

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Assessing the Understanding of “Suzhi” of Chinese Students Studying at elite U.S. Colleges

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

On December 16, 1978, China and the United States announced simultaneously in Beijing and Washington that the two countries would establish diplomatic relations; just ten days later, the first wave of fifty students from People's Republic of China landed in the United States. Although this was one of the most important moments during the Sino-American history, the history of sending Chinese students to the United States can be traced back to the 1800s, when modernization was the priority for the entire nation. Students went to the United States to learn military and mechanical knowledge in order to lead China to the track of modernization. Yung Wing, who was the first Chinese student graduated from Yale University in 1854, recalled in his later years:

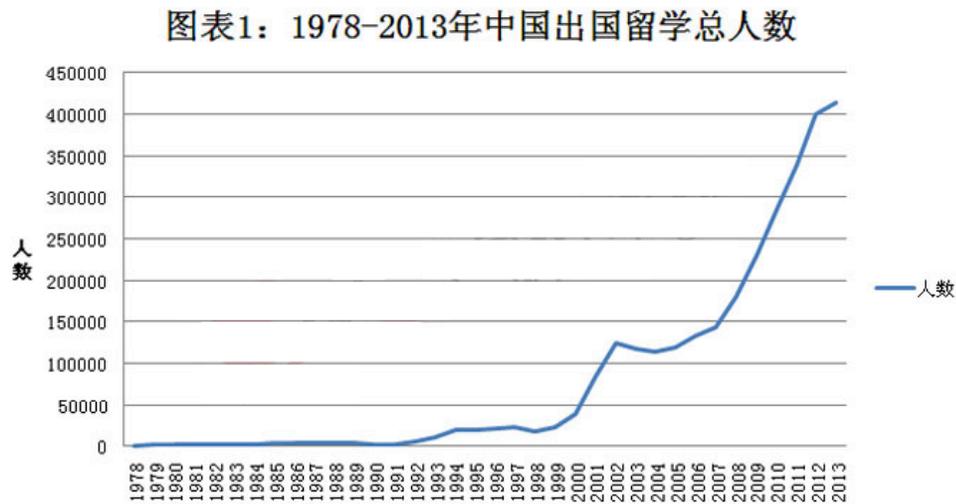
“I was determined that the rising generation in China should enjoy the same educational advantages that I had enjoyed; that through Western education China might be regenerated, become enlightened and powerful.”

--Yung Wing, MY LIFE IN CHINA AND AMERICA, 1909

The purpose of studying abroad, according to Ning Qian, is rooted in Chinese people's dream of their country's becoming strong; “learn from the advanced technologies in the West in order to resist the invasion of the Western powers” was the most famous slogan during the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895), which was a period of institutional reforms initiated during the late Qing dynasty following a series of military defeats and concessions to foreign powers (Qian, 2002). 160 years later, the People's Republic of China has become one of the world's largest economies. Related to this change, more and more Chinese students go to schools in the United States every

year, and China has become the source of the largest number of foreign students to the United States, with nearly 290,000 foreign students entering on an F-1 visa during the 2008-2012 period, according to a report from the Brookings Institution<sup>1</sup>. The Chinese international student boom did not occur until the 21st century, despite the fact that the Chinese government started to encourage self-supported study abroad since 1993. The following chart illustrates the trend of the growing number of Chinese students who went to study abroad, to all foreign countries, including the US:

Graph 1: Total number of Chinese students went studying abroad from 1978-2013.  
Source: "Statistical Yearbook of China", published by the State Statistical Bureau, PRC



According to a report provided by Ernst & Young, more than 50% of those students go to the United States; in 2013, 29% of them were undergraduate students, and 90% of them are supported by family fund, that is, by their own families' incomes<sup>2</sup>. The Brookings Institution also points out that 7 cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou,

<sup>1</sup> [www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/geography-of-foreign-students](http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/geography-of-foreign-students)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-china-overseas-study-market-analysis-report-2014-cn/\\$FILE/EY-China-Overseas-Study-Market-Analysis-Report-2014-cn.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-china-overseas-study-market-analysis-report-2014-cn/$FILE/EY-China-Overseas-Study-Market-Analysis-Report-2014-cn.pdf)

Chengdu, Wuhan and Shenzhen, in descending order) from China are on the list of top 20 cities in the world that send most of International students to the United States.

In 2000 a journalistic account of the cultivation of a Harvard student in China titled [*Harvard girl Liu Yiting: A chronicle of quality education*] was published in China, and soon became the bestseller for years. According to Kipnis, this book has gone through 63 printings (at the last count) and sold over 1.75 million copies. Liu Yiting herself became a “phenomenon”, and parents use the book as a “manual” to raise their children. The “Harvard Girl” book catalyzed the Ivy League/Western Top School Dream, which has been embedded in Chinese people’ mind since the 1800s. Although it might or might not be able to explain the “study abroad fever” that occurred around 2000, the “Harvard Girl” book did bring the debate of “Quality Education” to the public, since Liu Yiting and her parents claimed that the American, or Western education is the model of “Quality-oriented Education”, and Liu herself has been regarded as a role-model of a high quality student. She made the following statement in her book:

美国的名牌大学招生，一向不仅仅以学生的分数为取舍，而是要综合考察学生的成绩、品德、创造力、发展潜力等多种因素后，再做决定。因此，被名牌大学录取本身，就意味着学生素质的全面发展和胜人一筹。

—哈佛女孩刘亦婷

*The admission process of top colleges in the United States does not rely on cut-off lines. Instead, admission officers make decisions after accessing factors like merit, morality, creativity and potentials in a holistic way. As a result, being accepted to a top college in the United States means a student*

*has better developed overall **Suzhi** (quality).*

—“*Harvard Girl*”, Yiting Liu

There are two concepts I need to introduce here: Quality (Suzhi), and Quality Education (Suzhi Jiaoyu). The original meaning of suzhi, according to Kipnis, is “a compound of the characters su (素) and zhi (質). Zhi means ‘nature, character or matter,’ while su has many meanings including unadorned, plain, white and essence.”(Kipnis, 2006) Kipnis also points out that the meanings of Suzhi have undergone a continuous transformation since the end of the Culture Revolution; “Raising the quality of the Chinese population” became an important part of the propaganda at that time (2006). The concept of “Quality Education” emerged in 1988. The traditional Chinese education system has been criticized as “Examination-oriented Education”: the College Entrance Examination, called the *gaokao*, (literally, the “high examination”), is the sole way to college for most Chinese students, and students have intense and heavy study loads because they need to deal with fierce competition in the College Entrance Examination. In 1985 the CCP Central Committee declared that "raising the suzhi of the people of the nation was the basic goal of education system reform", and the concept of “Quality Education” emerged in 1988 as an alternative for “Examination-oriented Education”.

Many research studies about quality and Quality Education exist in academia. Anagnost, one of those anthropologists who contributed to the theorizing of *suzhi*, points out that quality is related to modernity, civility, and civilization and is represented by the middle-class single child (Anagnost, 2004); Woronov argues that “quality education” is “a set of biopolitical techniques aimed at cultivating a generation of children who will

embody and enact China's modernity and power on the world stage", as opposed to "Examination-oriented Education", which has dominated China for decades (Woronov, 2009). Anthropologists also notice the deficiencies of China's "quality education". Dello-Iacovo argues "the goals of the new curriculum (quality education) are still not reflected in the examinations and frequently conflict with teacher, student and parental goals in a society where examination outcomes have life long consequences" (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). However, none of this research was conducted in a global context and they only focused on "Quality" or "quality education" in one single culture.

