

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION CONSULTING IN THE INTERNATIONALIZATION
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

With the internationalization of higher education, the significant role education agents play has been increasingly recognized by educational institutions. A majority of education agents related research discussed the role of education agents in the international recruitment from the perspective of educational institutions. Little research is conducted to examine the broader role education consulting plays and the contribution education consulting could make to students' experience from the perspective of education consultants. Thus, this study examined education consultants' perspectives regarding the changes in the consulting services provided by education consulting companies (ECCs) to Chinese students wishing to study in the U.S. higher education since 2010 and the concrete feedback education consultants receive from students. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of education consulting and their impact on students' post-enrolment experience in U.S. higher education institutions from the perspectives of education consultants. Qualitative interviews are used as the primary method to collect the insights of experienced consultants and managers of ECCs. The official websites of 15 ECCs are also investigated in order to find the current consulting services ECCs provide. This study finds ECCs are extending their traditional services that focus on applications and visas to a longer-term and wider range of services. More prestige institutions graduates and native English-speakers are entering the education consulting industry of China and greater stratification among education consultants is occurring. According to the students' feedback education consultants have received, the consultants of ECCs have a positive impact on students' post-enrolment experience in U.S. educational institutions. This study suggests the role ECCs play in the internationalization of higher education should be reconceptualised in a broader context. Recommendations for ECCs and educational institutions are provided to prompt students' post-enrolment experience and to address the issue of inequality.

Preface

This graduating paper was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education in the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver). This paper is an original intellectual product of the author, Jie Tian.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

With the process of internationalization of higher education and competition related to international recruitment, most educational institutions in international destination countries are embracing education agents in students' home countries to assist with recruitment of international students, including the UK, Canada, the US and Australia. As the competition in recruiting international students among different countries and institutions becomes fiercer, the education agents are playing a greater role. Students and destination institutions can both benefit from working with education agents. For students, education agents can assist them to navigate the process of the college application. For institutions, education agents can help identify the key factors that result in the growth or decline in student recruitment, analyze the educational background of students and predict future market trends (Austrade Bangkok, 2013). They also have knowledge of local networks, offer services in local languages, and understand the culture of prospective students.

The term “education agent” (sometimes referred to as an “education consultant”) refers to “an individual or organization offering education advising services to students and their parents in exchange for a fee (paid by students and their families) and/or a commission (paid by an [educational] institution they represent...)” (Coffey, 2013).

There are two primary types of education agents, which are easily confused when using this term. The first type of agent (including individual and organization) is hired by one particular institution with the aim of recruiting international students exclusively for that specific institution and receives a commission from that institution. Another type of agent is an independent *education consulting company* (ECC) that charges students and parents for providing education consulting services and also engages in international recruitment for institutions they represent in exchange for a commission. The education agents discussed in

this study are these independent *education consulting companies* (ECCs) and the education consultants working for them.

In China, large independent ECCs provide a wide variety of services and programs to students in different age groups who plan to study overseas. The destination countries of the students might be the U.S., Canada, the UK, and Australia; the destination institutions of the students might be high schools, universities, or colleges; the common services offered by these ECCs include test preparation, admission counselling, institution application services, document translation, visa application and recently developed services designed to help the students be successful once they are immersed in the international setting. The consulting services provided by these large ECCs are usually firstly divided by destination country and then divided by academic level. For example, there are education consultants who specialize in providing consulting services to students who are preparing for undergraduate study in the U.S.

1.2 Statement of Problem

China has become the country sending the most international students to other nations. According to the Ministry of Education of China, the number of Chinese students studying abroad in 2016 has increased to 544,500. Among all the countries, the most noticeable and attractive destination country for Chinese students is the U.S. According to the Open Doors Report from the Institute of International Education (2016), 328,547(31.5%) international students in the U.S. in 2015/2016 school year are from China that ranked first among the top 25 places of origin of international students. The largest group of Chinese international students in the U.S. studies at the undergraduate level. The U.S. experiences a continuous increase in the number of undergraduate students from China, which rocketed from 39,947 in 2009/2010 academic year to 135,629 in 2015/2016 academic year.

According to Hagedorn and Zhang(2011), approximately two-thirds of international Chinese undergraduates studied in four U.S institutions used the consulting services of ECCs. With the growth in the number of international students, ECCs in China have developed rapidly since 2009, particularly in respect to U.S. higher education consulting. The size of the U.S consulting departments in ECCs and the number of services they provide grows along with the number of international students.

Having worked in the field of education in China for ten years, I had the opportunity to witness the growth of one of the leading ECCs in China (NV will be used as a pseudonym). Ten years ago, NV was a small office providing education consulting services to a limited number of students and helping a few institutions to recruit international students. Currently, NV with over 30 branches located in nearly all big cities of China provides a broad range of services to numerous students and partner with a great number of educational institutions, a result of the economic growth of China and global internationalization of higher education.

Ten years ago, the U.S. higher education consulting services offered by NV were focused on U.S. institutional applications and visa consulting. Since about 2010, the number of U.S. prospective students snowballed and a wide range of new services and programs that extend beyond the traditional services appeared on their websites and the websites of other ECCs. Some key words describing these newly developed programs might include long-term preparation, extracurricular activities planning, critical thinking, U.S. class demonstration, public speech, western culture lectures, presentation skills and so on. Another noticeable change is that many education consultants conducting these programs have educational experience from prestige institutions like Ivy League institutions in the U.S. or famed institutions in other countries.

In recent years, the critical role of education agents in international recruitment has been recognized. Many research studies were carried out to examine the role of education agents in international recruitment and to explore the institution-agent relationship. For example, there are studies about what difficulties international recruitment officers meet when working with agents, how institutional recruitment officers manage their relationship with education agents, and how institutional stakeholders make policy to regulate unethical behaviours of education agents. However, much of research related to education agents has been framed on international recruitment issues and fails to take account of the educational consulting role. Little attention is given to the changes in the education consulting services and programs ECCs provide and their impact on students' experience afterwards as international students.

Therefore, this study examines education consultants' perspectives regarding the changes in education consulting services provided by ECCs to students who plan to study in U.S. higher education institutions since 2010 and the concrete feedback education consultants received from students. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role education consulting plays in the internationalization of higher education and the impact of education consulting on students' post-enrolment experiences in U.S. higher education institutions from the perspective of education consultants.

1.3 Research questions

This study will be conducted to address the following issues:

1. What are the current primary consulting services provided by ECCs to Chinese students who plan to study in U.S. higher education institutions?

2. How and why have the consulting services provided by ECCs to Chinese students who plan to study in the U.S. higher education institutions changed since 2010?
3. What concrete feedback do education consultants of ECCs receive from the students and their parents regarding the impact of their education consulting services on students' experience after their enrolment in U.S. higher education institutions?
4. What lessons have education consultants learned regarding ways to enhance the experience of Chinese students as international students studying abroad?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Given that working with education consultants has become a common practice for Chinese students who plan to study in U.S. higher education institutions, more knowledge about the practices of ECCs is needed if we are to investigate the role of education consulting and their impact on student experience as international students. This study will be the first step in developing these understandings. Educational institutions and ECCs might learn lessons from this study, which could enable them to enhance the educational experience of international students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 The Rise of Education Agents

Education agents are a sign and effect of commercialization in higher education (Hulme, Thomson, Hulme & Doughty, 2014). Due to education providers' lack of commercial capacity to market their courses, education agents emerge as important facilitators of international recruitment and as direct sources of students (Collins, 2012). Currently, the use of agents is commonplace in many popular destination countries. Australia and the U.K. have depended heavily on education agents in international recruitment (Fischer and Hoover, 2011). Compared to Australia and the United Kingdom, the agent use generated significant controversy in the U.S. Under the law of the U.S., it is illegal to recruit domestic students by commission-based agents that lead to criticism on using agents to recruit international students (Altbach, 2013). However, Fischer (2013) argued that a softer approach to agent use is inevitable with the evidence of the growth of the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC), a non-profit organization founded by U.S. education leaders to certify agents and promote ethical international recruitment strategies. Agent use by Canadian educational institutions is very prevalent and has not caused the kind of debates seen in the U.S. International student recruitment is supported strongly by both provincial and federal governments in Canada (Coffey, 2013).

