



## Impact of US-China Trade War on Graduate School Selection

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### Introduction

#### *Chinese students studying abroad*

As of 2018, one in three international students in the U.S. hailed from China, totalling over 360,000 students and bringing in an estimated \$14 billion per year (OECD 2014; Fischer 2019; IIE 2018; Redden 2019; Reuters 2019). For many universities, these students' tuition dollars subsidize or enable existing programs and for some, are required to maintain solvency (Musgrave 2019; Magnier and Bases 2019). Although the U.S. is still the top destination for international students and is home to some of the highest ranking tertiary education institutes in the world, there has been increasing competition for international students (D. Liu and Morgan 2017). As other countries such as the U.K., Australia, Japan and Canada slowly increase their market share of Chinese students, the need to maintain and attract Chinese students has become a critical part of the stability of many U.S. universities (Project Atlas 2017; New Oriental 2019).

A number of studies have investigated Chinese and international students' motivations for going abroad (C. K. C. Lee and Morrish 2012; Chen 2014; Shu and Scott 2014; To et al. 2014; Wu 2014; Chao 2017; D. Liu and Morgan 2017; Bartlett, Han, and Bartlett 2018; Rafi 2018; Abubakar, Shanka, and Muuka 2010; Fang and Wang 2014; Ghazarian 2014; M. Yang 2007; Y. Yang, Volet, and Mansfield 2017). The push factors that motivate the students to leave their home country and the pull factors that draw students towards a destination country give researchers and recruiting institutions insight into how they may attract students to a certain location. One influential study was conducted in China by Bodycott (2009) to determine Chinese students' and parents' values in choosing a study abroad location. Bodycott outlined seven push factors and 24 pull factors that influenced student and parent decisions to study abroad. This research revealed that features of the study environment and nature of the degree were the strongest pull factors for Chinese students at the time.

More recent studies revealed a variety of contributing factors in the Chinese students' decision-making process, with some results confirming and other results contradicting prior research (Chen 2014; Chao 2017; D. Liu and Morgan 2017; Bartlett, Han, and Bartlett 2018; C. K. C. Lee and Morrish 2012; Rafi 2018; Shu and Scott 2014; To et al. 2014; Wu 2014; Fang and Wang 2014; H. Liu and Fang 2011). Consequently, it seems appropriate to reassess the motivations as student opinions evolve and decision-making factors shift in importance. These fluctuations could be based on changes such as transforming student desires, international policies and economics or relationships between home and destination countries. As can be seen in the



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method section, this paper adapted motivating factors from Bodycott's (2009) research and added additional criteria based on the current U.S.-China trade war.

### *U.S.-China Trade War*

In early 2018, the U.S. president, citing unfair trade practices, initiated the first tariff increase significantly affecting many Chinese products (*BBC News* 2019; Wong and Kody 2019). Since that time both the U.S. and China have imposed escalating tariffs amplifying the U.S.-China trade war. Additional measures have continued to be implemented by both sides, recently culminating in the closure of a Chinese and U.S. consulate and sanctions being placed on numerous Chinese officials (*BBC News* 2020a; *BBC News* 2020b) These increases have placed economic strain on both Chinese and U.S. companies and consumers (*BBC News* 2019).

As a result of the U.S.' trade deficit with China, China had less potential U.S. imports to which it could add retaliatory tariffs (Bartash 2019; U.S. Department of Commerce 2019). Analysts predicted that China would use other routes of reprisal; 'China is... likely to take action against the U.S. service trade, including transport, tourism and education' (Xin and Wang 2019). Musgrave (2019) and Fischer (2019) argued that U.S. universities aren't ready for the impact of the trade war on Chinese student enrollment and believe the impact could be debilitating for some universities reliant on international tuition.