What I found interesting is, Fong points out that Chinese people always believe that citizens of the developed world have "high quality" (gao suzhi), whereas citizens of the developing world (like China) do not; and she believes that is an important reason that Chinese students want to go study abroad (Fong, 2011). This statement is related to the quote from Liu Yiting, which claims that the education in the United States focus more on students' "Quality", and being accepted to a top college in the United States is a mark of "High Quality". At the same time, the purposes of Chinese students coming to the Western countries have been changing as well. In the past, the most frequent reasons for Chinese students to go abroad was to become "gold-coated" to be more competitive in the job market back in China; others might use studying abroad as a short-cut for immigration. However, pursuing "Quality Education" is becoming an important reason in its own right. One parent who sends her kid abroad indicated "In the U.S. they focus on creative-thinking skills, while in China they only focus on theory," she says. "So what university students learn here doesn't prepare them for the real world." Another student,

when reflecting on the Chinese classroom, says, “Chinese values require me to be a good listener, and Western values require me to be a good speaker.”<sup>3</sup>

Although *suzhi* is wildly used by different people, people have different understanding of this word, even among those people who are regarded as “high quality people” by Yiting Liu, which are those who got accepted by top colleges in the United States. In the context of globalization, a research study of those students who are currently studying in the Western countries could help us to have a better understanding of how the notion of Quality is perceived, and how it has changed overtime. Currently, the only literature that focuses on both Chinese students and Quality oversea is Vanessa Fong’s (2011) Paradise Redefined, which mainly focuses on students who lack academic achievement and family wealth from Dalian; some of them even sell their houses and borrow money from friends and relatives go study abroad (Fong, 2011). However, mega cities, instead of relatively smaller cities like Dalian, a peripheral city in northern China, tend to have more resources and produce more students. Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing are the three largest feeder cities for students in the US and contribute almost a hundred thousand students in total. What is more, almost all subjects in Fong’s research attended “far less prestigious foreign-language schools, for-profit, technical, or community colleges, or low-ranked universities” (Fong, 2011). Yiting Liu’s quote earlier in the introduction, however, only talks about that being accepted by a “*top colleges in the United States*” could be an indication of “high quality”. At the same time, China now has held the top spot in foreign countries represented at many top colleges like University of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/education/07china-t.html>

North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of California, Berkeley, or Cornell University for the past five years. As a result, Fong's research result might not be comprehensive enough. My research, which extensively studies twenty-two students from different cities who are currently enrolled in the top 35 colleges in the United States (according to the US NEWS college ranking), will fill the gap of current studies by attempting to answer the following questions:

- How is the notion of Quality perceived among Chinese students in the US?
- Have their notions of Quality changed since Chinese students came to the US?
- What are the factors that shape their understanding of Quality? Are there any divergences?
- What are some consequences of those divergences?

## **Chapter 2 Debate about Suzhi**

### **Discourse of Suzhi**

The very first study I have found about assessing Chinese students' achievement overseas was *Chinese students in America: qualities associated with their success* by Jennings Pinkwei Chu in 1922. Chu used “the Science of Mental Measurement” which made huge progress in the United States during that period as the methodology to evaluate Chinese students' success and tried to figure out the factors that were associated with it. The purpose of his research was to help Chinese government to improve the preparation and selection of Chinese students. It is worth noting that Chu used the keyword “quality” here, but he did not offer an exact definition to it.

As mentioned in the introduction, Kipnis summarizes Suzhi as “the innate and nurtured physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, and ideological qualities of human bodies and their conduct”. However, he also recognizes that this word has no single English term fully catches the nuances of *suzhi*, despite that it is usually translated as “quality”. *Suzhi* first appears over 2000 years before present in *Guan Zi*, and its meaning has evolved over time (Kipnis, 2006). Jacka points out that the word *suzhi* became widespread after the Cultural Revolution, when the government advocated for the idea of population quality (*renkou suzhi*) in the economic reforms since 1976. According to Jacka, the state documents attributed the poverty of rural area in China to “the failure to modernize ‘low quality’ people; the Chinese government also launched the “One-Child Policy” to ask female “not to reproduce more but to intensify reproduction by improving

the quality of their only child” (Anagnost 2004). These studies indicate that the government has shifted its policy focus from population quantity to population quality since the late 1970s. Anagnost also points out that the body of rural migrant exemplifies “low quality” (di suzhi), and the body of the urban, middle-class only child fetishizes the concept of “high quality” (gao suzhi) (2004).

The goal of raising the suzhi of Chinese population then was integrated with the purpose of education. “Quality Education”, just like “Quality”, does not have a unified definition; however, most current studies believe that the government is trying to substitute the Chinese traditional education system, “Examination-oriented Education”, with “Quality Education”. Dello-Iacovo presents us that examination-oriented education has long been deeply embedded in Chinese culture for centuries, when government examination was the only “stepping stones to official status and power”, and students needed to study “Confucian classics, history and literature as well as the skills of essay writing, poetry writing and calligraphy” to pass the examinations; after the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) was introduced right after the Cultural Revolution, students need to pass the Gaokao in order to get into a college, and the competition is usually extremely fierce (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). As a result, “rote learning dominates classroom teaching and students are weighed down by excessive homework and examination pressure” (Thogerson, 2000). The reason behind this, according to Vanessa Fong points out, is that the only-child in each family became the sole focus of parents’ financial and emotional investment. Therefore, parents expect their children to

“become a winner in a pyramidal socioeconomic system that allowed only a small minority to win”, so they can rely on their kids when they retire (Fong, 2011).

As Zhang describes, the examination oriented education has been resulted in the psychological suffer and lack of self-esteem or social skills of Chinese students (Zhang, 2000). The Chinese government realized that the examination-oriented education could not improve the population quality as a whole. In 1985 the CCP Central Committee declared that "raising the suzhi of the people of the nation was the basic goal of education system reform", therefore, the concept of “Quality Education” emerged.

In 1997, the government published the “Encyclopedia of Quality Education”, and listed “Five-aspect development of Quality Education (Morality, Intellectual, Sports, Arts and Labor—developed in all aspects)” in the first chapter in the book; however, not until 1999 the Action Plan was launched, was a clear definition of “Quality Education” was introduced to the public. Dello-Iacovo cites the 1999 Action Plan in her research to explain the official concept of “Quality Education”: it “includes the universalization of nine year compulsory education, curriculum reform, moral education (which includes labour skills and mental health), physical and aesthetic education”. However, scholars believe that the attempt of improving Chinese citizens’ quality via education does not seem to be very effective: Woronov argues that the purpose of Quality Education was hindered by the contradiction between a rhetoric of collectivist morality and the awakening of students’ individuality (2009). Dello-Iacovo argues “the goals of the new curriculum (quality education) are still not reflected in the examinations and frequently

conflict with teacher, student and parental goals in a society where examination outcomes have life long consequences” (2009).

### **The Clashes between Suzhi and Oversea Education:**

The concept of Quality and Quality education were connected to oversea education when Yiting Liu got accepted to Harvard University in 1999. Liu’s parents published a book to recount how they trained their daughter, Yiting Liu, to become a Harvard student in 2000; this journal of how Liu’s parents cultivate her “good qualities” soon became a doctrine for Chinese parents who want to replicate a “Harvard Child”. As Wang Chin-ming notes in his study, it was reported that a girl called Ranran even burnt a copy of “Harvard Girl” because her parents force her to follow whatever Liu did in the book (Wang, 2013). A journalist, Xiao Yu, published a book to debunk the myth of Harvard Girl, arguing not only Liu’s quality education is in fact a “test-oriented education”, but also she got into Harvard because of her “special connection” (Xiao, 2004). Wang cites a quote from Liu Dezhong : “The real quality lies in a person’s ability to survive anywhere. Don’t believe it? Let the ‘Harvard girl’ come live with us in the village for a few days!” (Wang, 2013)

What I learned from this clash is that there is no unified understanding of suzhi, and what the role western elite education plays in this debate is worth studying. Since all my informants, like Liu, are Chinese students at top-schools in the United States, they might be able to help me answering those questions I proposed at the end of the introduction section.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology and Definitions**

### **1. Research Design**

My sample population includes twenty-two Chinese students who complete their high school education in China, and are currently studying in a top-35 universities and colleges (according to the US-News and World Report) in the United States. Informants were recruited via snowball sampling. These informants are from twelve different colleges, and ten different cities back in China (based on where they went to high school). The sample population is constituted by three freshmen, five sophomores, seven juniors and seven seniors; eight of them are male, and fourteen of them are female. A list of schools and number of informants from each school is attached at the end of this thesis (see Appendix 2). I interviewed each of them either in person or via Skype, with questions related to their personal experiences and their understanding of Suzhi. Chi-Square and Phi-Coefficient calculated by STATA are used to test hypotheses and examine the relationship between variables. Note that the quantitative method is only used to find out the patterns in the sample pool, instead of to make hasty generalization. By analyzing the answers provided by my informants, I hope to find the factors that would affect the understanding of Suzhi of those Chinese students who are studying in the United States, and analyze the outcome of those different understandings.