2.2 Debates on the Use of Education Agents

Mazzarol (1998) argued that strategic alliances with education agents and overseas teaching programs can help the international recruitment of higher education institutions. Education agents can present physically in targeted international markets for U.S. educational institutions and be valuable resources for international markets (Harris & Rhall, 1993). Since

it is costly for international recruitment officers to travel to a variety of other countries, working with education agents to recruit international students is financially wise and could help the institution keep its international student body diverse (Stedman, 1999). However, questions about whether agents' practices are ethical have been raised (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). Redden (2013) argued that agents that recommend a particular institution to students for a commission can cause agents to put the student's interest behind of their own. When trying to help students, an education agent might assume to be authoritative and provide inaccurate information (Heaney & Ott, 2000). Similarly, Hagedorn and Zhang(2011) argued less responsible education agents might provide false information or mislead students for their own financial interest, which is harmful to both students' life and the reputation of educational institutions. On the other hand, education institutions may also have unethical issues when working with education agents in order to recruit more students, by misrepresenting their academic courses, breaking their promises to students, or violating their written contracts or spoken agreements with education agents (Robison, 2007).

Due to the ethical concerns on the agent use, some scholars argue education agents should be eliminated. For example, Altbach (2013) suggested a simple solution to resolve this controversial issue that educational institutions should immediately stop working with education agents. However, with the process of commercialization of higher education, the concerns about ethical problems have been gradually overcome by the perceived need for agents. Brainer and Galbraith (2013) argued that stop using education agents would not be in the interests of both students and institutions. Education agents will also help the education market continue to expand by playing a brokerage role in the recruitment process (Hulme, Thomson, Hulme & Doughty, 2014).

2.3 The Agent Use in International Recruitment

With the education agent use increasingly accepted by higher education institutions, research related to education agents began to develop. The use of education agents discussed in much of the existing research is related to international recruitment. Many studies discuss strategies to manage the institution-agent relationship and how to regulate the agents' practice from the institutions' perspective. International officers' opinions were examined in much research (Huang, Raimo & Humfrey, 2014). Suggestions and recommendation of institution-agent relationship management were provided in many of the agent-related research. Developing transparent processes and including sufficient specification of behavior norms in partnership contracts were recommended to institutions on agent use (Huang, Raimo & Humfrey, 2014).

Another aspect of research related to education agents examines the factors influencing students' decision-making, but it is still insufficient. Many factors might influence the student's choice in destination countries and destination Institutions. For example, family and peers will affect the selection of international students on institutions (Bodycott, 2009; Ren, Hagedorn, & McGill, 2011). Among many possible factors, such as the reputation of host institutions, locations, tuition fees and institutional rankings, education agents have a strong influence on students' choice on higher education institutions and "informational and persuasion influence from agents has a stronger impact than informational and persuasion influence from peers" (Pimpa, 2003). Coffey (2013) argued education agents primarily affect student choice-making by "offering a severely constrained set of institutional program choices." However, these studies related to student choices fail to take full account of the agents' role. For example, some education consulting services target primarily the applicants of top institutions that will not partner with any third-party agents so that these education agents don't have commission-based motive to recommend certain institutions. The education agents' suggestion on destination institutions might depend on students'

preference, students' academic performance, education consultants' work load in application process and institutions' admission rate. According to my working experience and observation, some education agents or ECCs will charge students for providing consulting or application services according to the ranking of institutions to which students are admitted. In this case, education agents will possibly recommend institutions with high rankings and relatively higher admission rates. In peak seasons for higher education applications, institutions with fewer application essays or a simpler application process might be recommended. One research question of this study related to education consulting services provide by ECCs may contribute to a better understanding of the influencing factors on students' choices.

2.4 Education Agents in China

Students rely heavily on education agents to navigate them through the college application processes in East Asian countries (Robison, 2007). A significant number of students and parents in China will seek professional consulting services in the college application process, which is seen as "a compulsory component" (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). Since the early 1990s when it is more available for Chinese students to study overseas, education agents began to actively participate in helping students to seek higher education opportunities (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011).

During the past decade, the number of ECCs in China has increased significantly. According to the website of the Ministry of Education of China, there are over 600 registered ECCs. The registered ECCs are granted "the Qualification License for Self-supporting Overseas Study Service Agent" issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education and are allowed to form partnerships with overseas higher education institutions and organizations. Except for these registered ECCs, there are many other ECCs without "the Qualification License" from

the Ministry of Education of China providing similar education consulting services to prospective students, but they are not allowed to form partnerships with overseas institutions and recruit international students for those institutions. That is to say, these “unregistered” ECCs and other independent education consultants don’t have a recruitment role for overseas institutions and have only an education consulting role that is rarely mentioned in the existing literature.

2.5 Education Consulting Services Provided by Education Agents

Information navigation, college admission counseling, application, and visa processing services are standard services provided by education agents (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011; Pimpa, 2003). The concept of “one-stop shop” is used by many agents (Pimpa, 2003), such as some “one-stop going abroad” programs or “one-stop services” provided by some ECCs. According to Hagedorn and Zhang (2011), the most commonly referred services in China that an agent could provide are as follows: (a) Choosing a destination country and/or institution; (b) Assisting in college application materials; (c) Initiating contact with any necessary personnel at target universities; (d) Preparing all necessary materials for student visa application and/or providing training for U.S. visa interviews; (e) Translating documents; (f) Training for TOEFL, IELTS, or ACT. Among these services, the first four services are the most needed by students (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). Some agents also provide services to students after they go abroad including airport pick-up, accommodation arrangements, and financial transactions (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). However, the expertise, range, and sophistication of education consulting services vary considerably (Coffey, 2013).

The services provided by education agents are expanding as these edu-businesses continue to grow and pursue more profit. Education agents are increasingly using their intelligence in international markets to extend their business into education-related

areas(Hulme et al., 2014), which can be evidenced by a wide range of newly developed education consulting services and programs found on ECCs' websites including the Long-term Package Consulting Services, the DIY Application Consulting services, Academic English Programs, Career Consulting Services and so on.

Given that China has become the number one origin country for international students in higher education institutions, more knowledge about the practice of ECCs in China is much needed. However, the majority of discussions related to education consulting services provided by education agents in existing literature are very generalized given that only the most common consulting services were listed without much explanation and expansion. Furthermore, little critical attention has been paid to the wide range of education consulting services provided by ECCs and how and why the primary consulting services ECCs provide has changed with the fast growing number of prospective international students, in particular concerning the newly developed consulting services in recent years.

2.6 The Influence of Education Agents on Students' Experiences

Many education consultants identified in research had previously been international students themselves. Their own experience as an international student “not only informs the advice they provide to students but also affects their relationships with students” (Collins, 2012). Some agents offered a wide range of services that go well beyond those associated with education such as airport pick-up and drop-off services, accommodation arrangement and even Internet access (Collins, 2012). There is evidence that some education consultants provide some social, learning and personal support at no cost. Under such circumstances, education consultants are establishing social capital¹ with students rather than making a profit, which indicates there is a significant overlap between the profit-oriented aspect of education

¹ Social capital is defined by the OECD as “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups”(OECD, 2017).

agents and the broader contribution they make to student experiences (Collins, 2012). Pimpa (2003) argued that education consultants are not just information providers but also mentors for prospective students. Education agents are valuable because they have the ability to provide face-to-face communication about the advantages and disadvantages of particular academic programs and institutions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, there are only little pieces that mentioned that education agents could make a broader contribution to students' experience. Little research is conducted from education consultants' perspective and examined how exactly education agents influence students' post-enrolment experience.

As mentioned above, educational institutions have become increasingly aware of the need to manage their relationship with education agents and to know more about education agents' practice. Thus a majority of research related to education agents places great emphasis on the role education agents play in international recruitment from educational institutions' perspective. As a consequence, other roles education agents might play are possibly invisible and unrecognized. According to my working experience and observation, the primary business of many leading ECCs is providing education consulting services to students in addition to or instead of recruiting international students for overseas institutions. The commissions ECCs receive from partner institutions are just a small portion of their revenue. The profit of many ECCs is primarily from charging service fees to students and parents. Little attention is paid to the consulting role ECCs play in the internationalization of higher education. Therefore, this study will explore education consultants' perspectives related to enhancing students' post-enrolment experience and the lessons education consultants learned in the process of providing education consulting services, which may contribute to enrich the studies related to the role of education consulting in a broader context.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative methods will be used to get first-hand perspectives of experienced education consultants in this study. In order to understand the new U.S higher education consulting services in China and their impact on students' experience in higher education, this study will draw on individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with experienced education consultants and the analysis of documents and information on ECCs' websites.

3.2 Setting

Some large ECCs in China have a great number of branch companies that are located in the major cities of China. The head offices of these ECCs are primarily based in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Guangzhou. Some small-scale ECCs that service a smaller number of selected students are located mostly in Beijing and Shanghai.