Beginning in the summer of 2019, China implemented policies designed to promote Chinese patriotism and anti-U.S. sentiment through Chinese state run news and social media (Li et al. 2019; Allen-Ebrahimian 2019; Magnier and Bases 2019; Redden 2019). Considering the effect of this propaganda as well as the political and economic changes can give both researchers and higher education institutions a better gauge of present and future Chinese student enrollment trends. This article provides insight from a case study conducted with a group of Chinese students, assessing their perspectives and future study abroad intentions based on the specific events in the ongoing trade war. By utilizing this information, international institutions seeking Chinese enrollment can better appreciate the Chinese graduate school decision-making process and tailor their marketing strategy accordingly. Universities can also learn about the unique characteristics of central China, a less frequently researched but highly populated portion of China with a higher rate of untapped study abroad potential.

## **Material and Methods**

### *Interview*

The first component of the research uses interviews of 40 Chinese undergraduate and recently graduated students from universities located in Henan, China. The interviews were conducted in English either face to face or remotely to accommodate the interviewee. Key words (tariff, trade war) were provided in the local language of Mandarin Chinese to interviewees for question comprehension as needed. The data was grouped into categories for comparison purposes and

placed in descending order in the charts located in the results section. The list of questions and the follow up question pathway used while interviewing is located in Appendix A.

### Survey

The survey was created via Qualtrics survey software and was disseminated to Chinese student respondents who had the option to take the survey in Mandarin Chinese or English. The survey was taken via QR code by 596 Chinese university students in Henan province. These students were divided fairly evenly across all four grade levels, represented 31 different majors and came from nine different universities across the province.

The survey asked Chinese students to rank graduate school location decision making factors. Bodycott's (2009) pull variables, which were influenced by previous studies (F.-S. Hung, Chung, and Ho 2000; F. S. Hung et al. 2005; K. H. Lee and Tan 1984; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Zhao and Guo 2002) were included to provide a reference point to compare the importance of political factors in students' decision-making. Two new political questions were included in the pool of 16 total factors to assess the relative weight, the trade war, and the international relations situation had on students' decision-making process.

After the initial demographic questions and removing students with no interest in studying abroad, students were asked to select their value for each factor on a five-point scale of 1- extremely important, 2- very important, 3- moderately important, 4- somewhat important, 5- not important at all. There were also multiple written response questions which were later translated into English for examination. In addition, all interviews were conducted after students had already taken the survey.

## Results

### Interview results

Each of the interview questions listed below is followed by a summary of the results from 40 undergraduate or recently graduated student interviews.

Question 1: *Which country or countries have you applied to or are planning to apply to for graduate school?*

| <b>Table 1: Potential study abroad destinations</b> |                     |      |
|---|---------------------|------|
| <i>Desired Country</i>                              | Number of responses | %    |
| <i>U.K.</i>   | 13                  | 32.5 |
| <i>U.S.A.</i>                                       | 11                  | 27.5 |
| <i>Australia</i>                                    | 5                   | 12.5 |
| <i>Canada</i>                                       | 3                   | 7.5  |

|                             |   |     |
|-----------------------------|---|-----|
| <i>China</i>                | 3 | 7.5 |
| <i>U.S. campus in China</i> | 2 | 5   |
| <i>Japan</i>                | 1 | 2.5 |
| <i>Singapore</i>            | 1 | 2.5 |
| <i>Germany</i>              | 1 | 2.5 |

As seen in Table 1, the majority of students preferred to pursue education in the U.K. The primary motivation expressed by twelve participants was that a master’s degree in the U.K. typically only requires one year and is therefore faster and cheaper. Nine students also expressed that the application process is easier. Specifically, the universities don’t require additional prerequisite exams (e.g. many degrees in the U.S. require the GMAT or GRE). Eight students expressed that the British IELTS language proficiency exam had a reputation for being easier than the analogous U.S. TOEFL exam. Seven students also believed the U.K. was safer and more “polite.” Two of the students already had family or friends either currently residing or having previously resided in the U.K.