### **2. Definitions and Distinctions**

Before going in depth into the analysis, I have definition for some terms that I am

going to use in this thesis. The national college entrance examination, or Gaokao, is an academic examination held annually in China on June 6-8. The examination is a prerequisite for entering a college in China, and almost all test takers will be admitted into different universities solely based on their test scores (Yu and Suen, 2005). For a long time, the Gaokao has the reputation of providing equal opportunities to test takers to go college, since it was launched in 1977 as a substitute of the nepotistic nomination system, which was in favor of the “red class” during the Cultural Revolution (Wang, 2001). However, due to the uneven distribution of educational resources in China, the chance of being accepted to a college varies from region to region. In 1998, the national average enrolment ratio among the candidates was 36%; however the enrolment ratio of Shanghai was 60% in 1998, which was three times as much as that of Gansu, which only had 21% of the test takers accepted. (Zhongguo Jiaoyu Bao, April 7, 2002, p2).

Almost all Chinese students attend high school before taking the Gaokao. Chinese high schools are divided into two groups: “key schools” and normal schools, mainly based on students’ college enrollment rates. Using Shanghai as an example, there are 28 key high schools among roughly 300 high schools. However, since studying abroad has become an alternative recently, some of the key high schools aim to send their graduates to prestigious colleges overseas as well. Schools like High School Affiliated to Fudan University (Fudan Fuzhong, hereinafter to be referred as FDFZ), Hangzhou Foreign Language School (HFLS), or Beijing National Day Schools (BNDS) all have the reputation of having graduates both accepted by Fudan University or Peking University in China, and top universities and colleges overseas like Harvard University of Cambridge

University, and the number is usually much higher than that of other key high schools in the same area. Using the High School Affiliated to Fudan University as an example, it is “a premier Shanghai public high school with a well-established foreign-exchange program” according to Ann Hulbert’s description on New York Times; she also wrote “Thanks to its stellar student body, teachers can spend less time on review without jeopardizing exam results, and the campus bustles with clubs, optional courses, service projects”<sup>4</sup>. One graduate of FDFZ, who is currently a senior at Georgetown University, told me “the top 150 students from each class are almost guaranteed a spot at Fudan University. In 2011, we have roughly 50 students got accepted by the top-30 colleges in the United States<sup>5</sup>, and the number is growing rapidly each year.” The difference between these schools and those traditional key high schools like Hengshui High School in Hebei, is that although the latter also send their graduate to top colleges in China, they might not be as supportive in developing students’ extra-curricular activities, and almost no graduate goes abroad each year. Here I refer the first kind (schools like FDFZ, BNDS or HFLS) as “Elite High School”, and the second kind as “Regular High School” (schools like Hengshui High School).

In order to find out the relationship between students’ origin of place and other factors, I categorized the 10 cities into two groups: core and peripheral. The definition I used is provided by the Institute for Urban and Environmental Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science: cities that have a GDP greater than 160 billion (currency: Renminbi)

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/01/magazine/01China.t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/01/magazine/01China.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>5</sup> <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

and a population greater than 200 million are core cities, and the others are peripheral<sup>6</sup>.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his *The Inheritors*, used the occupation of informants' father to estimate his or her class of origin. Since asking someone's family income directly is not appropriate in Chinese culture, I used the same method that used by Bourdieu: I categorized the family background of my informants into high income family or mid income family based on the occupations of this informant's parents based on Chinese common understanding; occupations like business owners would fall into high-income category, while state employees are categorized as mid-income.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://iue.cass.cn/>

## Chapter 4. Understanding of Suzhi before Coming to the United States

人的不同素质就像打游戏时的不同参数！游戏里我们有力量，智力，敏捷，生命值，魔法值……在现实中，人有身体素质，心理素质，还有道德等。

--北卡大学学生，男，大四，统计学

*Different qualities of people are just like different parameters when you are playing video games! In games we have STR(Strength), INT(Intelligence), DEX(Dexterity), HP(Health Point), MP(Magic point)...In real life, people have qualities like body quality, physical quality, and morality.*

--UNC Chapel Hill student, Male, Senior, Statistics

As mentioned in the methodology section, I interviewed 22 Chinese students who are currently studying in a top-tier college in the United States, based on the ranking provided by US News & World Report. According to “Harvard Girl”’s statement above, these students are supposed to have “better developed overall Suzhi”. However, these 22 students actually do not even have a unified understanding on the concept “Suzhi”.

One of the very first questions I asked during interview was “What did you think Suzhi was before you came to the US?”, and 14 out of 22 students mentioned “Suzhi Jiaoyu” (quality education). Almost all students who brought up “quality education” mentioned the word “well-rounded”. One student from Liaoning, Shengyang and two students from Shanghai all mentioned the phrase “德智体美劳—全面发展” (Morality, Intellectual, Sports, Arts and Labor—developed in all aspects). In fact, this concept of Quality Education can be traced back to 1997, when the government published the “Encyclopedia of Quality Education”. This “Five-aspect development of Quality Education” appeared in the first chapter in the book, and later became a propaganda-like slogan for quality education (Liu, 2010). Phrases like “taking non-Gaokao-related classes”

and “having some hobbies besides having good grades” repetitively appeared when students were describing their understanding of “Quality Education”, and whether a school supports extra curricular activities is the main criterion when one evaluates whether this school provides “Quality Education” or not. One graduate from Hangzhou Foreign Language School (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province), who is a sophomore at Vanderbilt university, told me “I chose Hangzhou Foreign Language School because it is a school that advocates for ‘quality education’, which means ‘NOT examination-oriented’, like having more extra-curricular activities or taking ‘weird’ or non-Gaokao related classes.” A Taiyuan No.5 High School graduate, who is currently a junior at Cornell University, presented her definition for quality education as “having one or two hobbies besides having good grades, like musical instrument or dancing; it is even better if you pass examination and get certification for certain levels”.

Dello-Iacovo describes Kipnis’ definition of “Quality” as the expertise in many areas, and “Quality Education” is the process of gaining quality by a disciplined practice of cultivation and leading to an overall “physical, mental and moral superiority entitling one to high social status and power” (242); Kipnis also points out that the Chinese education reformers often translate “quality education” into “competence education”, which is the North American idea of “competence education” that emphasizes “training students in specific competencies rather than exam success” (299). However, Hulbert points out that the emphasis of Chinese “Quality Education” is “on practice and mastery of skills” instead of the “self-expression and creativity emphasized in Western conceptions of developing the whole person” (2007,6 ).

In my research, students' descriptions of "Quality education" are simplified but still more or less agree with the definition provided by the current studies; however, some informants' understandings of quality lean toward the "practice and mastery of skills", while others' are inclined toward the "Western conceptions of developing the whole person" as Hulbert says. In my analysis, I found that these discrepancies are mainly caused by three reasons: social-economic class, high school education, and origin of region of those informants. Among all of them, socio-economic class might be the most significant factor that decides how students understand the idea of Suzhi.

In order to simplify research data, I categorize students' answers to "What did you think Suzhi was before you came to the US?" and "What are some different kinds of Suzhi?" into two groups. Answers related to "self-expression and creativity emphasized in Western conceptions of developing the whole person" are generally regarded as "non-practical"; answers related to "practice and mastery of skills" are generally regarded as "practical". Thus, informants who give the first kind of answers are categorized as "having a non-practical understanding of Suzhi", while those who give the second kind of answers are categorized as "having a practical understanding of Suzhi".

### **Socio-economic Class**

The first hypothesis is the socio-economic background of students will have an impact on students' understanding of Suzhi. In order to further examine whether these two variables are independent, a chi-square test by STATA is as followed:

Table 2: association between informants' family income level and their understanding of Suzhi

Income Level	Understanding of Suzhi		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
H	13	0	13
M	3	6	9
Total	16	6	22

$$\text{Pearson } \chi^2(1) = 11.9167 \quad \text{Pr} = 0.001$$

Here I use the Phi Square to examine the relationship between these two variables:

$\Phi = \sqrt{\text{Chi}^2/N} = 0.735$ , where N is the total number of the sample. When there is no association,  $\Phi^2$  will be zero; when there is a perfect association, it will be 1.