3.3 Participants Recruitment and Selection

Education agents in this study were the leading ECCs in China, ECCs with a strong reputation in U.S. higher education consulting, or independent consultants with strong reputations. The potential participants of this study satisfied at least one of the following criteria: (1) Education consultants who have more than five years experience specializing in U.S. higher education consulting; (2) Directors, managers or team leaders who have more than three years experience in a U.S. higher education consulting department or company; (3) Key persons or program designers in a recently developed U.S. higher education consulting programs; (4) Education consultants who work closely with prospective international

students heading to U.S. higher education and with students who are enrolled in U.S. institutions.

The participants' recruitment method was as follows:

1. The researcher identified the leading ECCs and other ECCs with a strong reputation in U.S higher education consulting services by exploring the official website of China Education Ministry and media coverage. Event information such as U.S. institutions' seminars or exhibitions hosted by certain ECCs was additional information used to identify the ECCs that interact with U.S. institutions.
2. The researcher investigated the website of these ECCs to explore the consulting services and programs they provide. The ECCs that provide a wide range of consulting programs on U.S. higher education and provide services focusing on long-term preparation for U.S. higher education instead of, or in addition to, institution application consulting services were selected.
3. The researcher investigated the website of selected ECCs to find qualified participants. Most company websites introduce the U.S. higher education consulting team and the programs for which they are responsible. Because the experience of a consultant is a key factor when students and parents come to a consultant, it is not uncommon to find rich introductory information of the consultants' experience and their contact information on the website of their companies. The consultants' blogs, existing public interviews on the Internet, event information and media coverage about China's education consulting industry were also used to identify the experienced consultants.
4. China's most popular microblog Weibo (often called China's Twitter) was used to identify experienced consultants as well, especially the independent consultants.

Consultants specializing in the U.S. higher education consulting who have a high number of followers on Weibo were invited to participate in this study.

5. An invitation to participate in a semi-structured in-depth interview was sent to potential participants using an email address published on a company website. Other possible participants without a published email address on the internet were contacted via the online platform such as the consultants' Weibo message system to ask for an email address and then the researcher sent the invitation via email. The invitation contained criteria for inclusion in the study. Qualified participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating.
6. The participants were encouraged to forward the researcher's invitation to other experienced consultants who meet the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Four participants who have senior management role and the most long-standing experience specializing in U.S. higher education consulting were selected to conduct interviews.

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The first stage of this study was the collection and examination of documents. Documents collected included: Online materials of selected ECCs describing U.S. higher education consulting services and programs; consultants' public blogs; media coverage and public interviews related to consultants' insights about U.S. higher education consulting services and their impact on students' after-enrolment experiences.

The second stage of this study consisted of face-to-face or Internet-supported semi-structured interviews that posed open-ended questions about participants' experiences related to U.S. higher education consulting. After the participants were selected, the researcher sent the Informed Consent Forms to the participants for their review and completion. Once the selected participants confirmed their interest to participate, the researcher began to discuss

the interview time and location with the participants. When the researcher and the participant were in the same place, the interview was conducted face-to-face. The participants decided the place and time for doing a face-to-face interview. When it was not possible to meet face-to-face, interviews were conducted by online communication software, such as Skype or Wechat (the most common instant communication App in China) depending on the participants' preference. The interview questions were sent to the participants by email three days before the interview time. Before beginning each interview, the researcher introduced the purpose of the study and asked if the participants had any questions or concerns. After the researcher answered all the questions and confirmed the Informed Consent Form was signed, the interview began. During the interview, the researcher led a semi-structured interview, but the researcher also had the flexibility to change the sequence and use follow-up questions according to the interviewee's responses. The participants could choose their preferred language, Mandarin or English, to conduct the interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were audio recorded upon the participants' approval and then transcribed. After the interview, the participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for use in the study and they were invited to contact the researcher if they had any additional questions or thoughts about the interview.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data was organized according to research questions, searched for themes within the data related to each research question. Data was presented thematically and analyzed critically related to themes addressed in the literature review. The major themes that emerged include the current primary services provided by ECCs, the newly developed services provided by ECCs, the primary changes in consulting services provided by ECCs and the possible causes of these changes, the changes in the background of education consultants, the

impact of the consulting services on students' experience and the recommendations from education consultants.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study did not begin until UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board issued the ethics certificate. Consultants who are working in the ECCs were recruited after their employment companies provided written approval for the researcher to conduct the study. All participants were provided with a consent form that states the purpose of the study, how much time participants would commit, what participants' rights were what steps would be taken to protect confidentiality, and who to contact if they had any questions or concerns. This study used pseudonyms instead of real names for the ECCs and education consultants. No identifying information about the participants was revealed in this study, nor were participants asked to reveal personal information about the students with whom they consult. The participants were informed in advance of the interview that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and they had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions posed during the interview.

During the study, the data and the electronically signed consent forms were stored in the researcher's personal computer. The computer was protected by a password. After the study, the data and electronically signed consent forms were stored in the researcher's personal computer and the computer of the research supervisor. Both computers are protected by passwords. Following completion of the study, the data and consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the research supervisor's office on the UBC campus.

3.7 Limitations

The purpose of this study is to better understand the role education consultants play and their perspectives about their impact on students' post-enrolment experiences in U.S. higher education institutions. Due to constraints related to resources, this study examines only the education consultants' perspectives about the feedback they get from students. Direct feedback from the students themselves on this topic could be examined in future research.

Based on personal experience, parents and students tend to keep in touch with their consultants for the first one to three months after enrolment in U.S. institutions. Some of the students will maintain long-term communication with their consultants. However, consultants might lose their connection with some students and parents after a short term, which might limit the ability of consultants to discuss feedback from all students.

Most of the ECCs in this study were for-profit companies. Considerations related to business secrets might limit the details that were shared about some newly developed or competitive consulting programs. Furthermore, some experienced consultants who are not employed currently by ECCs or who are not using public blogs may have been unintentionally excluded from the study because of an inability to identify and contact them.

3.8 Positionality as a Researcher

Before I became an international student, I had worked as a teacher, an education consultant and a director of an educational organization in China. All of these working and study experiences shaped my interest and contributed to the generation of my research topic and research questions.

While working in the field of education in China, I heard some information from students and colleagues that Chinese international students in overseas institutions encountered significant

academic and cultural challenges. Possibly due to the language barrier and significantly different teaching and learning styles between China's education system and overseas higher education institutions, a great number of Chinese international students struggle with academic performance and cultural immersion in overseas higher education institutions. According to my former experience in China's public school system, China's public high school education places great emphasis on exams and standardized training, which possibly have limited student potential to address the future challenges they will face in overseas higher education institutions. Then I began to consider the possibilities of enhancing the experience of Chinese international students in a for-profit education company context.

When I served as a Director of a for-profit educational organization, I encountered the dilemma sometimes to choose between students' wellbeing and pursuing profit. It is my personal value that education companies have the responsibilities to think more about its educational role and students' well-being. I believe the education consulting services for prospective international students are not just helping students achieve admission to overseas institutions, but have potential to impact students in different ways compared to China's public education system, including the possible influence on students' post-admission experiences as international students. In China's education context, private education sectors and for-profit education companies are more sensitive to discover students' need and are more flexible to provide valuable services to them. In this study, I assume that some existing education consulting services have the potential to influence students' post-enrolment experience and some education consultants in China have learned some lessons that can contribute to these students in overseas higher education institutions. These assumptions also influence my choice on qualitative interviewing as a research method to explore education consultants' experience.

As the researcher, I am privileged by having similar work experience with my research

participants, and possibly having the same culture and native language, which has helped me better understand their experience and perspectives. In order not to influence my participants' values and opinion, I took care not to impose my own views of the research questions on my participants. Before the interview, I told my participants that I would be open-minded to any perspectives as a researcher and I did not reveal the details related to my previous work experience in the ECC. During the interview, I did not make comments on any of the participants' perspective. I used reflective practice to endeavor to fully reflect and respect the participants' views in the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings after investigating the websites of 15 ECCs and interviewing four interviewees. This Chapter is divided into five parts. Each of the first four parts presents data for research questions one, two, three and four respectively. Part one presents the primary consulting services provided by ECCs to Chinese students who plan to study in the U.S. higher education. Explanations and comments of the primary consulting services from the interviewees are included. Part 2 presents the interviewees' opinions on the primary changes in consulting services ECCs provide to Chinese students who plan to study in the U.S. higher education since 2010 and possible causes of these changes. Part 3 presents the feedback education consultants received from a small percentage of students regarding the impact of their consulting services on students' post-enrolment experience. Part 4 presents the lessons interviewees learned about enhancing students' post-enrolment experience. Part 5 is a summary of this chapter.