Question 2: *What are the key factors involved in your decision-making process when choosing your preferred country? Respondents could cite more than one answer.*

**Table 2: Key factors in choice of study abroad location**

| <i>Factor mentioned</i>                                       | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>U.S. education is superior</i>                             | 12                  |
| <i>U.K./Australia degrees are only one year</i>               | 9                   |
| <i>Family or friend living in country</i>                     | 9                   |
| <i>Culture is superior (U.K. 4/U.S. 3/Japan 1)</i>            | 8                   |
| <i>Safer (than U.S.)</i>                                      | 7                   |
| <i>U.K./Australia are cheaper (than U.S.)</i>                 | 6                   |
| <i>U.K./Australia have easier application process</i>         | 4                   |
| <i>Parents insist</i>   | 3                   |
| <i>Australia has less rigorous classes</i>                    | 2                   |
| <i>Relevant major</i>   | 2                   |
| <i>Closer to Chinese people but international (Singapore)</i> | 1                   |
| <i>Easier to get a job</i>                                    | 1                   |

All applicants that mentioned reputation (12) considered the United States to be the strongest in the area of education and believed that it would be the best option for learning. Four specified that their major of study in particular was the most robust in the U.S. The U.S. was also unanimously seen as the most dangerous place to live, with five students citing gun violence as reported in the Chinese news as their reason for this view. There was also a fear of



discrimination against Chinese people expressed by four students. Five students expressed fears that they would be forced to leave the U.S. prior to completing their degree based on comments made by the Trump administration that were widely emphasized by the Chinese media (Yoon-Hendricks 2018; Bloomberg News 2019). Four respondents expressed fear that seemed to stem from external Chinese media sources which insinuated that U.S. law enforcement was racially motivated to unfairly target Chinese people. Six students also shared concerns that due to the trade war, U.S. citizens would likely discriminate against Chinese people and that the U.S. would not be a welcoming place for Chinese nationals.

Australia was widely considered to be the simplest approach with the lowest bar for acceptance for students desiring education in an English-speaking nation (enumerated by 11 students). The shorter program of one-year, lower cost, proximity to China and easier entrance qualification (due to the simpler IELTS exam and no supplemental GMAT or GRE test requirement) were key motivating factors in favor of Australian higher education. Two students commented that although they may not qualify for a comparably ranked university in the U.S. or U.K., they could still be accepted in an even higher ranked university in Australia. The pathway for students going to Australia seemed to be the most well-charted and students (4) believed there would be strong Chinese communities in the Australian institutions. Those four students also had family or friends already living in Australia or with previous experience in an Australian higher degree program.

Canada was viewed as a safer alternative to the United States due to less perceived violence. Two students proposed a hierarchy of English-speaking education based on quality and difficulty of program acceptance ranked high to low as follows: United States, Canada or United Kingdom, and Australia.

Two students chose China-based campuses of U.S. universities. Both students said they could obtain higher prestige with lower cost and a more convenient location, while remaining close to family and relational networks. One student pointed out that sometimes Chinese students face difficulty when returning to China to secure a job because unlike their peers who have had a year or more to develop relationships in China, those that studied abroad were separated from Chinese relationship networks. In this student's opinion, these relationship contacts are one of the most important parts of securing a job. One student believed that the acceptance qualifications were easier for the China branch campus than if the student wanted to attend the campus located in the U.S.

One student preferred Singapore as a superior option since proximity to China is convenient, the environment and education are strong and Chinese language is still prevalent. The student who selected Japan was studying Japanese language and also passionate about Japanese culture. The student who selected Germany had a sister who had married a German citizen and had an

established network. Finally, two interviewees selected China because it was the cheapest option, they had family networks in the city and one was worried about going to a locale where English would be required.

Question 3: *Have you heard anything about the current political situation involving China and the U.S. placing tariffs on one another's products? What have you heard?*

All students were familiar with the political climate, although to varying degrees. Most considered it to be U.S.-induced and believed it was best if all countries were reconciled quickly. They also were familiar with the 'Huawei ban' (Power and Tobin 2019) and believed the U.S. was unfairly discriminating against Chinese companies. Few were able to articulate details regarding the Huawei situation beyond it being a situation of U.S. bullying. When prompted, nearly all respondents were familiar with the increasing tariffs by both countries.

