and mismatch between UCLA and the Chinese elite-singletons who are among its targeted student-consumers illustrates the different rationales, largely influenced by the social and cultural contrasts between the U.S. and China, that can underlie a common goal such as the pursuit of a "global iconic brand." Furthermore, it demonstrates that a brand conveys not only the symbol or meaning of a product, but is also a strong cultural resource, which deserves fuller attention from HEIs that are seeking to enter the competition of global brand campaigns. It also reminds international student-consumers, such as the Chinese elite-singletons in my study, of the importance of looking beyond the university features that seem most familiar to them, and asking questions about the features that they may not fully understand. Turning a critical lens on university brands and the branding activities that are aimed towards them would not only allow these students to make better college choices, arising from a deeper understanding of their desired institution, but would also help them to prepare for the experience of American culture and American college life, a crucial part of the attraction of the global brands they seek.

Limitations of the Study

The two main limitations of my research on higher education global brand campaigns were sample selection and the timeframe of the study. Future plans include an expansion of research to address these limitations.

Sample Selection

An important caution in drawing conclusions from this project is that it was based on a single case study. Although UCLA's case reveals important details and insights regarding university branding practices, it is not necessarily applicable to other HEIs, whether in the U.S. or in other countries, as they seek to actively participate in global brand campaigns. As a public university, for instance, UCLA faces restrictions from the state that do not apply to private institutions in the U.S. For example, the number of international enrollments, as a subset of nonresident enrollment, was something that had to be agreed upon between the university and the state of California; private institutions, on the other hand, can freely set their own goals for international enrollment based on their particular institutional needs. In addition, UCLA is situated in a U.S. higher education system characterized by decreasing support from the state, a circumstance that does not apply universally in other countries. For example, the Chinese higher education system is still highly centralized and heavily supported by the government. The motivations, therefore, for entering into a brand campaign would differ widely for a Chinese institution as compared to one in the U.S. Last, UCLA already occupies an advanced position in the global higher education competition, and has a well-established brand. Thus its experiences may not be directly useful for an institution at an earlier stage of building its programs and reputation.

Similarly, the student samples were selected from a special cohort of the Chinese singleton generation, and the conclusions of this study regarding their motivations, college choices, and

perceptions of the UCLA brand may not apply to all Chinese international students nor to international students from other countries. The data collected from eight elite high schools in China's eastern coastal region was the best result of my efforts in the field. Although the student sample could have been more balanced by using a wider selection of schools from other important areas of China, the limited timing, funding, and connections to schools in those areas restricted my sample scope. However, it is my own personal judgement that if I had surveyed the other two important regions of China, the result would have been very similar. This is a potential area for future research.

Timing of Field Study

Another limitation of my project was the timing of my field study. During the spring of 2012, UCLA was just launching its first ads in the new brand campaign; I interviewed and surveyed Chinese students about their perceptions of the UCLA brand between September 2012 and June 2013. Although a number of branding efforts aimed at international recruitment were already using new communications guided by the renewed UCLA brand, the impact of the renewed brand may still have been limited; after all, the perceptions, judgements, and attitudes towards UCLA's brand had developed over the course of a long time and could not be expected to change overnight with the launch of a new campaign. The results from my study should therefore be treated as a baseline for further investigation, now that the longer-term impacts of the new brand strategy and renewed brand campaign may be more apparent.

Further Discussion

This research is positioned as an exploratory study of university branding, as it is a newly-emerging trend in American higher education. The single case study of UCLA provided a very good example of how an American public university could transform towards the model of a

"self-reliant university" or an "entrepreneurial university" (B. Clark 1998) by adopting branding practices from the private sector. Future research could use this case study as a point of reference to compare the different rationales, practices, and impacts of branding in the higher education sector, both within the U.S. and around the world. In addition, the findings regarding Chinese elite-singletons are rich and illuminating, uncovering their backgrounds, their motivations for studying abroad, and the factors driving their college choices in the U.S.; all of this contributes to the store of knowledge regarding this special, and highly sought-after, cohort. A longitudinal study of this group might usefully focus on the following: (1) whether and how their perceptions of American higher education brands changed after they attended college in the U.S.; (2) their levels of satisfaction with their initial college choices; (3) the outcomes of their choice (job, graduate school, etc.); and (4) their further life choices after graduation, particularly whether they chose to return to China or not. Such a study could provide a wealth of valuable guidance for incoming international students, crucial insights that would allow universities to realize their brand promise, and essential knowledge that could guide the Chinese government in crafting new policies and creating new conditions in China that might attract these young global talents back to their home country, for the "better life" they had always dreamed of.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: UCLA Logo Chaos

Source: Images collected from UCLA websites 2002-03 by UCLA Communications

Appendix B: Timeline of UCLA Branding Process (2009-2016)

Time Period		Major Steps	Significance
2009	April	Revenue task force recommends increase in nonresident undergraduate students.	Financial pressure
	July	Budget cuts and furloughs as financial shortfall deepens.	Financial pressure
2010	April	Nonresident Workgroup Report mentions need for branding, assistance from central Communications	Branding/Admissions
2011	April-11 to March-12	Various marketing efforts made for undergraduate admissions • recruiting events outside California • Campus Virtual Tour • phone and email campaign for prospective students first Bruin Day event	Branding/Admissions
	June	160over90 selected as UCLA's new branding agency; begins discovery phase. Questionnaires sent out to 14 leaderships	Brand campaign
	October	Hired a new Senior Executive Director of Marketing from Disney	Leadership change in Marketing
2012	January	Hired new interim Vice Provost for International Studies	Leadership change in International Studies
2012	February	Hired a new Associate Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management	Leadership change in Admissions
		Launched first optimist ads campaign	Brand ads campaign
	March	UCLA brand guideline	Branding
	April	Launched first phase of new UCLA Gateway Website guided by renewed brand and it has been updated several times afterwards	Branding/UCLA official website
2012	April-12 to April-14	New branding initiatives launched for admissions led by the renewed brand: • Bruin Day • Viewbook • Admit packet • Bruin Bound yield events • recruitment presentation, • recruitment brochure • recruitment video Youvisit online campus tour	Branding/Admissions
	June	Created new position for Director of International Admissions as first full-time international recruiter	Leadership change for International Admissions