4.1 Current Primary Consulting Services Provided by ECCs to Chinese Students Who Plan to Study in U.S. Higher Education Institutions

According to one interviewee of this study, there are three stages of consultation before Chinese students study abroad in the U.S. higher education system: preparation stage, college application stage and post-admission stage. At the preparation stage, ECCs primarily provide standardized test training programs, academic guidance and extracurricular activities planning services. At the application stage, ECCs provide application consulting services including applicant assessment, school selection and application material consulting services. At the post-admission stage, ECCs generally provides visa consulting services and pre-departure programs.

Generally speaking, most of the ECCs in China provide services for each stage. Some service products are designed to serve a single step of the application stage, while some other service products are designed to serve two or three stages before students go abroad. Most of the large ECCs provide a wide range of products covering each stage for students to choose from. Some particular service products will be focused and promoted according to the ECCs' target markets. For example, some products are designed to meet the need of students who want to apply for the very top U.S. institutions such as Ivy League institutions or the top thirty institutions. While some products are designed to meet the needs of students from rich families who want to have VIP service experience. Small-scale ECCs primarily focus on a few services products to a limited number of students.

After researching the websites of 15 ECCs, including ten large ECCs and five small-scale ECCs in U.S. college application services, combined with the explanation and comments from the interviewees, the primary services provided currently by ECCs are as follows:

4.1.1 Standardized Test Training Programs

Standardized test results are significant for Chinese students to apply for U.S. institutions according to the interviewees. A minimum score on TOEFL or IELTS must be met by Chinese students to apply for all the U.S. institutions. Many U.S. institutions also require a SAT1 or ACT test from Chinese students. If a student plans to apply for the very top institutions, consultants will recommend the students to prepare SAT2 or AP tests in order to get an edge in the college application by proving their learning ability. Nearly all the ECCs provide standardized test training programs. Some large ECCs are also well-known in language training by providing a wide range of training courses including TOEFL, SAT1, SAT2, ACT and AP tests, so a large percentage of their students will choose a package of

service products including standardized training courses and other application related consulting services.

4.1.2 The One-Stop Application Consulting Service

The One-stop Application Consulting Service is the most traditional service ECCs provide to Chinese students who plan to study at a U.S. institution. Almost all ECCs provide the One-Stop application consulting service to students. The following content of the One-Stop consulting program is listed on one ECC's website:

“a. Standardized test planning and preparation; b. The Applicant evaluation; c. Schools selection; d. Online applications and application documents preparation; e. Correspondence emails checking and reply; f. Application essays advising, including personal statement, essays, resume, reference letters and study plan; g. Interview guidance; h. Visa application consulting; i. All other related issues advising.”

According to one interviewee's illustration, the concept of “one-stop service” means that ECCs provide comprehensive guidance related to college applications so that the students and their families don't need to go to other places for application-related services. In this service, students and their families fully authorize ECCs to be their agent and do most of the application related procedures on the student's behalf by signing an agent contract. ECCs will advise the students what tests to take, when to take the tests, the tests training programs ECCs provide, how to ask for English transcripts from their high school and how to seek reference letters. When the students' high school or references have difficulties with English transcripts or reference letters, ECCs will help translate the materials. Furthermore, ECCs will guide the students to fill in long forms to collect the raw information of students that ECCs need to complete the application form. The final application packages of students are compiled, organized and submitted to U.S. institutions by ECCs. The correspondence

between students and institutions are also sometimes written by ECCs. Another interviewee said:

“It is a kind of nanny style service. It is good for students who don’t have enough time and energy to do the college application independently. Actually, there are some students who have the ability to lead their application and still choose the nanny service due to lacking of confidence.”

That is to say, in this service, students seldom participate in the application process after providing the information and materials ECCs required. One reason parents and students choose this service is to save time and energy so that students can focus on preparing for the stressful standardized tests or their high school study. The other reason is that students and parents lack the information, English ability, skills and confidence to do the U.S. college application on their own. One interviewee pointed out that students and parents believe the ECCs are professionals on college application so that the students can get a better admission result with the maximum help from ECCs.

The service fee ECCs charge for this one-stop service will differ according to the number of institutions to which a student applies, the ranking of the institutions, and the admission result. Because ECCs play a leading role in this service, part of their service fee will be result-based which means the better admission result they get for the students, the higher service fee they will charge. The institution that admits the student and is the highest in world rankings among all the institutions to which the student applied is regarded as the best admission result according to the consulting service contract.

4.1.3 The Premier Application Consulting Service

The Premier Application Consulting Service is an upgraded version of the “one-stop” application consulting service whose key components of service are the same. The students also fully authorize ECCs to prepare most of the application materials on their behalf.

However, the consultants from ECCs who provide this premier service to students are senior consultants or expert consultants usually including American teachers, American consultants, Chinese consultants who graduated from top U.S. institutions such as Ivy League institutions, the managers, directors or even presidents of ECCs. According to the interviewees, these expert consultants who provide the premier service are assumed to have a deeper understanding and more expertise on U.S. college application so that students will get better service and an ideal admission result with the help of these experts. Students and their families have to pay more money for this premier service, which sometimes doubles the fee of the general consulting services.

4.1.4 The Long-term Package Consulting Service

This category of long-term package consulting service products has been developed in the past five years according to the interviewees. These services are developed for students who will begin their application preparation process at an early stage when they are still in grade 9 or grade 10. That is to say, the students will have at least two or three years before their college application in grade 12 so that they can prepare long-term in order to get an ideal admission result. This long-term package service will cover all three stages for overseas study from the very beginning of preparation to the very end of enrolment in overseas institutions. The potential clients of this category of service are normally students who are aiming to apply for the top 50 institutions or the most competitive majors.

The most significant difference between this long-term package service and the above-discussed one-stop application service is that the former will also focus on the preparation stage such as academic guidance, extracurricular activities planning and leadership cultivation which will lead to a competitive CV and attractive essays for the college application. One of the long-term package services from a large ECC named “Prestige Only” is a good example. Except for the “Admission Consulting Services”, the

“Soft Skills Enhancement Services” and “Experience Enhancement Services” are also emphasized on the official introductory website of this “Prestige Only” service product. The “Soft Skills Enhancement Services” include GPA management, English reading and writing development, shared resources, extracurricular activity development and master classes. The “Experience Enhancement Services” include career advice, networking, consulting meetings, progress reports and parents feedback meetings.

According to one of the interviewees from another large ECC, the two key components in the first stage, preparation stage, of this long-term package service product are academic guidance and extra-curricular activities development. For the academic guidance part, their service will provide academic courses and consulting services to students in lectures and individualized consulting sessions including critical thinking courses, academic writing courses, public presentation courses, research skills courses, literature review sessions or other customized academic courses according to the student’s need. For extra-curricular activities development, the ECC will provide activities resources and teach the students how to plan, organize and carry out a particular activity or program, which the student is interested in. These two key components in this long-term package service, academic guidance and extracurricular activities development, will increase not only the opportunities for students to be admitted by a top institution, but also have an impact on students’ long-term development and help students to be more successful in their overseas study. Compared to the “nanny style one-stop” service, there is another difference one of the interviewees mentioned:

“Students who choose the long-term package services will be responsible for preparing most of the application materials by themselves with the guidance of our consultants. They cannot do nothing and depend on us to complete all their applications. So we will teach them and encourage them to prepare for their college application as early as possible.”

That is to say, the students themselves will control their application process in the long-term services. The consultants will advise on their application materials and keep close interaction with the students until their enrolment in the U.S. institution.

After researching the 15 selected ECCs for this study, 9 out of the 15 ECCs were found to provide this long-term package service. All products of ECCs have various attractive names and present an elite image compared to their other products. Without exemption, the consultants who provide the long-term package service have their photo and background information provided in the product introduction webpages because they are regarded as significant selling points. All these experts have backgrounds with top-ranked or famed institutions. For example:

“Consultant L, Doctor degree from XXX University (an Ivy League university); Consultant W, Master of Education from XXX University (another Ivy League university); Foreign Consultant C, former admission officer from XXX College (a top ranking college); Foreign Consultant J, a professor from XXX University (a famed private university).”