Question 4: *Where did you learn about this, for example, from certain internet websites, TV, family, friends, teachers or somewhere else?*

**Table 3: Source of information about U.S.-China Trade War**

| <i>News Source</i>                      | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>Weibo microblog</i>                  | 14                  |
| <i>TV state-run news</i>                | 8                   |
| <i>Miscellaneous Chinese news sites</i> | 7                   |
| <i>WeChat app</i>                       | 4                   |
| <i>International news through VPN</i>   | 3                   |
| <i>Chinese Communist Party app</i>      | 3                   |
| <i>Chinese teachers</i>                 | 3                   |
| <i>Don't read news</i>                  | 2                   |

As seen in Table 3, the plurality of students (34%) saw state media articles on their Weibo microblog. About a fifth of students (19.5%) saw it on television while at home with parents or grandparents. No students mentioned watching television alone at home. Some students (17%) mentioned they read their news from various Chinese language websites. Some websites such as "Phoenix" had a more political bend than state media articles. According to students, often the comments under the articles or news sources were much more nationalistic and expressed more radical sentiments than the articles themselves. Seven students volunteered that they didn't seek out the news but that it "popped up" on their websites or phone applications in prominent places. The three students who actively used their Communist Party phone applications appeared to exhibit more passion about patriotism than those who did not. Three students said they learned trade war information from their Chinese teachers.

There was a salient trend of all interviewed students speaking very matter-of-factly that China was simply a victim of U.S. bullying and students believed China had done nothing to warrant the U.S. tariffs. A large proportion of the students were largely disinterested with two students admitting they don't follow the news.

Question 5: *Would the trade war influence your decision of whether or not to go to the U.S. for graduate school? If so, how?*

**Table 4: Influence of U.S.-China trade war on decision to study in the U.S.**

| <i>Degree of influence</i>                                      | Number of responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| <i>No influence</i>   | 19                  | 47.5 |
| <i>Minimal influence</i>  | 12                  | 30   |
| <i>Strong influence, but not enough to change result</i>        | 4                   | 10   |
| <i>Won't go to country with trade war (strongest influence)</i> | 3                   | 7.5  |
| <i>Whatever parents decide</i>                                  | 2                   | 5    |

From this question, 92.5% of applicants said the trade war would not ultimately affect their final choice in deciding where to go to school. Many expressed varying degrees of pro-China sentiments (40%), but one student explained for a decision as important as education, "something like politics shouldn't affect their choice of schools." Two students expressed that it didn't matter what their opinion was because they should follow their parents' desires.

Question 6: *If interviewee is planning to pursue graduate school in a country other than the U.S., they were asked, If [country of graduate school] was in the trade war with China instead of the U.S., would it influence you not to go, Why?*

The purpose of this question was to ensure that even students not planning to attend graduate school in the U.S. would still attempt to consider the impact of a trade war on their educational plans.

Question 6a: *Will the trade war have any effect on your consumer purchasing decisions, for example, imported U.S. products?*

**Table 5: Influence of U.S.-China trade war on consumer purchases**

| <i>Degree of influence</i>              | Number of responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| <i>No influence</i>                     | 16                  | 40   |
| <i>Strong influence</i>                 | 12                  | 30   |
| <i>Some influence</i>                   | 7                   | 17.5 |
| <i>Doesn't buy U.S. products anyway</i> | 3                   | 7.5  |



|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| <i>Apple customer planning to switch to Huawei</i> | 2 | 5   |
| <i>Undecided</i>                                   | 1 | 2.5 |

Respondents were split on their answers as 40% responded that it would not influence their purchasing decisions, 32.5% stated that it will have a strong influence, 17% answered ‘some influence’ and the remaining 10% were unsure or didn’t buy U.S. products anyway.

Question 6b: *If yes, if price wasn’t a factor, would you still avoid purchasing imported U.S. products? If so, why?*

For those respondents who plan to avoid buying U.S. products 71% (22 total) gave political reasons, while the remaining 29% (9 total) stated that price was the only factor.