According the test result, high-income family background has a strong positive correlation with non-practical understanding of Suzhi. Thus, in the discussion of “on practice and mastery of skills” vs. “self-expression and creativity emphasized in Western conceptions of developing the whole person”, students from middle class families have an inclination toward a practical definition of quality, while students from high-income families have an understanding leaning toward to a non-practical definition of quality.

It is hard to examine the impact of socio-economic class on informants' understanding of suzhi directly, since people tend to avoid talking about the situation of their family wealth in detail. One way of doing analysis is to investigate variables that are highly dependent on family income, which student's oversea experience is one. During

interview, I found that 8 out of 22 informants had oversea experiences before they started college in the United States, and most of them come from high-income families:

Table 3: Students' pre-college oversea experience based on family income level

Study abroad experience ?	Income Level		Total
	H	M	
no	6	8	14
yes	7	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>

The only one student who comes from a mid-income level family that went abroad for a year was on a full-ride scholarship provided by High School Affiliated to Fudan University, which is an elite high school. For other students who had pre-college oversea experience, all of them are from families with high-income level. If we further examine the relationship between whether a student had study abroad experience and whether his or her understanding of Suzhi is practical, we can tell that all of those who had oversea experiences have a understanding of Suzhi which is leaning toward the conceptions of developing the whole person.

Table 4: Study Abroad Experience and conceptions of quality (non-practical/well-rounded versus practical/skills-based):

Study abroad experience ?	Understanding of Suzhi		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
no	8	6	14
yes	8	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>22</b>

The student from Henan, coming from a wealthy family, who went to an examination-oriented high school, went abroad for a year during high school through a private Overseas-study Service Agency. She told me that “People talk about leadership frequently here. Chinese people seldom tell students that you should be a leader. When I was on the exchange program, people still emphasize leadership, even though that high school is not a very good one.” One Cornell student who is a graduate of a regular high school in Shanghai, tell me that her concept of “caring about the world” comes from her host mother when she was studying abroad for a year after her freshman year in high school:

My host mother was really active in community services. She took care of orphans, and organized many events with other mothers. She didn't get any monetary compensation from doing that! I think she did that because she was interested in that...well, I think it is more appropriate to say ‘she did that out of altruism’. As long as she could help others by doing these things, she felt happy.

Chinese people always consider “whether doing something will be beneficial to myself”...if all citizens think this way, the quality of the population probably won't be very high.

Beside oversea experience before college, socio-economic class can also decide where a student receives his or her education. Four of my informants indicate that their family moved from a peripheral city to a core city, where they found better education environment. That might also explain why there are students who did not have pre-college oversea experience but still have non-practical understanding of Suzhi.

### High School Education

The second hypothesis is that the high school education has an impact on students' understanding of suzhi. A Chi-square test can be run here to inspect the possibility of these two variables being independent or not:

Table 5: association between High School Education and informants' understanding of Suzhi

Type of High School	Understanding of Suzhi		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
Elite	10	0	10
Regular	6	6	12
Total	16	6	22

$$\text{Pearson } \chi^2(1) = 6.8750 \quad \text{Pr} = 0.009$$

$$\text{Phi} = \sqrt{\text{Chi}^2/22} = 0.56$$

According to the table, the type of high school education and students' understanding of Suzhi to each other are related, and the Phi coefficient tells us that students from elite high schools have a higher frequency of having a non-practical understanding of Suzhi. The qualitative answers from my informants also support this finding. The Vanderbilt student, who is a graduate of Hangzhou Foreign Language School, is very proud of the "Quality Education" at her high school:

"I chose Hangzhou Foreign Language School because it is a school advocates for 'quality education', which means 'NOT examination-oriented', like having more extra-curricular activities or taking 'weird' or non-Gaokao related classes." She also mentioned that "Teachers will not focus too much on whether you finish your homework everyday, and they will encourage you to read more books and watch more movies, instead of mentioning 'Gaokao' all the time". As a result, she "broadened her view", learned "people have different ways of thinking", which she regards as the two major parts that constitute her quality.

Another example where elite high school education has a huge impact on students' concept of Suzhi is Beijing National Day School (BNDS). One freshman at Northwestern University from BNDS told me "The Beijing National Day School has a broad quality education...it includes caring about the world, and being responsible for the society, pursuing your dream, your career...these are the quality education I experienced at school, which directly shaped my understanding of quality." Another BNDS graduate, a junior at Georgetown University also confirmed this statement: "I think National Day School has a huge impact on my quality by creating a supportive environment for extra-curricular

activities.” Both of them mentioned “critical thinking” and “care about other people” when being asked what their understanding about Suzhi is.

On the contrary, graduates from non-elite high school, or traditional high schools usually have a different understanding when talking about the concept “Suzhi”. One graduate of Shanghai Southwestern Weiyu High School, who is currently a sophomore at UNC, mentioned, “Morality is the first, then quality means academic quality, including science quality like calculation, logic reasoning and humanity/social science quality like language ability and reading ability...” The prioritization of the importance of morality might be associated with the compulsory “morality lesson” according to the 1999 Action Plan, but overall, this student provides an answer that is leaning toward a practical answer of quality. Just like the UNC sophomore, a graduate of Hengshui High School, currently a UNC senior, told me that “Some people have high IQ and are very talented in science, this is a quality; some people have high Emotional intelligence and handle things very smoothly/ get along well with everyone, that also embodies high quality. Some people can do both! They have even better quality. According to my understanding, many kinds of high ability can be counted as a high quality.”

Patterns can be found among those answers. The Vanderbilt student’s high school, Hangzhou Foreign Language School, is one of the most elite high schools in China. According to the introduction on HFLS’s webpage, “Every year, 80% of our graduates are admitted to top universities in China and abroad, such as Tsinghua University, Peking University, Harvard, Yale, Cambridge, Oxford, etc. Many of our graduates are today’s elite in all walks of life. For instance, over 30 HFLS graduates are now serving in China’s

foreign ministry.<sup>7</sup> According to Beijing National Day School's website, roughly 40% of each class enroll in top 30 universities in China, and among those students who apply to go study abroad, 90% enroll in a top 80 college<sup>8</sup> in the United States. According to that freshman at Northwestern University, BNDS provides all kinds of facilities for extra-curricular activities, and she "learned how to observe and understand the world" by working at the student-run TV station, which led her to pursue a degree in Journalism. The Vanderbilt student says, "HFLS creates a liberal atmosphere for students to learn something that has nothing to do with Gaokao, to read, to watch movies...I might not be the best exam taker, but I know more, and care about more things compared to other people." When asked about the "quality education" at her high school, the UNC sophomore, who is a student at the Kenan Flagler Business School, mentioned "My school claims that it wants to provide quality education, to respond to the call from Shanghai Municipal Education Commission of advocating for quality education. When I was in high school, art classes, PE classes cannot be substituted for by so-called main subjects like math or English. It helps a little bit." Art classes and PE classes being substituted by "main subject" classes is a common phenomenon in Chinese secondary education since Art or PE are not Gaokao subjects. This student is happy about having PE and Arts classes not being taken, while students at elite high schools enjoy the opportunities of short-term exchange program, national activities like Model UN, and opportunities of working at a student-run TV station. It is clear that students from regular schools might have many fewer opportunities to cultivate their Suzhi in the non-practical

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<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.chinahw.net/html\\_en/template/aboutus.html](http://www.chinahw.net/html_en/template/aboutus.html)

<sup>8</sup> <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

sense. Coming back to the UNC student's understanding of suzhi: "Speaking of the Chinese system, I think it just cultivates students in a different direction, but it's not necessarily bad. The ability to take exams is also part of quality. I have to say that Chinese students' ability of taking exams is much better than that of American kids". The emphasis on "ability", especially "test-taking ability", is another indicator that this student's understanding of quality is practical.

From the information above, we can tell that the type of high school education weights a lot in the shaping of students' understanding of suzhi. Those elite high schools in China that my informants graduated from create an atmosphere with less pressure, provide more opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities, and are more aware of cultivating students' sense of social responsibility. As a result, graduates from these schools go to top schools both in China and abroad. At the same time, those non-elite high schools that I studied are less likely to do so, which could lead to their focus on "practices and mastery of skills".