Undoubtedly, the price of the long-term package service is the highest in an ECC compared to the ECC’s other products for its comprehensive service and long service period. However, prices differ between ECCs. Some ECCs charge double or three times as much for the long-term package service compared to similar products of other ECCs.

4.1.5 The DIY Application Consulting Service

The DIY (Do it yourself) Application Consulting Service is provided in the form of small workshops or seminars to students who plan to apply for top ranking institutions such as the U.S. News top 30 universities and liberal arts colleges. These workshops and seminars focus on the application stage only, that is to say, college application strategies and materials preparations including the school selection, the personal statement writing, the essay writing

and the interview preparation (top U.S. institutions often require an interview with the applicants in the application process). The students will learn the successful strategies and prepare all the materials by themselves with a certain amount of feedback on their application essays. That means the students who attend these programs should have a strong will and certain ability to deal with the complicated application process primarily by themselves because the students have to prepare noteworthy personal statements, numerous supplemental essays and detailed application documents for the applications, which is time-consuming and stressful to students who have to deal with their high school study at the same time. Therefore, the students are always required to show outstanding English proficiency and academic performance to attend this DIY service by providing their standardized test scores and high school GPA. For example, the following entry requirements are listed on the website of one leading ECC:

“The students need to meet the minimum requirements of achieving TOEFL score 105+, SAT score 2050+ and a top 10% high school GPA for the 2017 Ivy League Workshop Program. The Students will be selected to enter this program based on test results, academic background and soft skills. ”

According to one of the interviews, the expert consultants who are the most experienced in top colleges’ applications will lead this program, teach the application strategy, analyze examples of essays and provide feedback to a certain amount of students’ application essays. These expert consultants will also lead the students to share their concerns, stories and experiences with each other so that students will inspire each other and develop a friendship during this tough time. The students will also have the opportunity to interact with former DIY program students who have already studied at prestigious U.S. universities.

Another interviewee pointed out that the DIY service is attractive to many outstanding students because they can not only learn practical skills for college applications but also have the opportunity to build a relationship with other “top of the pyramid” students with the network provided by ECCs, which is a great lifelong resource. Surprisingly, the service fee of these DIY programs is quite low compared to other services even though the salaries for those experienced consultants is quite high. Some ECCs even provide scholarships to the students who meet certain requirements, which means the DIY service is free for some students, or students who enter the DIY programs may work for the ECC to earn money. According to one interviewee, the purpose of this strategy of ECCs is to attract the most outstanding students, such as the potential successful applicant of Harvard University, who will be their best future spokesperson for ECCs’ reputation and strength.

4.1.6 Post Admission Consulting Services

According to the interviewees, the traditional services in the post admission stage are visa consulting and pre-departure guidance, both of which are included in the one-stop consulting service and long-term package service discussed above. Regarding visa consulting service, ECCs will provide guidance on visa materials, visa interview strategy and mock interview practice to help the students get their visas smoothly. The pre-departure guidance services are generally short courses of departure preparation and cultural adaptation.

However, in recent years, some ECCs have begun to provide academic related courses in the post-admission stage to help the students be better prepared for overseas studies, such as academic English courses, critical reading courses and American college courses in different subjects. A few leading ECCs even extend their services to the post-enrolment stage providing academic support and career consulting services to students already studying in the U.S. institutions. Overall, ECCs have provided a comprehensive service chain to the students.

4.2 The Primary Changes in Consulting Services ECCs Provide to Chinese Students Since 2010 and the Possible Causes of These Changes

4.2.1 The Changes in the Prospective Student Population and the Students' Needs

Before the year 2009, there were only a small number of Chinese students who studied in the U.S. higher education. Most U.S. institutions are invisible to Chinese students. It is hard for Chinese students to get much information about the U.S. college application process from their peers or from U.S. institutions directly. Therefore, most of the students at that time tended to fully authorize ECCs as their agents to help them achieve admission. Although ECCs also didn't know a great deal about U.S. college application, they could still get satisfactory results for students because the admission requirements of U.S. institutions that time were relatively low. For example, one of the interviewees said that one student got an admission from University of Indiana with a TOEFL 40+ around the year 2010. However, the number of prospective international students from China increased rapidly from 2010 onward. Students gradually got much more information about U.S. college application from their former peers and from the increasing number of U.S. institutions actively recruiting international students in China.

Students and their parents are now more familiar with the admission principles and process compared to five years ago and ECCs are not the only resources students can depend on. Furthermore, the international school systems in China became more mature in recent years, so that the college admission counselors of international school systems took over some of the fundamental consulting services provided previously by ECCs such as providing information on application procedures, application materials and suggestions on school selections. According to all interviewees, admission into US institutions for Chinese international prospective students became more competitive in recent years, especially for the

top institutions. An increasing number of students had realized that they have to prepare as early as possible. They have to seek more professional consulting services and resources they cannot get from their high schools and families, such as activities planning and long-term guidance. According to the interviewees, the students who choose the long-term package service and prefer to lead the application process are increasing significantly, rather than authorizing ECCs to do most of the things for them as was common five years ago. For example, according to the interviewee from one large ECC located in Beijing, the percentage of their students who choose the long-term package service increased from 10% of all students in 2010 to around 60% in 2016. The reason why more students choose to lead the application process themselves is that they believe that their applications will be more individualized, detailed and competitive with their own leading role, compared to authorizing ECCs to prepare all the application materials for them.

In short, the primary needs of students have changed from agent-led services (led by the agents) to student-led services (in which the student takes a lead role and agents provide supportive consultation and counseling), and this is a trend in China's large cities, according to the interviewees. Following the changes in students' needs closely, ECCs developed new service products and recruited more suitable consultants to meet the students' needs. Service products and consulting teams are the two primary aspects of changes regarding ECCs' consulting services.

4.2.2 The Changes in Service Products ECCs Provide

According to three interviewees, due to the above-discussed changes on students' need, the service products of ECCs have the following three primary changes: Firstly, the long-term package service was newly developed in recent years to meet the need of increasing number of students who begin to prepare for their U.S. higher education application in an early stage around the 9th or 10th grade and it has gradually become the

mainstream service product of ECCs currently instead of the one-stop application service popular five years ago. During the two to three year service period, ECCs provides an extracurricular activity planning module and an academic guidance module neither of which students can easily get from their high schools. According to the interviewees, most of the Chinese high schools focus their teaching and learning on certain subjects and tests to prepare the students for China's GAOKAO (China's national college entrance exam) rather than providing opportunities and resources for academic and extracurricular activities needed for the international study.

Secondly, the scale of ECCs' DIY programs increased significantly in recent years to meet the needs of students who have realized the importance of their own participation in the college application and prefer to do most of the things on their own. For example, the DIY programs of one ECC expanded from 40 students in 2013 to 200 students in 2015 even with strict entry criteria on students' background and academic performance. Moreover, the location of these students changed from primarily large cities of China such as Beijing and Shanghai to many different cities all over China.

Thirdly, the post-admission stage services have become more diversified. Five years ago, the only services ECCs provided after the students got their admission letters was visa consulting. However, in recent years, as the number of students who study overseas increased, a small percentage of students and their families began to realize the possible difficulties and challenges the students would confront after their enrolment in U.S. institutions and they felt a need to be better prepared for those possible challenges. In this context, ECCs developed more diversified post-admission services to meet the students' need such as U.S. culture-related courses, academic English courses and career consulting services. However, the majority of students and parents do not access these post-admission

services. ECCs usually include these post-admission stage services into packaged services instead of selling these products separately.

Above all, as for-profit educational organizations, ECCs are adaptive and responsive to student needs. As the students are seeking long-term services, ECCs also changed their focus from one-stop consulting services to long-term and student-led services.

4.2.3 The Changes in the Background of Consultants

In the year 2010, ECCs websites provided only an introduction of the service products without detailed information about the consultants who provide these services. However, currently most of ECCs put photos and background information about some of their consultants on their official websites as selling points, especially for the high-end service products such as the premier consulting service, long-term package service and DIY programs. The “elite” consultants who are placed in prominent locations in ECCs advertising materials and websites can be classified into two groups: Chinese consultants who graduated from top U.S. universities and colleges, especially the Ivy League universities; and foreign consultants including native English speakers, American teachers and former admission officers of U.S. institutions.

According to the interviewees, these “elite” consultants are followed eagerly by students and parents because they are thought to be more competent in consulting services and have a deeper understanding of the U.S. higher education system than the local consultants. For example, one interviewee said:

“the seminar presented by a Harvard University graduate is a great advertisement which will easily attract more students and parents. They are willing to pay more money to ECCs if their son or daughter could be served by an Ivy League elite who have irreplaceable experience on top colleges’ application in their eyes.”