As seen from the results of Question 7a and 7b, 52.5% of students surveyed were influenced by the trade war in the realm of consumer purchases. This is significantly higher than the percentage who stated it would affect their educational choices. One student expressed “it is important to support Chinese companies and the Chinese economy.” Three students commented they never bought U.S. products anyway while three others said they would buy the best quality product no matter which country it came from. One student mentioned that some of his fashion was from the U.S. (Adidas and Nike) and that he probably wouldn’t change. He pointed out “Every few years, anti-Japan sentiments [flare up] and Chinese people protest and destroy Japanese products, but after a month, everything goes back to normal.” He suspected the same might be true in this situation. Two students expressed that they have always used Apple, but they will now discontinue their support of Apple in favor of a Chinese company as a direct result of the trade war. Many respondents (29%) explained the main reason they would no longer buy an iPhone was because it would be too expensive with the additional China-imposed tariffs.

Question 7a: *Do your parents hold the same political views as you regarding the current international hostility between China and the U.S.? If not, how do your views differ?*

The majority of respondents (77.5%) answered that their parents held a more nationalistic view than themselves. Of the remaining students, 17.5% said their views were the same and 5% were unsure what their parents believed. There were no respondents who stated their views were more nationalistic than their parents.

Question 7b: *Would you say that they [parents] influenced your opinion, you influenced their opinion, or both of you arrived at your conclusion independently?*

15% of respondents had no opinion 27.5% said the parent influenced the child, 22.5% the child influenced the parent and 35% stated that there was mutual influence or independence between the parent and child.

Students consistently considered their parents to be more nationalistic than themselves, although they were surprisingly split on their perception regarding who would influence the other more in areas related to international study. Five students expressed that their parents essentially planned their future for them, while two believed they had great autonomy to do what they wanted because their parents didn't know very much about graduate school and international affairs or because their parents had a very deferential approach (also 2 students). Seven students stated that their parents received their news primarily from the Chinese government's TV news channel. Five parents were described as "not political" and two students didn't know their parent's view on the trade war.

*Question 8: For students who said that they were considering not pursuing U.S. education solely because of the trade war, 'If you were accepted into Harvard University, would you still attend?'*

The function of this question was to measure how devout students were in their nationalist sentiments when they claimed they would avoid U.S. education because of the ongoing political situation. None of the students were willing to forfeit an opportunity to attend what is widely considered by Chinese to be the world's top university (He 2014). This suggests that even the more nationalistic have limits to their nationalism when it comes to education.

### **Survey Results**

The average age of students taking the survey was 21. In the survey, over 75% selected they would consider going to graduate school and of that, 60% would consider going abroad. Stated another way, 45% of students were considering going abroad for graduate school.

Students who considered graduate school but did not want to go abroad had varied responses, falling into a few broad categories. Most students (78%) considered the cost of international education to be too high for their families and about 12% were intimidated by the language requirements of foreign education. The reasons for the remaining 10% of the students included: desire to remain close to family, love for China, not wanting to live in a different culture, or not having a compelling reason for pursuing education abroad.

When asked in question 7, how important their parent's opinion was in their decision to study abroad, 22% of students gave the highest ranking with 42% considering it 'very important' and 27% deeming it to be 'moderately important'. Less than 1% considered their parent's opinion 'not important.'