	September	Hired a new Senior Executive Director of Marketing from 160over90	leadership change in Marketing
	November	Hired a new Director of Admissions	Leadership change in Admissions
2013	April	Video clips: Optimists 2.0	Brand ads campaign
		Start using digital marketing to promote UCLA brand among prospective students	
	July-13 to present	• Project K (email outreach to highly qualified students, begins with 4 emails to domestic) • Twitter Chat for admitted students Project Countdown (8 emails to freshman applicants and 8 to transfer applicants)	Branding/Admissions
2015	February	Video clips: optimists 3.0 (We, the Optimists)	Brand ads campaign
	May	UCLA "Let There Be" projection mapping laser light show on Royce Hall, tick-off centennial campaign	Centennial campaign
2014	September	Video clip: Let there be	Centennial campaign
2015	March	Finished international recruitment video as the first branding initiative geared towards international market	Branding/International Admissions
	July	The interim Vice Provost for International Studies and Global Engagement promoted to VP	Leadership promotion for UCLA global brand
	September	Launched optimists 4.0	Brand ads campaign
2016	February	UC Office of President and Governor agreement ties increased funding to increased CA enrollment; UCLA to add 600 additional California freshmen and 150 additional California transfer students	Political and financial pressure
	Apr-16 to present	Underrepresented student initiative • ads in community newspapers congratulating admitted students • "Our Past Meets Your Future" - diversity print piece	Branding/Admissions
	April	AVC for Enrollment Management promoted to Vice Provost for Enrollment Management	Reflects success of enrollment management
	December	UCLA breaks records with more than 100,000 freshman applications; number has more than doubled in 10 years	Branding/Admissions

Source: UCLA Communications (UCLA Communications & Public Outreach 2017)
Note: Information collected from UCLA Communications from 2009 to 2016

Appendix C: UCLA International Undergraduate Enrollment Trend (2000-2016)

UCLA Undergraduates Classified as Non-Resident Internationals, by Country of Citizenship, in Fall Quarters from 2000 to 2016

	Fall 00	Fall 01	Fall 02	Fall 03	Fall 04	Fall 05	Fall 06	Fall 07	Fall 08	Fall 09	Fall 10	Fall 11	Fall 12	Fall 13	Fall 14	Fall 15	Fall 16
ALL INTERNATIONALS	698	723	701	875	967	893	957	1,073	1,186	1,274	1,518	2,011	2,759	3,249	3,643	3,691	3,602
CHINA, PRC	25	36	44	53	53	49	42	40	63	128	322	693	1,324	1,637	1,816	1,742	1,544
SOUTH KOREA	125	124	119	168	224	219	272	300	328	343	418	509	538	547	556	535	489
INDIA	17	17	17	23	24	23	24	24	28	42	47	73	100	156	218	264	323
CANADA	35	37	40	38	40	36	52	54	41	49	53	79	96	129	151	174	174
HONG KONG	84	74	63	91	120	125	109	109	160	183	161	148	157	188	192	173	167
INDONESIA	40	30	34	46	51	38	36	53	73	72	63	49	53	48	73	74	95
SINGAPORE	6	6	10	15	17	19	15	22	22	21	21	27	49	52	65	72	83
JAPAN	100	137	138	162	162	140	143	150	136	114	104	94	64	62	71	86	78
TAIWAN	56	46	37	47	52	44	51	52	56	58	61	58	64	76	86	80	77
MALAYSIA	8	8	5	6	3	1	5	11	11	10	14	15	35	43	53	65	69
UNITED KINGDOM	4	5	6	20	29	26	22	21	20	16	19	31	39	54	64	65	61
TURKEY	4	5	4	2	1			2	4	6	6	2	6	10	17	29	40
AUSTRALIA	5	6	8	7	5	9	6	6	6	3	5	4	11	15	13	23	29
VIETNAM	4	4	8	9	15	8	8	14	27	29	27	25	26	25	25	24	28
PAKISTAN	1	1	5	6	9	4	4	4	5	5	6	5	6	8	19	21	22
ALL OTHERS	184	187	163	182	162	152	168	211	206	195	191	199	191	199	224	264	323

Subset: Enrolled International Undergraduates Who Entered UCLA as Freshmen from High School, from 2000 to 2016.

	Fall 00	Fall 01	Fall 02	Fall 03	Fall 04	Fall 05	Fall 06	Fall 07	Fall 08	Fall 09	Fall 10	Fall 11	Fall 12	Fall 13	Fall 14	Fall 15	Fall 16
ALL INTERNATIONALS	223	215	218	249	277	290	382	414	394	418	610	1,099	1,853	2,296	2,632	2,710	2,610
CHINA, PRC	4	5	7	10	8	13	21	24	41	72	199	499	1,070	1,343	1,494	1,426	1,198
SOUTH KOREA	43	49	48	63	87	89	147	154	122	98	117	203	255	256	257	253	247
INDIA	11	9	14	20	20	18	20	16	17	30	45	69	98	152	214	264	322
CANADA	28	30	36	33	35	31	42	43	34	42	44	69	88	121	143	168	167
HONG KONG	11	12	16	13	12	10	9	12	10	9	8	12	16	31	40	43	53
INDONESIA	6	5	6	6	8	9	6	7	6	4	8	15	20	20	21	16	26
SINGAPORE	5	4	3	6	8	13	11	14	11	12	14	22	38	43	57	60	68
JAPAN	5	4	6	8	13	12	14	14	11	11	9	8	11	21	23	23	17
TAIWAN	30	23	15	19	16	13	15	19	19	22	28	35	41	49	58	52	53
MALAYSIA	5	6	4	4	2	-	1	2	2	4	8	10	32	40	49	60	60
UNITED KINGDOM	3	3	4	9	12	12	9	5	8	6	10	22	30	44	54	59	54
TURKEY	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	5	8	16	28	39
AUSTRALIA	5	6	8	5	4	9	6	6	6	2	3	2	8	12	12	21	26
VIETNAM	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	6	5	6	6	5	7	6
PAKISTAN	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	3	4	5	4	6	8	19	21	22
ALL OTHERS	65	57	48	51	50	60	80	94	100	97	105	123	129	142	170	209	252