## **Region**

One thing that I noticed in my analysis was, although not all high schools in core cities are elite schools and vice versa, students from coastal/core cities and those from inland/peripheral cities have different attitude toward "Quality Education". Current studies use quantitative method to figure out the relationship between geographic origins and the stratification and mobility in China, but quantitative researches have their limitation: in Hannum and Wang's research, "The importance of geographic origins has

not been fully considered in the stratification and mobility research in China” and these quantitative analyses “only suggest that geography is a sufficiently important stratifier to warrant further scrutiny” (262) . To illuminate this issue, I cross-tab the city of origins and the different types of Suzhis concept held by my informants, and the result is as follow:

Table 6: association between city type and students’ understanding of suzhi

city_type	Understanding of Suzhi		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
Peripheral	5	2	7
core	11	4	15
Total	16	6	22

The difference is not statistically significant, which fits what Hannum and Wang suggested. Thus, a qualitative examination on the correlation between students’ understanding of quality and the city they receive education is necessary. Through my interviews with those 22 informants, I discovered several important findings. First, the inequality of educational resources allocated to the Gaokao plays an significant role in shaping students’ understanding of quality; second, the fact that periphery cities provides fewer opportunities for students due to size and location limitation also sheds a light in determining the education style of high schools. Both these two reasons lead to the discrepancy in students’ understanding of Quality.

As mentioned in the previous section, the graduate from Hengshui High School views quality as the combination of multiple pragmatic abilities. He provided the following statement when being asked to describe his life in high school:

Hebei Province is not as well-developed as southern area. Gaokao is the only way toward a bright future for almost everyone. Most students and their families have never thought about going abroad, because of financial level, or maybe they just have closed minds. Everyone takes Gaokao, but there is no good college in our province. Small quota for good colleges, tons of people compete for that. As a result, getting students into good colleges becomes the No.1 goal for all high schools in Hebei province. Gradually, the purpose of education became to push students to the very end or even imprison students and force them to explore all their potentials in test-taking.

A graduate of Zhengzhou No. 4 High School (Henan Province), a current UNC junior, also supported this statement:

The pressure of Gaokao in Henan Province is...unimaginable. My high school is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the city, but only two or three students can get into Peking University or Tsinghua University. In our Henan province, we go to our classroom at 7 in the morning, and leave our classroom at 10pm. We spend at least 12 hours in school and there are at least 9-10 hours that we are purely studying... Everyone needs to take Gaokao. The sole purpose of all activities is to crack Gaokao. No Model UN, no debate team...20% of the entire class can go to a first-tier college.

On the contrary, the statement from the Vanderbilt student, the graduate of Hangzhou Foreign Language School shows an opposite situation in Hangzhou: "In the small town where I was born, no more than 50 people can get into Zhejiang University

each year. But students at Hangzhou Foreign Language School treat Zhejiang University as a safety school.” Each year, 140 students at HFLS can get into top colleges like Fudan University, Peking University or Tsinghua University without taking the Gaokao, and that is a fixed quota. She told me “For class of 2012, none of us needed to take the Gaokao, because too many students went study abroad. ” Note that these exam-exempted quotas might only be available to HFLS in that area, since it is an elite school. However, even students from regular high schools in core cities face less pressure and have relatively more opportunities to participate in extra curricular activities. A Cornell student from Shanghai told me that although there are not that many students get accepted to top colleges each year, and her high school does not have as much resource as those elite high schools have, her high school life was still pretty enjoyable:

No more than 5 students took SAT and applied to colleges in the United States. Each year, roughly 15 students among 330 would be accepted to top colleges like Fudan University. 50% students go to tier 1 universities. But the school was advocating for quality education when I was there...I got off class around 3 every day! And extra-curricular activities were encouraged.

The uneven distribution of education resources in China has been recognized as a problem for long time. According to the Wall Street Journal, “It is well known that Beijing has an easier test than other places, and because there are so many schools there, it’s also easier to get into a college with a lower score.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, core areas like Shanghai and Zhejiang enjoys abundant educational resources. At the same time, there is

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<sup>9</sup> <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/06/26/are-your-kids-smart-enough-for-chinas-toughest-test/>

only one key institution in Henan Province, where the number of population is 100 million. In my studies, schools in periphery cities have fewer educational resources shared by more competitors, and as a result, students are more likely to focus on “mastery of skills”, since these “skills” might be able to help them get into a good school, but “the cultivation of a whole person” cannot. At the end of the interview, the Hebei student said the following statement, which supports this finding:

Although those kids from my province might have lower comprehensive quality, their, or our perseverance, will power, and hardworking is also important quality, which other people might not have. To put it straight forward, many things in the future, like civil servant test, graduate school test, also require students to isolate themselves, stay in one shack and prepare for the exams. Once you have a job, it might still be very tedious and take tons of efforts. If you were hardworking and have strong will power, you would survive again.

The high school that the Hebei student graduated from, Hengshui High School, is regarded as the famous “test-taking factory” in China<sup>10</sup>, and this is probably why the Hengshui graduate has a very practical understanding of suzhi. However, although there are schools that support extra-curricular activities in periphery areas, these schools can only provide limited resources for students due to the location, which might also have an impact on the way that students understand Suzhi.

A graduate of Taiyuan No.5 High School, who currently is a junior at Cornell

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<sup>10</sup> <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201408190001>

University describe the limitation of being a student in a periphery city:

I know it (my understanding of Quality Education) is a very narrow understanding, but we small town kids do not have any opportunities like ‘Intel innovation award’ competitions like those kids in big cities do...I heard about that after I started participating in national Model UN. These opportunities/competitions are always launched in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, then they will expand to second-tier cities like Chengdu and Xi’an. Taiyuan is such a small city, so we don't have these opportunities.

She also told me the situation of students going study abroad at her high school: “I was the only student who went study abroad that year... pretty much I was taking the road less traveled. My teachers discouraged me when I told them my decision.”

Situation in big cities like Beijing seems to be totally different from that in Taiyuan, Shanxi. The statement of the student from BNDS presents a sharp contrast comparing to what the Taiyuan students told me above:

Our school is really supportive for extra-curricular activities!! Each semester we have our own conference, and school provides funding for delegates to attend Peking U Model UN, Fudan U Model UN. Our school even sends students to the Doha Model UN Conference! I went to the Doha MUN trip, and all of us who were on the trip are abroad. A student and I are now at Georgetown, one is at U British Columbia in Canada, one got into Northwestern, one got into William and Mary, and one goes to Rhode Island School of Designing since she is an art student.

He then told me how the Doha Model UN trip changed his understanding of quality:

I went to the MUN trip to Doha RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF ARAB SPRING!!! The television at my hotel was showing the live stream of Egypt 24 hrs a day! Everyone was talking about that! Everyone became an idealist, everyone was hyper excited. When I was watching the protest process, I realize that everyone can and should fight for their own future. Don't lose your hope! This is the biggest inspiration I got from that conference.

Under the premise that the cultivation of Suzhi in Chinese high school is usually conveyed by extra-curricular activities (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), these two cases present us that the chances for “Quality-cultivating”, or we can say the resources for “developing the whole person” are unequal for students from core area and periphery area.

It's important to note that both the students from Taiyuan and Henan have an understanding of Suzhi more leaning toward the “Western conceptions of developing the whole person”, despite the fact that both of them are from periphery area. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the socio-economic class of a students might play the most important role in shaping students' understanding of Suzhi, and this factor might be able to override both the region and the high school education factor. However, the influences of region and high school education are still significant in shaping students' understanding of Quality.

## Chapter 5 After Coming to the United States

*“Students are particularly irreducible to their class of origin and even to their situation and their practice (which are always closely linked to their origin) because, as intellectual apprentices, they are defined by their relation to their class of origin, their situation, and their practice and, as aspiring intellectuals, they strive to live out this relation according to the models of the intellectual class, reinterpreted in terms of their own situation.”*

— Pierre Bourdieu, *The Inheritors*

In the previous section, I have revealed that different students have various understanding of Quality, and examined the factors that shape students’ understanding of the concept Quality before they got accepted by the colleges in the United States. Just like Bourdieu pointed out in *The Inheritors*, those informants’ understandings of Quality are shaped by their “class or origins, situation and practice”. Bourdieu conducted a research in 1964 on the relationship between education and culture in France, and came to the conclusion that despite the “acceptance of the same rules of university law, compliance with the same administrative formalities...queuing together to get into the library, suffering the constraints of the same syllabus...” it is still really hard to define this “integrated group” as a whole, since students are from various family backgrounds and have different experiences, which determine their life styles or choices of major (Bourdieu, 1964). Some of his findings include students from lower class are less likely to get into colleges, and are more likely to choose majors that are practical.