The key component of the survey was rating the 16 factors and their level of influence on study abroad location. Respondents who answered that they would not be interested in studying abroad did not proceed to this question in the survey. 228 responses were recorded for the importance of these factors. Table 6 depicts the average ranking of each factor with the lowest

number being of the greatest importance.

| <b>Table 6. How important are these factors to you when choosing where to study?</b> |        |
|--|--------|
| Factor   | Rating |
| <i>Level of crime</i>  | 1.45   |
| <i>International standing/reputation of university</i>                               | 1.68   |
| <i>Employment prospects after graduation</i>   | 1.75   |
| <i>Physical study environment : facilities , buildings and grounds</i>               | 1.93   |
| <i>Cost of tuition</i>   | 1.95   |
| <i>Current relationship between graduate school country and China</i>                | 1.96   |
| <i>Cost of living</i>  | 1.99   |
| <i>Visa application and acceptance</i>   | 2.15   |
| <i>Part-time employment while studying</i>   | 2.3    |
| <i>Political factors such as the trade war between China and the U.S.</i>            | 2.34   |
| <i>Gain understanding of western culture</i>   | 2.38   |
| <i>Scholarships</i>  | 2.56   |
| <i>Climate of host country</i>   | 2.62   |
| <i>Relatives and friends living or studying in the area</i>                          | 3.35   |
| <i>Migration possibilities</i>   | 3.54   |
| <i>Proximity to home</i>   | 3.61   |

When taking the average for each of the 16 factor responses and ranking them from most to least important, level of crime was the most important factor for the surveyed population of Chinese students. University reputation and employment prospects made up the top tier of student responses. The second tier included the campus facilities, cost of tuition, the country's relationship with China and the cost of living. The least significant tier was family and friends living in the area, migration possibilities and proximity to home.

The key findings were that the students surveyed found the political factors to be of average significance, ranking them 6th and 10<sup>th</sup> most important. The specific question invoking the term 'trade war between China and the U.S.' was ranked only 10<sup>th</sup> of 16 factors and just below opportunities for part time employment while studying and slightly above "gain understanding of western culture". This ranking, which is supported by the interview results, demonstrates that political considerations seem to not be among the most important factors of Chinese students when considering studying abroad.



## **Discussion**

Despite considerable propaganda from Chinese state media, students did not seem to be adversely influenced to a significant degree by the events of the trade war in the area of education in either the interviews or the survey. Of the 16 factors mentioned in our survey, nine others factors were deemed more important to students contemplating studying abroad than the trade war factor. 45% of surveyed students are considering studying in a foreign country and are thus potential customers for U.S. universities.

According to students surveyed, U.S. education currently has the strongest reputation. This reputation, combined with the great importance placed on education among Chinese families, suggests that U.S. universities might be afforded some additional grace in spite of political conflict (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Bodycott and Lai 2012). At present, even the interviewees who expressed the strongest pro-China sentiments demonstrated an unwillingness to surrender a theoretical opportunity to attend Harvard despite the political tensions. As mentioned previously, Harvard is widely accepted as the world's top university by most Chinese families and the students' desire to still attend can be seen as evidence suggesting that educational opportunities carry immense weight and might be deemed more significant than patriotic sentiments (He 2014). If Japan can be looked to as an example, it has historically been China's most consistently propagandized enemy since World War II (Stokes 2016). Despite this, it remains a popular destination for Chinese students pursuing education abroad (New Oriental 2019).

If universities wish to continue to be competitive in attracting Chinese students willing to pay high tuition rates, they need to be mindful of what motivates this population. A potential starting point could be appreciating what causes students to choose different countries for education. If U.S. universities are able to offer shorter graduate degree programs with less rigorous testing and application processes, they can appear more attractive to Chinese applicants. Universities can also benefit greatly from engaging in impression management with the various influencers that have an impact on Chinese students. Being a highly ranked university is obviously helpful to attracting many of the most talented Chinese students (Bartlett, Han, and Bartlett 2018; Chao 2017; Bodycott 2009; Manns and Swift 2016).

Additionally, recruiting managers would be wise to emphasize the safety of the university campus and surrounding areas. Of particular concern are crime and gun violence. This can be best accomplished by communicating the desired reputation for safety through appropriate channels. Since most interviewees received the bulk of their information through Chinese family, friends or commercial agents, universities ought to begin by ensuring their existing Chinese students feel secure and have a positive experience because they will likely influence others in their broader social network (D. Liu and Morgan 2017).