Source: UCLA Undergraduate Admissions
Note: International undergraduate student is classified as non-resident internationals by their country of citizens

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for UCLA Administrators

Date: _____ Location: _____ Time: _____

Name: _____ Title: _____ Department: _____

Debrief and Warm-up:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview with me. I want to interview you because you are involved in UCLA's international recruitment process. This purpose of this interview is to understand the on-going UCLA re-branding initiatives for its undergraduate admissions, by specifically focusing on the international student market. If you allowed me, I will audio-tape the interview for transcripts purpose. You may still participate if you do not want our conversation to be recorded. The interview will take 30-60 minutes. Do you have any questions? Let's begin.

1. **UCLA Brand**
   a. Brand identity
      i. What is the brand that UCLA is attempting to project both domestically and globally?
         1. Is there any difference?
            a. What is the desired perception of UCLA globally?
         2. What is current UCLA brand projected in China (for prospective students)?
            a. What is the desired perception of UCLA in China for Chinese prospective students?

   b. Brand performance and judgments
      i. Compared to other top-tier universities, such as the Ivy Leagues schools and the flagship public universities in the U.S., do you think UCLA stands out from the crowd? If so, what makes UCLA special?
         1. What do you like best about UCLA?
         2. Are there any negative things?

   c. Brand image and feelings:
      i. If we use the metaphor of a car to describe UCLA, what type of car is it today? What type of car do you believe it should/could be?
      ii. Could you use three words to describe your impression of the UCLA image?
         1. What do rankings mean to UCLA? Use some of the rankings as examples.

2. **UCLA's New Branding Efforts for international enrollment**
    a. When did UCLA re-brand initiatives start?
    b. What's the goal of re-branding UCLA at this moment? What are the motivations behind the scene?
        i.   Have the recent economic struggles affected overall enrollment or any other facets of the university? Please be specific.
        ii. Does international student recruitment consider university re-branding as one of the main goals?

    c. What are the main steps of UCLA re-branding efforts in general?
        i.   What are the UCLA's current branding strategies?
        ii. What are major new branding activities?
            1. What types of branding materials have been produced? Anything special toward Chinese students?
        iii. Is there any new organizational structure in the university to make the change, such as secured human resource and funding allocation?

3. How is UCLA branding applied in the global student recruitment marketplace with a specific emphasis on China? What are the specific strategies and main efforts?
    a. There has been a great increase of undergraduate students from China at UCLA in recent years. Is it the result of the new re-branding efforts? If so, what has been done at UCLA?
    b. In your mind, to what extent are Chinese elite single children aware of the UCLA brand and how do they think about UCLA?
        i.   What's your desired UCLA brand for them?
    c. What are the main accomplishments and challenges of UCLA branding toward international students in China so far?
    d. Would you suggest any changes in UCLA's branding efforts?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Chinese International Students

Date: _____ Location: _____ Time: _____

Name: _____ High School: _____ Final Choice of University: ____

Debrief and Warm-up:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview with me. As you know, this is a study about the impact of university branding on Chinese students' motivation and choices of universities in the U.S., the following interview will focus on this topic. Although I prepared several interview questions in advance, you are more than welcome to ask questions and give your comments during the interview. I hope we will have an interactive and inspirational conversation during this interview. You are free to stop at any time or refuse to answer any questions during the interview. It will be 45-60 minutes and I will audio-tape it for the purpose of transcription if you don't mind. Do you have any questions before we start the interview? If not, why don't we start with your motivation for studying abroad first?

Section 1: Perceptions of American Higher Education and Study-Abroad Motivations

Q1: As I know, you are planning to study abroad in the U.S. for your college degree. Do you mind telling me why you want to study abroad in the U.S.?

Sub-Q1: As you can tell, more and more parents send their children abroad for undergraduate education nowadays. What do you think about this new phenomenon?

Sub-Q2: What do you think about universities in the U.S.? Why do you like American higher education?

Sub-Q2: What aspects of higher education in China make you think Chinese universities are not the best choice for you?

Sub-Q3: Is the U.S. the only country you considered to study abroad?

Q2: Have you chosen to attend college in the U.S. rather than wait until graduate school?

Sub-Q1: What's your expectation of American college education?

Q3: Do you have any friend or relative who is studying in the U.S.?

Sub-Q1: If so, do you feel their choice has some influence on you? What is it?

Section 2: Key Influential Factors in the College Selection Process

Q1: What kind of university would you like to attend? (What are the main factors that influenced your university choice?)

Sub-Q1: Why do you think these elements are important to you?

Sub-Q2: Do you have a dream university in mind already? If so, what is it? What makes you think it is probably the best choice?

Q2: In your mind, what kind of key qualifications does a top-brand American university need to have?

Sub-Q1: How important do you think the university brand is in terms of college choice?

Sub-Q2: What do you think about university ranking? How do you use it?

Q3: What kind of major or career path would you like to take? Why?

Sub-Q1: Comparing the university's overall performance (overall ranking) with its performance on the specific major (university major rankings), which one is more important to you in terms of choosing a university?

Q4: Have you received a university offer yet?

Sub-Q1: Do you mind letting me know the name of the universities?

Sub-Q2: Do you have a first choice? Which one? Why?

Section 3: Perceptions and Choice of UCLA

Q1: Do you know about UCLA?

Sub-Q1: How did you hear about UCLA?

Sub-Q2: How familiar are you with UCLA?

Sub-Q3: What don't you know about UCLA?

Q2: What's your impression of UCLA?

Sub-Q1: If you had to let your parents know about UCLA, how would you describe it?

Sub-Q2: What about UCLA impresses/attract you most?

Sub-Q3: If UCLA was presented by a type of car, what kind of car it would be? What color is it?