This study of Chinese students is more or less similar to this study done by Bourdieu 40 years ago, and Bourdieu’s study did explain how class origins affect students’

understanding of Suzhi. However, there are some aspects that are different: first, none of my informants are actually from lower class background. Although income level of families varies, all of my informants are financially sufficient; second, the evaluation/assessment system for students are different. While the assessment for students in France during the 60s is purely based on test-scores (Bourdieu, 1964), the procedure in the United States for college admissions is different: according to the Admission Office of Stanford University, “The Department does not have a predetermined formula for weighing admission criteria, nor does it have any rigid cut off points on these criteria. All factors are taken into account and weighed by the Committee”. Here come the questions: now all the students are accepted to a top university or college in the United States, do their understandings of Suzhi change? Are their family backgrounds still playing an important role when they choose their majors? Are they playing on an even ground now?

### **Does the understanding of Suzhi changed when students enroll?**

For the first question above, some informants answered “Yes”, while other answered “No”. Each of these two groups also falls into two situations.

#### **Those who answered “No”--**

First, there are two different situations for those who indicate that their understanding of Suzhi did not change after they came here. Informants in the first group told me that either their understanding was already very close to the American concept due to the

education they received at an elite high school in China, or due to previous western cultural exposure. Both the Northwestern students and William and Mary student from Shanghai told me that they think the standard for a “qualifying person” here in the United States is the same with her understanding back in high school. The Cornell student from Shanghai, who went abroad for a year during high school, told me that since she had lived in the US before enrolling, her concept of Suzhi did not change much.

The other group is those “science majors”—The NYU student and the UNC student told me “Science classes are universally the same”, and as a result, the US education did not change their understanding of Suzhi, even their own Suzhi too much. The main changes they experienced are from the foreign environment they are in. The UNC student, who is a statistics major, told me “By living in a foreign country, I improved my mental quality, independence, the ability of interacting with other people. But it seems to have no connection with the education I received here.” The NYU student, who is a mathematics and economics major, gave the following statement:

I don't think NYU ever changed students' quality. The student body at NYU is very, very diverse... so quality is more relevant to family's education. Some of NYU students have very bad qualities. Honestly, there are that kind of students at Fudan University as well. Also, I have heard that at Peking University, or even Harvard University, also have low quality students, so the correlation between students' quality and school education might not be that strong.

What I found interesting is, statements from other students' interviews can actually be used as counter examples here. The Yale student said “How the American education

shapes a student's Suzhi all depends on how the individual takes advantage of the resources. Only going to classes or listening to lectures will not improve qualities. Even in social science or humanities classes, professors will not try to 'moralize' anyone or impose their ideas on students." The William and Mary freshman states something similar: "There will not be any people telling you what you should do in college, which means that no one is going to 'shape' you. " Another science student, the Stanford Student from Shanghai, also mentioned the idea of "Science classes are universally the same". However, he has a different understanding on how the US education shape students' Suzhi:

At Stanford...well, I will just put it straightforward: at least 60% of science professors give their first priority to research, and teaching is just secondary. After all, science principles are all the same in anywhere this world. Three out of five classes I am taking this semester are science classes, so 60% of my life is actually not that different from my friends back in China. But the most important things I learned are outside my major! Especially those humanities and social science classes.

### **Those who answered "Yes"—**

Those who indicate that the American education changed their understanding of Suzhi, and helped them developed their Suzhi also falls into two situations. The first group of students provides answers like "critical thinking", "open mindedness", "skepticism", "social responsibility" or "the consideration of other people." The

Georgetown student from Beijing mentioned “skepticism” and “humanistic quality” during the interview:

Speaking of skepticism, we are taught to doubt everything we observe. Is that true? Why is that true? Are there any other possibilities? This is a form of critical thinking. The second thing, humanities atmosphere: all things we do, all things we see, after all cannot be separated from this human society. If we ignore this point, we would become cold machines that only produce data and codes, instead of being HUMAN. Colleges in the United States would more or less advocate these ideas, while the Chinese education is doing very superficial actions.

The UNC student from Zhengzhou, Henan talks about the idea of Social justice: Not all colleges...but at least those good colleges, like our school and other top schools, will try to bring awareness for social justice. They will tell you ‘this is problematic’, ‘that is problematic’ or just ask yourself to think again whether this issue is problematic. This is critical thinking.

The answers of the second group of students are different: keywords like “abilities” and “skills” appear frequently in these answers, indicating a very different orientation to quality than the group of students just described. The UNC student from Shanghai, who is a student at the Kenan Flagler Business School, provides the following answer:

US education taught me how to communicate with others. Although we sometimes have group projects back in China, but there was barely any cooperation or teamwork needed...People never think about improving these

qualities. But now, we need to learn to cooperate with people from different background, and come up with something serious...yeah that's our final grade!

The UNC student from Hebei provides a similar answer:

I think the most important thing is that US education provides me opportunities to communicate/work with classmates, professors, even professionals from workplaces. Not only teaching me theoretical knowledge, but improving my abilities of communicating and cooperating with people.

After comparing these answers to the content I have discussed in the previous chapter, which is the diverse understanding of Suzhi, I found out that those students who believe that the U.S. education does not change their qualities because “science classes are universally the same”, or the US education changed their Suzhi in a practical/skill oriented way, are those who have practical understanding of Qualities. In contrast, students who mention that their Suzhi have been improved in an abstract way, are those who have a non-practical understanding of Suzhi. Only one of them are exceptions: the Brandeis student from Shanghai now regards “having passion for what you are doing” as an important quality after coming to America, instead of being “ambitious, aggressive, result-oriented and sometimes even ‘unscrupulous’”, which was her impression of suzhi for successful business major students when she was back in China.

It seems that education in the United States does not have too much impact on changing students' understanding of Quality, and if those students' understanding of suzhi is still the same kind with that before they come here, then region, high school education, and mostly important, socio-economic class, are still the dominant factors that

shape students' way of thinking even when students got into a top-college in the United States. One thing I need to mention is that not all informants are in the same year; some of them are graduating, and some of them had only spent 3 months in college. However, since only 2 among all informants are freshmen, and the situation of these two freshmen is consistent with the general observation, the conclusion should still be tenable.

### **Flexibility of Major Choosing**

When I asked how is the US education different from the education back home, I got some frequently appeared answers from informants, even though they are from different backgrounds. "Freedom" is the No. 1 keyword among all answers, and many informants expressed their appreciation for the flexible course-registration/major choosing system here. The UNC student from Cangzhou, Hebei compares the difference between the American and the Chinese system and think the American education system provides him "freedom of choice":

The US education provides students a wide range of choices. In college, there are plenty of opportunities for students to take classes in various departments, and extra-curricular activities are encouraged. These both are good for students to explore their potentials, and that is pretty similar to what we said 'cultivating high-quality people.' The education in China is inflexible, and having good grades is probably the most important quality. Everything could be standardized.

This statement is supported by other students' answers. The Vanderbilt student from Taiwan said, "US education encourages students to learn whatever they want to learn, and US colleges provide whatever they can to meet our requirement as long as they have the ability." One thing I found interesting is that even with the same answer "freedom", students gave different interpretations for it. A Vanderbilt student from Hangzhou and a Brandeis student from Shanghai both mentioned the flexibility of choosing major. The Vanderbilt student gave the following statement when she was talking about the reason for choosing a philosophy major:

I am a philosophy major with a Political Science concentration, and I focus on political theory/philosophy. Before I came to college I never imagined myself studying philosophy, and my understanding was "Philosophy is so hard to understand!" just like other people. But later I took some philosophy classes and started to read some philosophical articles, and found them fascinating. I pick philosophy major was not because I want to pretend that I am super smart or erudite, but because I do find philosophy interesting.