According to another interviewee, “some students and parents are very picky on the consultants’ education background. They prefer consultants who themselves graduated from high-profile universities. Those consultants can take great advantages of a prestigious institution in China’s education consulting industry.”

Therefore, most of ECCs recruit “elite” consultants to meet the students’ needs and the percentage of “elite” consultants has increased significantly in China’s overseas study consulting industry. This trend is reflected in changes to ECCs’ service products. For example, the long-term package service emphasizes Western approaches to academic research and U.S. college courses both of which match the consultants’ firsthand experience. Furthermore, according to the interviewees, “elite” consultants prefer to provide counselling services on student-led applications instead of full agent services that do everything for the students. The preference of the “elite” consultants corresponds with the increasing number of students who prefer to lead the applications by themselves with professional guidance provided by “elite” consultants.

Admittedly, it is reasonable that these “elite” consultants are needed by both students and ECCs due to their first-hand knowledge and experience and insights on U.S. higher education systems. Not only can they provide consultation directly to students, but they can also help ECCs provide training to other local consultants. Especially for services that provide U.S. pattern academic guidance, teaching or research experience in U.S. higher education system is a must. Therefore, these “elite” consultants are indispensable to some ECCs.

According to the interviewees, there are many problems relating to these “elite” consultants. For example, one interviewee said that not all top university graduates have the ability to be a professional consultant and many of them cannot provide satisfactory services to students due to their lack of understanding of the Chinese culture and education system.

Another interviewee complained that some ECCs only recruit those “elite” consultants as part-time consultants who cannot provide long-term and stable guidance to students. After students and parents paid a higher price for those “elite” consultants, sometimes they found they didn’t get the service and results as they expected. Furthermore, on a management level, the norm of judging a consultant on the institution they graduate from is unfair and discouraging to other excellent consultants without the brand of a top university.

4.3 The Feedback Education Consultants Receive From the Students Regarding the Impact of Their Consulting Services on Students’ Experience After Going Abroad

Interviewees received feedback from only a small percentage of their students, so limited data was available in relation to this research question. According to the interviewees, students generally think ECCs’ services end once they go abroad. The busy lives of students in a new country leave them little time to keep in contact with their consultants. However, when the students confront a challenge in the new environment after their enrolment, they or their parents will contact their consultant to seek advice. The data about students’ feedback in this section were communicated to the interviewees by students who kept long-term contact with the interviewees and students who sought advice from the interviewees after their enrolment. The feedback that education consultants received from students regarding the impact of consulting services on their post-enrolment experience is described in the following sub-sections.

4.3.1 Cultural Transition

The Cultural transition is a common challenge for Chinese international students according to feedback participants receive from students, such as adaptation to a new environment, getting along with roommates from another culture and making new friends; this is especially the case for Chinese students without sufficient English proficiency. For

example, one interviewee revealed that a few students from her ECC had experienced tough times because of conflicts with their host families in the U.S. When feedback from students and the news about the difficulties in cultural transition accumulated, ECCs began to provide culture-oriented courses and activities to prepare the students in advance. For example, one student who has taken the American football experience course provided by an ECC in its long-term package services stated in an email message, “The football experience course help me a lot in making new friends in the U.S. with the knowledge I learned from that course. It is so cool for Chinese students to talk about the American football game.” Moreover, some students also shared that knowing the real experience of other students and consultants as former international students is very helpful for them to avoid similar mistakes and to better deal with the difficulties. Therefore, ECCs responded with more detailed real cases that happened to Chinese international students. These cases were shared in ECCs’ pre-departure programs, cultural-related courses and during personal communications in the service process.

According to the interviewees’ reports of feedback they received from the students, they believe students will have a better experience when they are more familiar with the American culture and be well informed about the possible problems and potential risks. Accordingly, ECCs’ culture related programs, activities, services and experience will have a positive impact on students’ post-enrolment experience in the aspect of cultural transition.

4.3.2 Academic Performance

According to the students’ feedback the interviewees received, the U.S. pattern academic guidance and academic courses provided by ECCs in their services are valuable not only for their college applications, but for their academic performance in the U.S. institutions as well. Such U.S. style learning experiences are especially important for students from the Chinese public school systems in which there are more lectures and tests and much less

discussion and essay writing common in American classes. One student said to one of the interviewees that the U.S. university demo classes and the public speaking course offered by his ECC provided an early opportunity to experience the American class and group discussion helped him to adapt quickly to the new academic environment in the U.S. institution.

Furthermore, the academic projects guided by ECCs' consultants with the purpose of enriching the application materials also helped the students better understand their academic interests, make decisions about what topics to write about and master some basic skills related to literature reviews all of which are required abilities in their overseas study. Academic writing is a great challenge to Chinese international students according to the interviewees. A course in academic English is commonly recognized by students as beneficial to their academic experience in the U.S. institutions. Most of the Chinese students don't have many opportunities to practice their English essay writing in their public schools. They take English courses either for Chinese GAOKAO or standardized tests such as TOEFL and SAT, and normally not for educational purposes. Although students can take academic English courses after they register at their U.S. institution, time to improve their academic English ability is too short to enable them to handle well the great number of writing tasks in their first year. The academic English courses provided by ECCs help them make good use of time on academic writing before their enrolment and also make them aware of some important rules of academic writing.

4.3.3 Campus and Community Activities

As discussed in part one, due to the shortage of opportunities for extracurricular activities at their high schools, Chinese students have a great need for ECCs to provide a wide range of activities or help in planning and operationalizing unique activities designed to enrich their CV for the purpose of a better admission result. For example, the Leadership

Cultivation Camp, The Culture Descent Program, The Environmental Protection Advertising Program and The Bronze Ware Culture Promotion Program are displayed on the websites of ECCs as examples of extracurricular activities. In the process of consulting services, students will learn and practice how to search for information, make good use of their resources, write activity plans, raise funds and recruit team members. In addition to using these experiences in their application materials, some students admitted that these experiences could be used in organizing and participating in campus activities, protests and community services in U.S institutions.

4.3.4 Student Network

According to the interviewees, many students are very eager to know other Chinese international students so that they can share their thoughts about studying abroad and learn from each other. In China's public school system, the mainstream student body will continue to study in Chinese universities. It is sometimes hard for the minority who decide to study abroad to find companions with the same goal in their own high schools. Therefore, the student network they can develop through ECCs is very valuable. Through ECCs' seminars, courses and orientations, they can get to know other students who will study abroad or who have been abroad. According to the students' feedback, students can be inspired by each other during the long-term stressful application process and they can also get beneficial guidance from other students' perspectives. Some students said that they made great friends from ECCs' classes and they kept in touch with each other for years after their enrolment in the U.S. institutions. They always share institutional information with each other and when they travel to other cities of the U.S. they can sometimes find the friends they knew from ECCs that has a positive impact on students' post-enrolment experience and even long-term development.

4.3.5 Consultants' Personal Influence

Three of the four interviewees mentioned the students' feedback about the importance of their consultants' personal influence on them. During the two to three years of interaction and communication, there are many opportunities for students and consultants to influence and benefit from each other in different ways. For example, one interviewee mentioned that one of her students was very grateful for the consultant's positive impact on her U.S. university experience and career development. Because both of them were very interested in nutrition, they discussed food education and health literacy; this helped the student clarify an academic major. Another interviewee said:

“Talking about college application essays with students is a process of helping students know themselves and know what are the things they are most proud of and the most worthwhile to present in their essays. The consultants sometimes touched the deep inside of the students. In this process, I know that some consultants happened to help the students solve their family problems or help improve their psychological well-being. After the students went abroad, they reported they felt lucky to know their consultants who helped them know more about themselves, become more mature and independent, which were important characteristics when studying abroad alone.”

While it can be concluded that ECCs' consultants have positive impacts on students' after-enrolment experience through their personal influence, these impacts on students are quite personal and cannot be generalized. The interviewees also admitted that these impacts depend on many factors, such as if the students trust their consultants, the consultants' personal preference and experience, the consultants' workloads, the consultant turnover rate and whether the consultants and students have common values. The interviewees pointed out that if the workload of the consultants is heavy, most of the time they will just do their job and not become engaged at a more personal level.

4.3.6 Summary

According to the students' feedback the education consultants received, some of ECCs' consulting services not only help the students with their college applications but also have a positive impact on the students' post-enrolment experience. Most of these positive impacts are related to ECC's long-term consulting services. At the same time, these positive impacts require the active participation of students and long-term close interactions between the students and their consultants, and do not normally occur in the one-stop hand-holding type services in which consultants do most of the work for students.