Q3: Did you apply to UCLA? Why or Why not?

Sub-Q1: If so, have you received an offer from UCLA? Will you accept it? Why?

Section 5: Interactions with Parents for the Goal of Study-abroad

Q1: Can you tell me about your family?

Sub-Q1: What are your parents' occupations?

Sub-Q2: What are your parent's education levels?

Sub-Q3: Does your family have any connections in the U.S., such as relatives, friends and etc.?

Q2: What do you discuss most with your parents in terms of study-abroad in the U.S.?

Sub-Q1: Who raised the idea of study-abroad first in your family, you or your parents?

Sub-Q2: How much do your parents support your decision to study-abroad?

Sub-Q3: Do you have a different opinion on study-abroad from your parents? If so, what is it?

Q3: What are your parents' expectations of your choice of universities and your majors in the university?

Appendix F: Survey Instrument for Chinese International Students (English)

Survey for Prospective Chinese International Students

Dear Student Participants,

My name is Jing Xu, and I am a third-year PhD student from Education Department at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This survey is being conducted for an on-going dissertation project in partial fulfillment for the doctor of philosophy degree at UCLA. The survey aims to examine the characteristics and determinants of Chinese high school students' outflow to US for undergraduate education, including the motivations to study abroad and college choice. It is also designed to explore Chinese students' perception of American universities by taking UCLA as one example.

Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. The survey is anonymous and you should take the survey on an individual base. It will take about 30 minutes in total. Your participation will have no impact on your performance review in your high school, nor will it adversely affect your chances of admitted to UCLA. You could review and revise your answer by clicking "<<" to go back to the previous pages. You could also choose to skip the questions you do not like to answer, or stop taking survey at any time you want. All your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Please answer openly and truthfully.

In the end of the survey, you will be asked to indicate if you would volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview which will cover the same topic as the survey does, including 1) your motivation to study abroad in the US; 2) your preference and choice of university in the U.S.; 3) your impression of UCLA. The interview will be conducted by me during your convenient time and location.

You could always contact me for any question about this survey at jenniexu@ucla.edu. If you decide to participate in this survey study, you could click ">>" in the bottom to start the survey now! Thank you very much for your cooperation and contribution!

Sincerely,

Jing Xu

Part I: Personal Background

1. Your Gender

   ◉ Male   ◉ Female

247

2. Are you the only child in your family?
　◎ Yes　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　◎ No

3. Your high school name: _____

4. Your high school program:
　◎ International program in a Chinese high school
　◎ Regular program in a Chinese high school
　◎ International school in China
　◎ High school abroad

5. How many AP, A-level or IB courses have you taken so far? Write down the number of classes if you have any.
　AP _____　A-Level _____　IB _____

6.: Your score of TOEFL or IELTS:
　TOEFL _____　　IELTS _____

7. Your score of SAT:
　Total _____　　Critical reading _____
　Math _____　　Writing _____

8. Please mark your TOP THREE intended majors:
　◎ Arts (Music, Media/Film Studies, Theater/Drama)
　◎ Humanities (Literature, History, Philosophy etc.)
　◎ Biological & Life Science
　◎ Business (Accounting, Finance, Management etc.)
　◎ Mathematics
　◎ Computer Science
　◎ Physical Science (Astronomy, Chemistry, Physics etc.)
　◎ Social Science (Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Sociology, Political Science, Public Policy etc.)
　◎ Education
　◎ Engineering
　◎ Other
　◎ Undecided

9. What's the HIGHEST academic degree that you intend to obtain?
　◎Bachelor's degree　　◎ Master's degree　　◎ Doctoral degree　　◎ Other

10. What is the HIGHEST level of education attained by your parents?

	Middle school or lower	High school	Vocational high school	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree	Other
Father	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Mother	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎

11. Has any of your parents attended college abroad or traveled abroad?

	Study abroad		Travel abroad		Work abroad	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Father	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mother	○	○	○	○	○	○

12. How many cars does your family own?

○ 0   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ > 2

13. How many books does your family own, not including your textbooks.

○ 0-25   ○ 26-50   ○ 51-100   ○ 100-200   ○ > 200

14. Do you own any electronic devices below?

○ IPad   ○ PC/ Laptop   ○ Cellphone

15. Please indicate your intended occupation, as well as your parents' current occupations.

	Your Intended Occupation	Your Father's Occupation	Your Mother's Occupation
Government cadre	○	○	○
Professional	○	○	○
Clerical staff	○	○	○
Intellectual	○	○	○
Business executive	○	○	○
Business owner	○	○	○
Small business owner	○	○	○
Artist	○	○	○
Factor worker	○	○	○
Farmer	○	○	○
Homemaker	○	○	○
Self-employed	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○

* Government Cadre: officials, policy makers and leaders in local or central government.
Professional: specialized in one field, such as law, medicine or computer science.
Intellectual: individuals produce or teach knowledge, such as professors, teachers, or researchers.
Business owner: more than 8 employers.
Small business owner: less than 8 employers.
Artist: specialized in art, music, design and movie.

16. What is your primary source of financial support for studying abroad:

○ Parents   ○ Relatives   ○ Fellowship/Scholarship   ○ Personal saving

17. Have you received any fellowships/scholarships from higher education institutions in the U.S.?

Yes ○   No ○

18. Please rate your high school academic performance from following aspects. Please make the MOST ACCURATE estimate of how you see yourself. (1 means rare, 5 means extremely often.)

	1	2	3	4	5
Ask questions in class	○	○	○	○	○
Support your opinions with a logical argument	○	○	○	○	○
Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others	○	○	○	○	○

Seek alternative solutions to a problem ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Explore topics not required for a class ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Accept mistakes as part of the learning process ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Seek feedback on your academic work ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

19. How confident do you feel about your ability to finance your college education abroad? (1 means extremely unconfident, 5 means extremely confident.)

○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5

20. Please rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the peers in your age. Please make the MOST ACCURATE estimate of how you see yourself.