In contrast, the Brandeis student, who transferred from Fudan University, gave a totally different description. She told me that with the freedom of choice here, she could easily major in economics, which requires high Gaokao score back home:

After I entered the Journalism School at Fudan, I was disappointed. My motivation has always been 'to be in the same place with the most outstanding people', but J-school students at Fudan did not meet my expectation. I started to hang out with students from other departments, and I

think Economics students are fun. That's because students are assigned a major based on their Gaokao score, and Economics always has the highest cut-off line. So Economics students are those who have highest scores. That's a motivation for me to go abroad and switch to Economics major. After I came here, I realize that in the United States there is no cut-off line for majors...you can major in whatever you want. Economics is the most popular major for Chinese students, and it's not selective at all...so I switch to math major.

### **Possible factors that might change the choice of major**

It seems that although the colleges in the United States grant students freedom to choose their majors, Chinese students still have criteria when they make their choice. Previous literatures argue that gender might be a factor that affect students' choice of major, and that led to the under-representation of female in Business and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (Blickenstaff, 2005; Beasley, 2012), and a cross-table might be able to examine whether this statement is still tenable among my 22 informants:

Table 7: Association between gender and type of major

Gender	majortype		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
F	9	5	14
M	5	3	8
Total	14	8	22

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.0070$  Pr = 0.933

According to the table above, although the gender distribution of female is a bit skewed, gender does not seem to be a factor that determines students' major. What is more, the classification of STEM in general might be misleading, since some of my informants are theoretical physics or pure mathematics, which do not prepare students to secure a job in industries like finance and business. Here I categorize the majors of those informants into two groups, one leads students onto a practical career oriented path, and the other does not. However, the result of the cross tabbing does not seem to have a big discrepancy from the table above.

However, I do notice one pattern when looking for rival variables between informants and the major they choose. After listing all possible rival variables, family income seems to have a strong association with the type of majors that an informant would choose:

Table 8: association between family income level and type of major:

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. tab income majortype, chi2
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Income Level	majortype		Total
	Non-pra..	Practical	
H	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>
M	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
Total	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>

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Pearson chi2(1) = 6.0440 Pr = 0.014
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**Phi= sqrt (Chi<sup>2</sup>/22) = 0.524**

As a result, income has a positive correlation with what major a student is going to choose. This finding is identical with Bourdieu's finding in his "The Inheritor", and reveals that class of origin is an important factor that might affect how students choose major, even they are granted freedom to pick anything they want to learn.

### **Are Chinese students overly practical?**

It is necessary to point out that the proportion of students of each type of major is not a good indicator for that of the entire Chinese student body in the United States, since many of my informants expressed the thoughts that Chinese students in the top schools are being overly practical. The Yale student from Changsha, Hunan, who is a history major, indicates, "At Yale, most of Chinese students are considerate and care about the society, but some of them are over practical." The Northwestern student tells me that "Many of the Chinese students here are doing/will be doing investment banking/management analysis." The Stanford student from Shanghai, who is a theoretical physics

major, is more straightforward. He complains about the frustrations he has when he tries to find friends to share ideas and thoughts:

Most of Stanford Chinese student are pursuing something that they can actually achieve in China...I can imagine that they are just living the same life back in China. You can copy-paste their life at Fudan University, and there's nothing different...The most distinct feature is that they focus too much on those things that are right in front of them (most relevant to them). 80% of our conversation is talking about how to solve physics problems. It might be because I am a physics major...but if I want to talk about a book that I just read recently, or what happened to my life, they would switch the topic back to physics homework after one or two sentence...So boring!!! We don't talk very often, but when we talk, they only care about schoolwork...you know, Stanford is in the Silicon Valley, so everyone is so into Computer Science. Whenever we have dinner together, topics will always be 'how to program' and 'how to code'. Well...you can do the same thing at Fudan, can't you??

Interestingly, although being a Computer Science major, one Cornell student from Shanghai also expresses the same concern as that Stanford student. As a computer science major, she is frustrated by the fact that Chinese students she knows only care about practical things, and she finds American students more interesting:

(Chinese students here at Cornell are) very pragmatic. Well you can't say that's bad...sometimes liberal arts colleges are unrealistic, and we are not like them. In liberal arts colleges, students might want to learn as many things as

possible, and the purpose is probably to improve quality. However, students at Cornell might not want to do that...physics major students sometimes don't want to take humanities classes. Some of them have the intention to take these classes, but they are scared that these classes will destroy their GPA and hurt their chances of getting into a good school/ good company. They will try their best to make their future better, instead of doing something "useless", like cultivating humanistic quality (laugh). That's different from my purpose of coming here! I want to meet people who are unpractical... I want to talk to all kinds of people. We can talk about our humanistic understanding, talk about how we should think, talk about how to make the education better...but I can't find any Chinese kids here who I can talk to. Well, I am a computer science major, so most of Chinese kids I know are programmers...Sometimes I found American students more interesting, and we have more topics in common.

Another Cornell student from Taiyuan, Shanxi, who is a government and math major, joked about this phenomenon when being asked her opinion: "We Cornell students are very honest when facing our desires (laugh)."

Are Chinese students overly practical? According to my informants, at least not all of them are overly practical. The Georgetown student from Shanghai told me that one of her most unforgettable experiences at Georgetown is discussing feminism with a female professor with other students: Georgetown student talks about one occasion she had a discussion about Microcredits for female with her professor: "I went to the professor's house with 11 other girls! We chatted for hours, had tea and snacks, and we learned a lot.

You can only have this kind of opportunities in the US, not in China.” Another UNC student, who is a philosophy major from Shanghai, tells me how her experience of participating in community service in America changes her *suzhi*: “I did a project that needs me to make a huge poster and introduce the situation of ‘boys and girls club’ (an organization that empowers children who need help) to people. At the final presentation, I gave a very sentimental speech, and all my classmates were moved and showed their willingness to help those boys and girls.” However, those informants who give this kind of answers are still mainly students from high-income families. The Stanford student told me that he believes financial reason might be able to explain Chinese students’ practicality:

Most of the Stanford students from China do not have any scholarship or financial aid. So it is actually very understandable why they are so realistic. They might also face pressure from their family members. I have a friend who wanted to be a physicist, but his parents worried that he couldn't earn much money after college and forced him to study economics. There are tons of examples like that. I do have Chinese friends who are interested in art history, anthropology, literature, but all of them pick practical and skill-oriented major in the end. The cost of attending Stanford without scholarship is \$64000 per year, and that's a huge burden for most Chinese kids. As a result, you have to consider what job you can get after you graduate. But they are wasting all these resources that Stanford provides.

He also told me that received a 100% meet financial aid from Stanford University, which might be a reason why he chose to be a theoretical physics major, despite the fact that he comes from a mid-income family. Among the 22 informants, he is the only one who receives financial aid from his school. The Georgetown student who is also from China, shares her personal experience as well as her work experience at Georgetown Admission Office with me: “Now the college financial aid situation is terrible for international students, and US schools tend to give priority to full pay students when admitting students.” This situation is different from that in the past, when most of students going abroad depend on government funding or university scholarship/fellowship, which makes family income level an even more influential factor when students are making decisions.

## Conclusion

“Harvard Girls” created a fantasy for Chinese students and parents. This fantasy means a possibility of getting into a top university with “good suzhi” instead of high scores, and receiving funding from those schools oversea so students from small towns, middle-class families, or attended regular high schools will be playing on an even ground when competing with those who are from wealthy families. Unfortunately, the result of my study tells us that family income level, type of high school, and hometown play significant roles in the shaping of Chinese students’ understanding of what “good suzhi” is, and that determines how students choose their major/spend their college life, and the impact of those factors are even larger under the circumstance that American universities and colleges largely reduce the amount of financial aid for international students due to the financial crisis.

One thing that I need to point at the end of my thesis is that the purpose this study is not to evaluate whether my informants have “high quality” or not, nor to judge what kind of understanding of suzhi is better. The process of conducting this research gave me a precious opportunity to talk to those wonderful peers from China, and each of them has interesting experiences both before and after coming to the United States. By talking to them, I was able to put the discussion of Suzhi in a global context, which has been done only by few scholars in the academia. My sample is also different from the only existing study, so this study is able to fill the gap between current studies and the reality.