It is noteworthy that most of the interviewees talk only about the positive feedback they received from students. One interviewee pointed out that the students will have negative experiences after they go abroad if they lack knowledge about their U.S. institution and if their consultants did most of the jobs for them in the application process. It is also possible that the students will be admitted to a university that is not suitable for them, which can lead to a negative post-enrolment experience. Above all, some of ECCs' long-term consulting services will have positive impacts on students' post-enrolment experiences related to cultural transition, academic performance and campus life. The education consultants help their students through formal courses and informally share their own insights and experiences. The importance of students showing initiative and taking a leading role in the process of consulting services are emphasized and encouraged by consultants as contributing to a positive impact on students' post-enrolment experiences.

4.4 The Lessons Education Consultants Learned About How to Enhance Students' Post-enrolment Experience

4.4.1 Academic English Programs

As discussed in section 3.2, academic writing is a common challenge for Chinese international students. Proficiency in academic writing will influence, to a large extent, the academic performance and experience of students after their enrolment in the U.S. institutions. According to the interviewees, these academic writing courses are not offered in most of the Chinese high schools and are seldom offered in language training schools. Participants strongly recommended that ECCs should include academic writing courses in their long-term package services or offer it separately after the students get their admission. Furthermore, as some news reported, students will even get a serious result, such as dismissal, if they break the academic policy of their university without enough awareness of the rules regarding plagiarism. One Interviewee suggested that ECCs should add content about plagiarism into their current academic English programs.

4.4.2 School Research

According to the interviewees, finding unexpected or unacceptable facts of an institution after enrolment will result in negative experiences for students. It is because both ECCs and students themselves haven't done enough research about the schools to which they are applying before enrolment. The consultants are always too busy guiding the students on application materials in the peak season to guide them to carefully research the schools to which they are applying. As to the students and their parents, a large percentage of them lack the English ability and sufficient awareness to investigate the school website thoroughly or communicate with the school officials directly. Instead, they rely on and overly use the U.S. News Ranking of institutions when they decide to apply or enroll a certain institution.

The interviewees suggested that consultants should help students realize the significance of school research and show them how to conduct more careful research about the institutions to which they are applying. For example, the consultants could guide the

students to thoroughly examine the information on school websites, show them how to ask for information from school officials, give them different resources about school reviews, provide them the information about school affairs and encourage them to visit their dream schools when available. Furthermore, ECCs could also provide their unique experiences about schools to their students. During the years of consulting services, the consultants will accumulate much useful information and insights about the U.S. institutions from their direct contact with the institutions and from the students' feedback. One interviewee recommended that ECCs should collect and organize this information and provide them to students during the consulting process or by a written school selection guide.

4.4.3 Class Setting Used in ECCs

Typically, ECCs use the form of one-on-one consultation to provide consulting services. One interviewee suggested that ECCs could also enhance the student experience through a class-setting consultation, which means the consultants could deliver consulting services in a manner which is typically used in a class such as giving lectures to a group of students and organizing group discussions. This class approach will be very helpful for students to share insights, provide feedback and form networks.

Furthermore, class settings will help encourage more students to lead their college applications. In a class setting where prospective international students get together, the students who prefer to lead their own applications may influence the other students to participate more actively in the education consulting services instead of overly relying on their consultants. According to the interviewees, the more active the students are in the application process, the faster their transition and the better their experience after beginning their study in the new higher education system.

Thirdly, class settings can facilitate the work of school research for both students and consultants. The interviewees suggested that it will be an effective way to help students to do

the school research during the busy application season if the consultants assign each group of students to research certain institutions and then share the insights with other group members.

However, it is not simple to facilitate class settings in ECCs. According to the interviewees, not all the consultants have teaching experiences. The participants recommended ECCs to recruit or train more qualified teachers and consultants to organize the students-centered classes.

4.4.4 Educating the Public

The interviewees suggested that ECCs could invite U.S. institutions that recruit international students to help educate the public about the differences between the two education systems and the challenges Chinese students will confront in U.S. higher education system. The interviewees pointed out that the parents and students will be more likely to believe and be aware of the future difficulties if they heard it from someone from the U.S. institutions other than from ECCs only. Meanwhile, ECCs could encourage the students to prepare for the future success in the overseas study in the long run such as making long-term commitments in English reading and writing, critical thinking and solid humanities foundations.

4.4.5 Management of ECCs

According to the interviewees, although China's overseas study consulting industry has developed in recent years, there are still complaints about how ECCs are managed, such as the unsuitable standards in recruiting consultants and high turnover rates of consultants. In order to maximize the *positive* influence of education consultants on prospective students and enhance the students' experience in U.S. institutions, the interviewees suggested that ECCs could optimize the management of their company in consultants' recruitment, consultants training and working procedures.

4.4.5.1 Consultant Recruitment

As discussed in section 2.3, the consultants who graduate from the top overseas university and foreign consultants are in high demand for providing some of ECCs' high-end services, so education background and nationality become the important factors when ECCs recruit the "elite" consultants. Ironically, according to the interviewees, these elite consultants lack experience sometimes. Just like one of the interviewees complained:

"What does a diploma guarantee? Does it guarantee your teaching expertise? Does it guarantee perspectives and insights in the specific context? Does it guarantee smooth communications between the students and the consultants? The name is fancy, the resumes are fancy, the profiles are fancy. The marketing people are smart."

That is to say, students who are attracted by the consultants who have graduated from prestigious institutions and pay a higher service fee for the "elite" consultants cannot be guaranteed to get their expected service and admission results.

The interviewees suggested that ECCs should recruit consultants who are outstanding educators and pay them reasonably, and not engage in recruitment for purely marketing purposes. The candidate's education background, experience in education consulting and college application, English proficiency, knowledge about standardized tests and different higher education systems, teaching expertise and research ability should all be considered when recruiting a consultant. More importantly, a passion for education consulting and a responsible attitude toward students' growth are key factors when recruiting consultants.

Furthermore, managers and HRs of ECCs should have corresponding educational expertise so that they have enough knowledge about the candidate's education-related certificate and have the ability to distinguish the most important qualities a candidate should have to be an education consultant.

4.4.5.2 Training of Consultants

After the appropriate consultants are recruited, training is another significant factor to enable consultants to better serve the students' needs. Consultants of ECCs should not only know how to prepare the application materials themselves but also be proficient in guiding the students to prepare for their overseas study themselves. That is to say, according to an interviewee, "Don't give the students the fish. Teach them how to fish."

The interviewees suggested that the knowledge about U.S. higher education system, skills in college application, long-term planning, activities operating, academic topic guidance and research skills should all be included in the consultants' training. For those consultants without Chinese heritage or experience, the characteristics of the Chinese education system and common perspectives of Chinese students and parents should be included in the consultants' training.

4.4.5.3 Assignment of Consultants and Working Conditions

To optimize the effectiveness of consulting, interviewees suggested placing the consultants in positions for which they have relevant competencies and relieving the workload of consultants.

On the first hand, the consultants should be assigned according to their expertise. For example, consultants with abundant research experiences could specialize in providing research guidance on the student's' academic projects and providing research-related training and support to other consultants. Meanwhile, students should be matched with appropriate consultants according to certain factors such as the students' language ability, interest in majors and consultants' personal background. For instance, the consultants with the related background in a major for which a student plans to apply will provide more valuable information and insights than the consultants without related experience. Moreover, foreign

consultants could work or partner with Chinese consultants closely so that students benefit from different consultants with different strengths.

On the other hand, heavy workload is one of the key factors that result in a high turnover rate in ECCs, especially in the application peak season. The interviewees suggested that the workload of consultants should be reasonable, such as serving no more than 20 students in one application season, so that the consultants have sufficient time and energy to pay attention to every single student.

4.5 Summary of Chapter 4

After researching the services of 15 mainstream ECCs in China, this study found that ECCs in China currently provide comprehensive services to Chinese students wishing to study in the U.S. higher education system from the early preparation stage until the students' enrolment in U.S. institutions, primarily include standardized test training, one-stop application consulting services, long-term package consulting services, DIY consulting services and a wide range of post-admission services.