	Lowest 10%	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Highest 10%
Competitiveness	○	○	○	○	○
Cooperativeness	○	○	○	○	○
Leadership ability	○	○	○	○	○
Popularity	○	○	○	○	○
Self-confidence (intellectual)	○	○	○	○	○
Self-confidence (social)	○	○	○	○	○
English skills	○	○	○	○	○
Math skills	○	○	○	○	○

21. Please indicate your behavior in school. (1 means rare, 5 means extremely often.)

	1	2	3	4	5
Join student union or a student club	○	○	○	○	○
Consider your behavior or words could influence others	○	○	○	○	○
Lead a team to achieve a goal	○	○	○	○	○
Open to have your own views challenged	○	○	○	○	○

22. Indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following (1 means extremely unimportant, 5 means extremely important):

	1	2	3	4	5
Becoming a community/organization/business leader	○	○	○	○	○
Influencing social values	○	○	○	○	○
Helping others who are in difficulty	○	○	○	○	○
Drive to achieve excellence	○	○	○	○	○
Hard working	○	○	○	○	○
Being very well off financially	○	○	○	○	○
Understand myself	○	○	○	○	○
Contribute to my family	○	○	○	○	○

Party II: College Application and Selection

23. Have you ever been abroad?

○ Yes   ○ No

24. Why did you go abroad?
◎ Travel and sightseeing   ◎ University tour or short-term camp or school
◎ Visiting family members or friends   ◎ Other

25. Which countries have you been visited?
◎ U.S.   ◎ U.K.   ◎ Canada   ◎ Australia   ◎ Singapore   ◎ Japan   ◎ France
◎ Others _____

26. Why did you travel to the U.S.?
◎ Travel, visit family members or friends   ◎ Summer or winter camp
◎ Enrolled in a school in the U.S.   ◎ Other

27. Below are some factors that might have influenced your choice of college in the U.S. Please indicate the FIVE most important factors to you.
◎ Become an international talent   ◎ Take care of Parents in the future
◎ Lack of confidence in China's higher education quality   ◎ Improving Chinese society after returning to China

◎ Interested in American culture   ◎ Preparation for immigrating to the U.S.
◎ Lack of confidence in overall environment in China (environmental pollution, food security etc.)   ◎ College admissions in China is too competitive and unfair

◎ My parents' advice   ◎ Freedom to choose my interest

◎ Peer pressure from study-abroad fever   ◎ Diverse, open and democratic environment in the U.S.

◎ Better chance to find a better job   ◎ Have relatives in the U.S.
◎ Become more professional   ◎ High quality of higher education in the U.S.
◎ Become more independent   ◎ Global brand of top American universities

28. How many relatives or friends do you have in the U.S.?
◎ 0   ◎ 1-3   ◎ 4-6   ◎ 7-9   ◎ > 10

29. When was the FIRST time you consider to study in the U.S.?
◎Primary school   ◎Junior high
◎ First year in high school   ◎ Second year in high school
◎ Third year in high school

30. How many universities/colleges have you applied to this academic year? (write down the number in the blank). _____

31. Within all the schools you applied to, which three do you prefer to attend most?
First choice _____ Second choice_____ Third choice _____

32. Please score the importance of following reasons for you to attend college in the US. The total score should be 100.
University overall ranking   _____
University major ranking   _____
Campus culture   _____
Safety   _____

Future job opportunity _____
Cost _____
Total 100

33. Please indicate the level of consideration of each ranking to you when you applying for universities in the U.S. (1 means low, 3 means high)

	1	2	3
Academic Ranking of World Universities from Shanghai Jiaotong University (ARWU)	○	○	○
Forbes College Rankings	○	○	○
London Times Higher Education Rankings	○	○	○
Washington Monthly Rankings	○	○	○

34. How frequently do you use the service from Chinese study abroad agency to improve the quality of your college applications and to help you select universities? (1 means never, 5 means full-service)
  ○1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5

35. Who influenced you MOST when you make your college decision?
  ○ High school teacher
  ○ College counselor in my high school
  ○ Parents
  ○ Chinese study abroad agency
  ○ Classmates and friends
  ○ Chinese international students studying in the U.S.

36. In deciding to go to college, how important to you was each of the following reasons?

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
Become a more cultured person	○	○	○
Gain a wider range of knowledge and insights	○	○	○
Prepare for graduate or professional school	○	○	○
Get a better job	○	○	○
Explore personal interests	○	○	○
Gain professional skills in the filed	○	○	○
Make a larger and better contribution to the society	○	○	○
Make more money	○	○	○
Meet parents' expectation	○	○	○

37. What are the first three university names comes to your mind when you think about the most prestigious American institutions.
  1. _____   2. _____   3._____

38. Do you have any university inspires you most to attend? If so, please write down its name after check "Yes".
  ○ Yes _____   ○ No

Part III: UCLA Brand

39. Have you heard about UCLA?
  ○Yes   ○ No

40. Have you ever visited UCLA campus?

◎ Yes   ◎ No

41. How much do you know about UCLA?

◎ Only heard of its name   ◎ Little   ◎ Somewhat   ◎ A lot

42. Where do you receive most of your information about UCLA? (multiple choice)
◎ Parents   ◎ UCLA school website
◎ Classmates and friends   ◎ Traditional media (TV, newspaper, magazine)
◎ Study abroad agency   ◎ Social media (Weibo, Renren and other online
                                               forums)
◎ UCLA admission officer   ◎ Online search engines (Baidu, google)
◎ UCLA faculties, students, and alumni   ◎ Other

43. In your eyes, which following title fits to UCLA most?

◎ Well-known top-tier California university
◎ Well-known top-tier American university
◎ Well-known world-class university
44. What are the first three things come to your mind when you think about UCLA?
 1. _____   2. _____   3. _____

45. How much do you think the following statements describe UCLA? (1 means strongly disagree, 5 means strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Limitless opportunities	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
High-end	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Collaborative	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Modern	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Excellent	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Large	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎

46. How much do you like UCLA? (1 means extremely dislike, 5 means extremely like)

◎ 1   ◎ 2   ◎ 3   ◎ 4   ◎ 5

47. How much do you think UCLA will satisfy your needs for higher education in the U.S.? (1 means very bad, 5 means very good)
◎ 1   ◎ 2   ◎ 3   ◎ 4   ◎ 5