Although suzhi is an important concept that was introduced by the Chinese Central Government and has been extensively studied by scholars, these Chinese students in my

study actually do not have a unified understanding of this word. However, factors like high school education, region of origin, and socio-economic status play significant roles in shaping these Chinese students' understanding of the important concept, and lead their understanding either onto the practical track, or the non-practical track. These differences in the understanding of suzhi reflect what things that these Chinese students value most are before they arrive in the United States. When they come to the United States and given freedom to pursue what they want, they are likely to focus on what they value the most, and that self-deciding process would keep them on the same track and lead them to certain kinds of major. As a result, American college education helps their understanding of suzhi evolve, but it is not likely to change dramatically. In another word, we can also say that American college education might play the rule of reproducing class differences.

There are some limitations of my study. First, the sample size might not be big enough. Second, since my informants were recruited by snowball sampling, it is possible that their socio-economic statuses are more likely to be similar than diverse. However, since this is mainly a qualitative study, those in depth interviews are still very valuables for the research about suzhi. If another opportunity were given, I would enlarge the sample size and narrow the gap between the sample and actual Chinese student distribution.

As Yung Wing said, "Through Western education China might be regenerated, become enlightened and powerful." However, Chinese students and parents need to view western education critically, as it is not a panacea that can magically change students' understanding of suzhi, nor necessarily can improve students' suzhi. I also have a hope,

that one day, Chinese students can enjoy true “quality education with equality” at their home country. By that time, China would be truly “enlightened and powerful”.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Questions:

### Interview questions:

#### *Questions for students:*

Gender

College:

Year:

Hometown:

High schools:

Major:

Occupations of Parents:

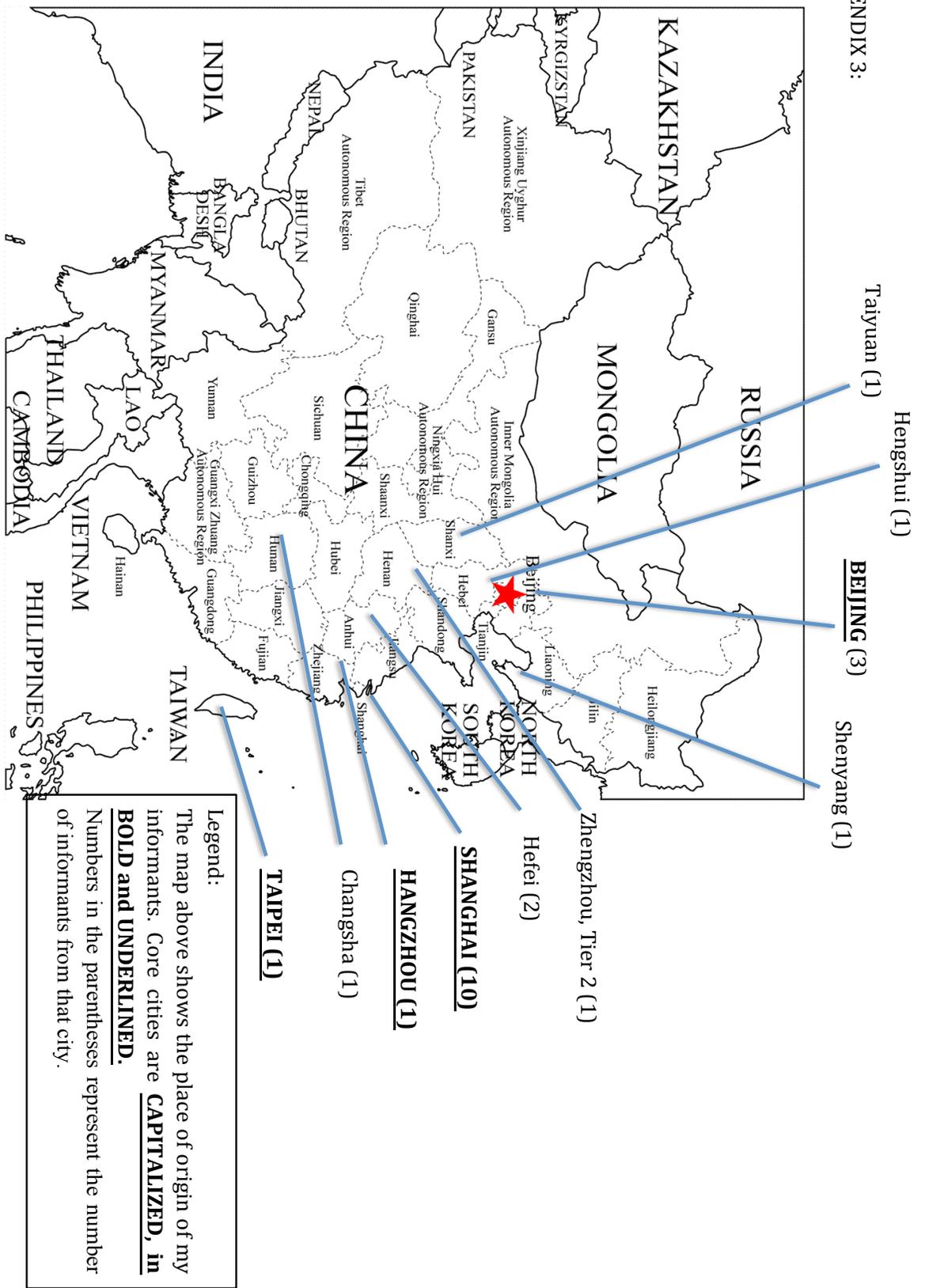
1. Why did you decide to pursue your degree in the United States? What factors were important to you when you were making this decision?
2. What did you think Suzhi was before you came to the US? What do you think it is now that you are in the US? How was your conception then different from your conception now?
3. Are there different kinds of Suzhi?
4. In general, how does the American-style education shape students' Suzhi? How does the Chinese style education shape it? Could you give me some examples?
5. In what ways has US education changed your Suzhi?
6. Describe your impression of the Suzhi of Chinese students in your college in general.
7. You mentioned the high school you went to. Can you describe your high school? What was the atmosphere (studying abroad oriented, or National College Entrance Examination Oriented) of your school?
8. Did you have experiences that were important to shape your Suzhi when you were a student in China? What were they? When you were growing up, were there factors from your family and school life that affected your Suzhi? What were they?

9. Do you plan to seek a job in the US or to go back to China after you finish your American education or training? Do you hope to immigrate to the United States in the future? What are the factors that will be important to you when you make this decision?
10. Estimate the percentage of your Chinese schoolmates who will return to China after getting their degree. What are the factors that will determine whether your Chinese schoolmates in your American university will return to China, or try to stay in the U.S.?
11. What do your American friends say about the Suzhi of Chinese students?
12. How would you describe the Suzhi of American students? Do they show different kinds of suzhi, or only a single kind? How would you describe the Suzhi of an International student who is not from China? How are their Suzhi in general comparing to those of Chinese students?
13. What aspects of your Suzhi do you think are high, and what need to be improved?

## Appendix 2: What U.S. Universities my sample of students are attending

<u>Vassar</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Beijing</u>
<u>Vanderbilt</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Hangzhou, Zhejiang</u>
<u>Brandeis</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>Cornell</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>Cornell</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>Cornell</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Taiyuan, Shanxi</u>
<u>Georgetown</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>Georgetown</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Beijing</u>
<u>Northwestern</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>NYU</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Anhui, Hefei</u>
<u>Reed</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Anhui, Hefei</u>
<u>Stanford</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>UNC</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>UNC</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>UNC</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>UNC</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Zhengzhou, Henan</u>
<u>UNC</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Hengshui, Hebei</u>
<u>USC</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>Vanderbilt</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Sophomore</u>	<u>Taiwan/Shanghai</u>
<u>W&amp;M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Freshman</u>	<u>Shanghai</u>
<u>W&amp;M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Shenyang, Liaoning</u>
<u>Yale</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Changsha, Hunan</u>

APPENDIX 3:



Legend:  
The map above shows the place of origin of my informants. Core cities are **CAPITALIZED, in BOLD and UNDERLINED.** Numbers in the parentheses represent the number of informants from that city.