Student interviews also highlighted the strong influence of the Weibo microblog platform as a primary source of international news. Higher education recruiting managers using advertisements in Chinese on Weibo can expect a greater number of views from potential Chinese students as compared to an advertisement on a Western media platform such as Google, Facebook or Instagram which are all currently blocked in China (Zhu 2019; Shu and Scott 2014). Creating a Weibo, Wechat and QQ account for the university and posting in Mandarin Chinese would ensure greater accessibility for students. Higher education institution (HEI) marketing strategies could also include posts of articles and/or videos of current and recently graduated Chinese students highlighting the benefits of the university, especially those ranked highly desirable in the survey such as safety, university reputation, employment prospects and physical environment of the university. The use of Chinese testimonials is of particular value, as students in the interviews expressed greater trust in the advice obtained from other Chinese people.

Another observation is that while education appears somewhat buffered from the trade war, student purchasing decisions seem more likely to be influenced as social political pressure is shifting. It is conceivable that in the near future, a product such as the Apple iPhone, once seen as a status symbol, could significantly lose popularity. The same could be true of other U.S. luxury brands if the Chinese state-run media is able to mobilize its citizens to buy exclusively Chinese-made products.

According to the interviewees, Chinese parents were all considered to be more nationalistic than their children. This indicates a possible trend toward the younger generation being less political than its predecessor and that younger generation's perspectives could be significantly different. University marketing departments should be mindful that a successful marketing campaign directed at parents might look very different from one directed at students.

#### *Limitations and further research*

One strength or limitation of this study is that it interviewed students almost entirely from Henan province in China. Henan, located in central China and one of the largest and most densely populated provinces, is typically considered to be more rural and less developed than the east coast cities and provinces (Brown 2014). Other researchers typically draw from larger cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shen Zhen, etc. Students from Henan are generally less exposed to foreign individuals and ideas compared to other parts of China, although Sias University, where the majority of respondents attend, has a large foreign presence. It is possible that other parts of China would be affected differently by the trade war. Further research should be conducted on how different provinces perceive the trade war and the consequential impact on education.



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### **Conclusion**

It is possible that a prolonged trade war as well as tensions created by the COVID-19 epidemic could continue for many years into the future and might cause a greater number of students to deviate from their original study abroad objectives. At the point of this study, however, the tensions of the trade war did not seem to be a sufficiently significant factor to deter most from pursuing education in the U.S.

Although concerns about the trade war may be mollified, U.S. HEIs should focus on creating and marketing a safe environment for Chinese students. Engaging Chinese agents, prioritizing positive student referrals, and utilizing social media to highlight low crime rates, university reputation and a welcoming environment can be used in attracting Chinese applicants



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### **Appendix A: Survey questions**

The questions were listed as follows

1. How old are you?
2. In which university are you a student?
3. What nationality are you?
4. What year are you in school?
5. Would you consider going to graduate school?
6. If yes, are you considering going to a university in a foreign country?
  - a. If not, what are your main reasons for not considering international schools? (open response)
  - b. If yes, would you consider going to graduate school in the U.S.A.?
    - i. If no, what are your main reasons for not wanting to attend graduate school in the U.S.A.? (open response)
7. How important are your parents' opinion in your decision of whether to go abroad or not?
8. How important are these factors to you when choosing where to study? (1- extremely important, 2- very important, 3- moderately important, 4- somewhat important, 5- not important at all)
  - a. Employment prospects after graduation?
  - b. Migration possibilities
  - c. Proximity to home
  - d. Scholarships
  - e. Cost of tuition
  - f. Relatives and friends living or studying in the area
  - g. International standing/reputation of university
  - h. Physical study environment; facilities, buildings and grounds
  - i. Cost of living
  - j. Part-time employment while studying
  - k. Visa application and acceptance
  - l. Gain understanding of western culture
  - m. Level of crime
  - n. Climate of host country
  - o. Current relationship between graduate school country and China
  - p. Political factors such as the trade war between China and the U.S.
9. Are there any other factors that strongly affect your decision of where to study abroad? (written response)



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