48. To which extent, UCLA makes you feel (1means very low, 5 means very high):

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Warm	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Fun	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Excited	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Socially approved	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Vibrant	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
Forging ahead	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎

Open and inclusive	○	○	○	○	○	○
Rigorous	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competitive	○	○	○	○	○	○

49. Do you think you particularly like UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

50. Considering all American universities, which class do you think UCLA belongs to?
○ Lower-middle tier   ○ Middle tier   ○ Upper-middle tier   ○ Upper tier

51. In your opinion, comparing to other top universities in the U.S., what is the biggest advantage and disadvantage of UCLA?
Advantage_____   Disadvantage _____

52. Please evaluate the performance of UCLA from following traits. (1 means worst, 5 means best)

	1	2	3	4	5
Academic and Research Performance	○	○	○	○	○
Teaching Quality	○	○	○	○	○
Service and Contribution to Society	○	○	○	○	○
Diverse and Multicultural Campus	○	○	○	○	○

53. Do you always want to learn more about UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

54. Do you always pay attention to the news about UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

55. Did you apply to UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

56. Please indicate the main reason you didn't apply to UCLA.
_____

57. Are you admitted to UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

58. Will you attend UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

59. Please indicate your main reason of attending UCLA.
_____
_____ 60. Do you feel proud of being admitted to UCLA?
○ Yes   ○ No

61. Did you attend the UCLA reception in Shanghai or Beijing for admitted students this April?
○ Yes   ○ No

62. Please indicate your main reason of not attending UCLA.
_____

63. Please write down the name of the universities which you are admitted to. (If you received more than five admission offers, please write down your top five choices.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

64. Please indicate your final choice of the university/college and the major.

University/College _____Major_____

65.Would you like to take an interview with me on your college choice?
 ○ Yes   ○ No

66. If you accept my interview invitation or want to know more about this dissertation research, please leave your contact information below.
 Email: _____   Phone: _____
 QQ: _____   Skype: _____

End of the Survey

    Thank you very much for your time to take this survey! If you have any questions about the survey, you are most welcome to contact me at jenniexu@ucla.edu. Don't forget to click the ">>" on this page to finish this survey and have your response record. Best Luck for your study!

Appendix G: Survey Instrument for Chinese International Students (Chinese)

<div align="center">

中国本科留美学生调查问卷

</div>

亲爱的同学，你好！

  我是来自 UCLA 教育与信息研究生院的三年级博士研究生徐婧。非常感谢您考虑自愿参与有关中国本科留美学生调查研究并填写相关问卷。这一研究是我博士论文的一部分，旨在了解中国本科留美学生的出国动因、选校倾向和对美国高校的主观评价(以 UCLA 为案例研究)。

  参与此次问卷调查采取完全自愿的原则。您的参与不会影响到您的高中在校成绩或 UCLA 对您的录取倾向。问卷填写所需时间大概在 30 分钟左右。为保护所有参与研究的学生的隐私权益和问卷的有效度，此问卷调查以无记名的方式进行，并需要您独立完成。在填写过程中，您可以通过点击"<<"来回顾和修改您在之前页面的回答。您也有权利跳过您不想回答的问题，或者在您需要的时候中断问卷填写。您的所有回答将被严格保密，所以请认真、诚恳地回答问题。

  问卷最后会提示您是否愿意接受一次问卷后一对一的个人访谈。访谈的主题也是有关出国留学的，主要包括 1）您留学美国的动因；2）您对美国大学偏好和选择；3）您对 UCLA 的印象。访谈将会选择在您方便的时间和地点进行。

  如果您对此次问卷调查有任何问题，请通过通过电子邮件 *jenniexu@ucla.edu* 与我联系。如果您决定参与此次问卷调查，您即可以通过点击页面底端的">>"键来开始您的问卷填写。 非常感谢您的合作和参与!

此致，

<div align="center">

敬礼！

</div>

<div align="right">

徐婧

加州大学洛杉矶分校

教育与信息研究生院

2013 年 2 月

</div>

第一部分：个人背景

1. 性别

◎ 男   ◎ 女

2. 你是否为独生子女？

◎ 是   ◎ 否

3. 就读高中:

_____

4. 所在班级:

◎ 国内高中的国际班

◎ 国内高中的普通班/重点班

◎ 国内的国际学校

◎ 国外高中

5. 在以下不同类别的国际课程中，你分别修了哪些课程？请在空格里填写所修课程的相关数目。

 AP _____   A-Level _____   IB _____

6.: 你的托福或雅思的成绩:

 TOEFL _____   IELTS _____

7. SAT 成绩:

 Total _____   Critical reading _____
 Math _____   Writing _____

8. 你最有兴趣就读的三个专业是:

◎ 艺术类   ◎ 人文类   ◎ 生物与生命科学   ◎ 商科

◎ 数学   ◎ 计算机科学   ◎ 理科   ◎ 社会科学

◎ 教育   ◎ 工程   ◎ 未定

9. 你认为自己将会获得的最高学历是什么?

◎本科   ◎硕士   ◎博士   ◎ 其他

10. 你父母所获得的最高学历是：

	初中	高中	中专	大专	本科	硕士	博士	其它
父亲	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
母亲	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

11. 你的父母是否有以下出国经历？

	出国留学		出国旅游		出国公干/出差/进修	
	是	否	是	否	是	否
父亲	○	○	○	○	○	○
母亲	○	○	○	○	○	○

12. 你家拥有汽车的数量是多少？

○ 0   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 2 以上

13. 你全家的藏书量大概是多少？（不包括你的课本和辅导用书）

○ 0-25   ○ 26-50   ○ 51-100   ○ 100-200   ○ 200 以上

14. 以下电子产品中，你拥有哪些？

○ IPad   ○ 个人电脑/笔记本电脑   ○ 个人手机

15. 请选择你将来希望从事的职业，以及你父母目前正在从事的职业。

	你希望从事的职业	父亲职业	母亲职业
政府公职人员	○	○	○
专业人士	○	○	○
一般企事业办公人员	○	○	○
知识分子	○	○	○
企业经理或高管	○	○	○
私营企业主	○	○	○
小商户	○	○	○
艺术类工作	○	○	○
工人	○	○	○
农民	○	○	○

家庭主妇／主夫	◎	◎	◎
自由职业	◎	◎	◎
其它	◎	◎	◎

* 职务解释: 政府公职人员:公务员、政府领导

专业人员: 在某一领域具有特长的高级专业人才，如医生、律师、工程师等

知识分子:以生产和传播知识为主的工作人员，如教授、教师、科研人员

私营企业主:雇员超过 8 人

小商户:雇员少于 8 人

16. 你本科留学经费的主要来源是:

◎ 父母　　　　　　◎ 亲戚　　　　　　◎ 大学奖学金　　　　　◎ 个人存款

17. 你是否获得美国大学的奖学金?

是 ◎　　　　　　　　　　　　　　否 ◎

18. 请评估你在高中阶段的一些学习表现，尽量接近你最真实的情况。（1 为非常少，5 为非常频繁）

	1	2	3	4	5
在课堂中提问	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
向他人阐述如何解决某个问题	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
评估所获得信息的质量和可信度	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
寻求解决问题的另一种方式	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
探索学业要求以外的问题	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
接受犯错是学习的一部分	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
寻求学业上的反馈	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎

19. 你对负担留学费用的信心是多少? (1 为非常没有信心, 5 为非常有信心)

◎ 1　　　　　　◎ 2　　　　　　◎ 3　　　　　　◎ 4　　　　　　◎ 5

20. 相较你的同龄人，请对以下能力做一个自我评价。

	最后 10%	低于平均	平均	高于平均	前 10%
竞争力	○	○	○	○	○
合作能力	○	○	○	○	○
领导力	○	○	○	○	○
受欢迎程度	○	○	○	○	○
智力水平	○	○	○	○	○
社交能力	○	○	○	○	○
英语能力	○	○	○	○	○
数学能力	○	○	○	○	○

21. 请评估你在学校的以下行为。 （1 为非常少，5 为非常频繁）

	1	2	3	4	5
参加学生会或其他学生组织	○	○	○	○	○
考虑你的言行对他人可能产生的影响	○	○	○	○	○
带领一个小组达成一个共同的目标	○	○	○	○	○
对反对意见持开放态度	○	○	○	○	○

22. 请评估以下选项对你的重要程度 。 （1 为非常不重要，5 为非常重要）

	1	2	3	4	5
成为一个组织/企业的领导者	○	○	○	○	○
用自身言行来影响社会价值观	○	○	○	○	○
帮助那些有困难的人	○	○	○	○	○
追求卓越	○	○	○	○	○
努力学习、刻苦奋斗	○	○	○	○	○
物质回报，经济富裕	○	○	○	○	○
认识自己	○	○	○	○	○
为父母与家族的未来作出贡献	○	○	○	○	○

第二部分：申请/选择美国大学

23. 你是否有出国的经历?

◎ 是 ◎ 否

24. 你出国的目的是：

◎ 观光旅游 ◎ 游学 ◎ 探亲访友 ◎ 其它

25. 你曾去过哪些国家?

◎ 美国 ◎ 英国 ◎ 加拿大 ◎ 澳大利亚 ◎ 新加坡 ◎ 日本 ◎ 法国

◎ 其它 _____

26. 你之前去美国的目的是：

◎ 观光旅游，探亲访友 ◎ 暑假或寒假的游学（包括各种暑期学校）

◎ 在学期中就读美国的学校 ◎ 其它

27. 你选择去美国读本科的最主要原因是什么? （请从以下选项中选择对你来说最主要的五个。）

◎ 对目前中国高等教育的质量缺乏信心 ◎ 为今后能更好地照顾父母

◎ 成为跨国际的人才 ◎ 为回国后能更好地改变和促进中国的
进步

◎ 认为高考制度不合理，竞争太为激烈 ◎ 为移民美国做准备

◎ 对中国国内环境的担忧，如食品安全、环 ◎ 对美国文化感兴趣
境问题等

◎ 我父母建议我出国 ◎ 有空间做自己想做或感兴趣的事情

◎ 周围太多人都选择了出国，我不想落后于 ◎ 喜欢美国多元、开放、民主的氛围
人

◎ 美国大学文凭能获得更好的就业机会 ◎ 我有亲戚在美国

◎ 使自己在今后的职业生涯中更为专业 ◎ 美国大学的优质教育与学术水平

◎ 让自己更独立自主 ◎ 美国顶尖大学的全球品牌

28. 你目前在美国的朋友和亲戚的一共有：

◎ 0 ◎ 1-3 ◎ 4-6 ◎ 7-9 ◎ 多于 10

29. 你从何时开始考虑去美国留学?

◎小学　　　　◎初中　　　　◎高一　　　　◎高二　　　　◎高三

30. 你一共申请了_____所美国大学?

31. 在你所申请的大学中，最希望能就读的前三所是什么?

第一选择：_____　　第二选择：_____　　第三选择：_____

32. 以下是你在选择美国大学时可能会考虑到的一些因素。请根据它们对你的重要程度给每一项打分，各项加起来总分为 100 分。

大学综合排名　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

大学专业排名　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

校园文化与氛围　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

安全　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

未来工作机会　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

费用　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　————

总分　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　100

33. 请表明你参考以下各项大学排名的程度。（1 为非常低，3 为非常高）

	1	2	3
上海交大世界大学排名	◎	◎	◎
福布斯大学排名	◎	◎	◎
泰晤士报世界大学排名	◎	◎	◎
《华盛顿月刊》大学排名	◎	◎	◎

34. 在申请和选择美国大学的过程中，你使用留学机构/中介相关服务的程度是:

◎完全没有　　◎少量的咨询　　◎一般　　◎较多的咨询　　◎全权委托

35. 在以下这些人或机构中，对你如何选择美国大学影响最大的是哪一个?

◎高中老师　◎升学指导老师　◎父母　◎留学中介　◎同学和朋友　◎留美中国学生

36. 以下选项提供了一些上大学的动因 (无论在国内还是国外)。请评估这些动因对你的重要性。

	不重要	有些重要	非常重要
成为一个有文化与修养的人	○	○	○
获得更广阔的知识和见解	○	○	○
为进入研究生院做准备	○	○	○
获得一份好工作	○	○	○
探索个人兴趣	○	○	○
发展个人专业特长	○	○	○
更好地贡献社会	○	○	○
获得更多的经济回报	○	○	○
实现父母的期望	○	○	○

37. 你所知道的美国著名大学有哪些？请列举出你最先想到的三个。
 1. _____ 2. _____ 3._____

38. 你是否有最向往就读的美国大学？如果有，请写出这所大学的名字。
○是 _____   ○ 否

第三部分：UCLA 的大学品牌

39. 你是否知道加州大学洛杉矶分校？
○是   ○ 否

40. 你是否到过 UCLA?
○ 是   ○ 否

41. 你对 UCLA 有多少了解?
○ 仅听说过它的名字   ○ 较少了解   ○ 有所了解   ○ 非常了解

42. 你对 UCLA 的了解主要来自于(多选)：
○父母   ○ UCLA 官网
○ 同学、朋友   ○ 传统媒体（电视，报刊杂志）
○ 留学中介   ○ 社交媒体（微博，人人，其它网络论坛）
○ 招生官   ○ 网络搜索（百度，谷歌等）
○ 教授、校友或学生   ○ 其它

43. 在你眼中，UCLA 的大学形象更符合以下哪一个选项？

　○加州著名大学　　　　　　○全美著名大学　　　　　　○著名世界一流大学

44. 当你想到 UCLA 时，最先联想到的是什么?(列举出三点)

　1.＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿　　2.＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿　　3.＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

45. 你认为以下选项在何种程度上描绘了 UCLA?　（1 为非常不贴切，5 为非常贴切）

	1	2	3	4	5	不知道
充满机会的	○	○	○	○	○	○
高端的	○	○	○	○	○	○
合作的	○	○	○	○	○	○
现代的	○	○	○	○	○	○
卓越的	○	○	○	○	○	○
巨大的	○	○	○	○	○	○

46. 你对 UCLA 的好感程度是多少?　（1 为很差，5 为很好）

　○ 1　　　　　　○ 2　　　　　　○ 3　　　　　　○ 4　　　　　　○ 5

47. 你认为 UCLA 在多大程度上能满足你对本科留学的需求?　（1 为很差，5 为很好）

　○ 1　　　　　　○ 2　　　　　　○ 3　　　　　　○ 4　　　　　　○ 5

48. 在多大程度上，UCLA 让你感觉到 （1 为非常低，5 为非常高）：

	1	2	3	4	5	不知道
温暖人心的	○	○	○	○	○	○
开心有趣的	○	○	○	○	○	○
令人兴奋的	○	○	○	○	○	○
被社会认可的	○	○	○	○	○	○
活力四射的	○	○	○	○	○	○
开拓进取的	○	○	○	○	○	○
开放包容的	○	○	○	○	○	○
严谨严肃的	○	○	○	○	○	○

有竞争力的　　　　　　　　　　○　　○　　○　　○　　○　　　○

49. 你是否特别钟爱 UCLA?

○ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　○ 否

50. 你认为 UCLA 在所有美国大学中处于哪一个水平?

○ 中等偏下　　　　○ 中等　　　　○ 中等偏上　　　　○ 顶尖

51. 与其他美国顶尖大学相比，你认为 UCLA 的最大优势和劣势分别是什么?

优势：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿　　劣势：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

52. 请对 UCLA 在以下这些方面作出你的评价。（1 为最差，5 为最好）

	1	2	3	4	5
学术与科研水平	○	○	○	○	○
教学质量	○	○	○	○	○
对社会的服务与贡献	○	○	○	○	○
多元的校园文化	○	○	○	○	○

53. 你是否总是希望能多了解一些 UCLA?

○ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　○ 否

54. 你是否经常关注 UCLA 的相关新闻与信息?

○ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　○ 否

55. 你是否申请了 UCLA?

○ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　○ 否

56. 你没有申请 UCLA 的最主要原因是:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

57. 你是否收到了 UCLA 的录取通知书?

○ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　○ 否

58. 你是否决定就读 UCLA?

　◎ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　　◎ 否

59. 你选择就读 UCLA 的最主要原因是: _____

60.你是否因收到 UCLA 的录取通知书而感到自豪?

　◎ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　　◎ 否

61. 你是否参加了今年 4 月 UCLA 在上海或北京为已被录取学生举办的宣讲会?

　◎ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　　◎ 否

62. 你没有选择就读 UCLA 的最主要原因是什么?

_____

63. 到目前为止，你获得了哪些美国大学的录取通知书?（请填写所有已获得录取的大学的校名。如果你被 5 所以上的美国大学录取，请填写出你最中意的前 5 所大学。）

　1. _____
　2. _____
　3. _____
　4. _____
　5. _____

64. 你最终选择就读的大学和专业是:

大学: _____　专业： _____

65. 最后，请问您是否愿意接受一次有关您如何选择美国大学的个人访谈? 作为感谢，我非常乐意与您分享我对美国高等教育的了解，以及我在美国的学习与生活经验。

　◎ 是　　　　　　　　　　　　　　◎ 否

66. 如果您接受了我的访谈邀请，或希望进一步了解我博士论文研究。请留下您的联系方式。我会通过以下 联系方式尽快与您联系。

邮箱: _____　电话： _____

QQ：　　　_____　　Skype：　_____

结束

非常感谢您完成了这份调查问卷！如有任何问题，请通过以下邮箱与我联系：*jenniexu@ucla.edu*。 最后，请不要忘记在此页面上点击"＞＞＞"，以便系统能记录下您的所有回答。 预祝您在美国的本科学习和生活顺利愉快！

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