According to the four interviewees, China's overseas study consulting industry has changed since 2010. As the Chinese students gradually know more about the U.S. higher education system and the U.S. college application process, a significantly increasing number of students realize the importance of being more involved and prefer to lead their college application with the guidance of education consultants. The need of students accordingly changed from helping them prepare application materials to providing long-term services focusing on academic guidance, activities planning and application materials in different stages. New long-term package services and DIY application services are developed by ECCs to meet the students' needs and gradually replace the traditional nanny style one-stop service. Meanwhile, consultants with an overseas education background and foreign consultants,

especially graduates of top U.S. institutions, are in high demand to satisfy the students' requests and to provide the relatively high-end services for ECCs.

According to the student feedback the interviewees received, some of the consulting services, especially the academic courses and activities operation, are thought to have a positive impact on students' experience after going abroad such as cultural transition and academic performance. Furthermore, forming networks through the consulting services are also very helpful to students' post-enrolment experience.

In order to help the students be more successful in their overseas study, suggestions related to ECCs' services and management are given by the interviewees, including providing academic English programs to students, helping students conduct more careful school research, delivering consulting services in class-setting, inviting U.S. institutions to help remind the students about future challenges and improving the management of ECCs in consultant recruitment, training, assignment and working conditions.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the study's findings, recommendations, and personal reflections about China's education consulting industry.

5.1 Implication of the Findings

Implications discussed in this section include the reconceptualization of the role of education consulting, elitism among education consultants, and growing inequality among students in terms of their ability to access costly programs and services provided by ECCs.

5.1.1 The Reconceptualization of the Role of Education Consulting

Responses from the interviewees and research on the websites of ECCs show that most ECCs provide a wide range of services to students, from the hand holding services to the DIY services. The range of services offered continues to grow as edu-businesses seek more ways to maximize their profits and market share. The more entrepreneurial ECCs are extending traditional services that focus on completing applications and applying for student visas to engage with students both earlier and later in the process.

From the very beginning as students think about studying abroad until their enrolment in U.S. universities, students gain a fuller range of support and services. They might have a better chance to be admitted to U.S. universities, get greater impact from their consultants and adapt to a new environment easier with the support of ECCs. Meanwhile, the three to four years cooperative process provides consultants of ECCs greater opportunities to establish a long-term relationship with the students. ECCs also have greater opportunities to keep profiting from the same client.

Data from some of the interviewees have revealed how they are dedicated to the role of education counsellors and how they see themselves as informal "educators." With the

developing and changing of China's education consulting industry in recent years, many consultants engage in work that has a strong educational dimension, such as teaching, academic program advising, navigating students to a suitable institution and helping students make social and emotional transition smoothly, moving beyond the traditional role of an agent focused on admission results only. Due to students seeking long-term preparation in academic, extracurricular and language for college application, providing quality services in long-term programs has become an advantage in the business competition of ECCs. So ECCs have been recruiting what they view to be more qualified consultants to meet the needs of students. Teaching capacity and research experience are now required for teaching different modules in ECCs' long-term services. Many consultants have a degree in education or have teaching or advising experience in academic programs. Research capacities will also be examined during the consultants' recruitment. Furthermore, more consultants are sharing their overseas experience on study, working, career planning in both former occasions like individual consulting services or workshops of ECCs and informal personal conversations during the long-term interaction which will benefit students' post enrolment experience. That is to say, many consultants of ECCs conceive themselves as teachers and advisors who have a long-term commitment to students, much as teachers in school settings. The educational part of ECCs has increased and some education consulting businesses in China have changed from traditional recruitment agencies to complicated organizations that have a diversity of practices with educational functions.

However, ECCs are not included in the supervision of the school system and there are no mandatory requirements for teaching certification to become a consultant, and it is still a great challenge for ECCs to provide quality programs and responsible consultation without training.

Above all, my research shows the potential and possibilities that consultants in ECCs could be the informal educators of students and the relationship between the student and consultants might later positively impact the student's' post-enrolment experience in the U.S. institutions. It is quite different from most of the related literature in which the education consultants are discussed as agents who primarily facilitate international recruitments for certain institutions. The growing importance of education agents in literature primarily emphasizes international student recruitment that produces great income for institutions. However, the international admission officers who primarily interact with ECCs and international students might have little knowledge of the students' subsequent experiences in universities and how ECCs can help influence these experiences. The role of ECCs play should be recognized and reconceptualized in a wider perspective, other than being regarded merely as recruitment tools.

5.1.2 The Elitism among Education Consultants

As discussed in section 2.3 of Chapter 4, it is worthwhile to notice that the “elite” consultants are regarded as higher in status by both ECCs and students and their parents, especially the consultants who graduate from the private prestige institutions like the “Ivy League ” schools and the native English speakers who have connections with more famous institutions. According to the interviewees (some interviewees are also the “elite” consultants), the “elite” consultants generally find it easier to gain trust from students and parents. They also get better promotion opportunities and better pay from ECCs. This phenomenon reveals that greater stratification among education consultants is occurring.

Admittedly, it is reasonable that these “elite” consultants are needed by both students and the ECCs due to their first-hand knowledge and experience and insights on U.S. higher education systems and specific schools, especially for those students who pursue admission to those prestige institutions. Not only can the “elite” consultants provide consultation

directly to students, attract more students with their education background, the truly preeminent consultants with profound understanding and insights on U.S. higher education system could also provide training to other consultants. Especially for services that provide U.S. pattern academic guidance, teaching or research experience in U.S. higher education system is a must. Therefore, these “elite” consultants are valuable resources and are indispensable to ECCs.

Increasing importance of “elites” attracts more consultants with prestige education backgrounds and those who are native English-speakers to work for ECCs, which make students and parents more selective when choosing consultants. Such selectivity could lead to greater competition among consultants and exert more pressure on other consultants without prestige university degrees to work harder in order to keep their clients. In theory, the quality of consultants in ECCs and the employment standards will increase among these competitions and students will benefit from better consultants and more choice.

However, there are many problems relating to these “elite” consultants. Though they will find it easier to be employed by ECCs given their background, not all elite institution graduates have the capacity to be professional education consultants. Many of them lack understanding of the Chinese culture and education system, consulting skills or enthusiasm to be informal educators. “Elite” consultants don’t guarantee best services and student satisfaction. In sum, they may not be successful consultants. These problems could lead to a higher turnover rate among “elite” consultants, which could have a negative impact on the ability of ECCs to provide stable long-term guidance to students.

Furthermore, the norm of judging the value of a consultant based primarily on the institution they graduated from is unfair and discouraging to other hardworking and excellent consultants without the brand of a prestige university diploma. The ECCs may lose good consultants if they don’t have acceptable assessment and treatment. The ECCs’

advertisements of “elite” consultants which emphasize the employment benefits of graduating from a small number of prestigious private universities will amplify student desire for admission to those private universities that are not a good fit for everyone.

5.1.3 The Issue of Inequality

As ECCs continue to grow and provide a wider range and longer term of consulting services, the cost to ECCs for daily operation and recruiting more qualified consultants have been increased significantly. It means students need to pay more expensive service fees to ECCs if they hope to get a fuller range of services in order to compete with other students for a limited number of seats at U.S. universities and get better prepared for their overseas study. Some extracurricular activities and overseas summer programs that will enrich the experience of prospective students are costly. In particular, because it is impossible to assign all students to the most “elite” consultants, some ECCs are selling a VIP service provided by chosen “elite” consultants at a much higher price to students who can afford it.

Although most students who can afford to study in U.S. higher education come from above average income families, not all students can afford the full range of education consulting services from ECCs. Those students from extremely wealthy families will benefit from the most expensive resources and top-level consulting services, which will advantage them in the college admission competition. A large number of consulting services ECCs provide are still out of reach for some students who come from lower-income families and will become increasingly so as the cost of programs rise, which places these students in a disadvantageous position. That is to say, the services ECCs provide have a negative impact on equality. The business model of ECCs is actually perpetuating the inequality among prospective students.

5.2 Recommendations

The following includes recommendations for ECCs, for U.S. educational institutions, and for further research.

5.2.1 Recommendations for ECCs

This research reveals the potential educational role the ECCs play in their long-term interaction with the students. In order to develop the positive role of ECCs to prompt students' post-enrolment experience, the following recommendations for ECCs can be drawn from the data:

- ECCs should positively transform the potential clients of 'hand-holding' programs to clients of long-term programs that will be more helpful to students' academic performance, cultural transition and post-enrolment experience. During the early contact with students at language study period, education consultants and teachers should encourage students to lead their application process and prepare for their college admission in the long run. ECCs or higher education institutions could host public lectures and provide information on their websites on long-term preparation for overseas study.
- ECCs primarily use small meeting rooms to provide consulting services to students that normally occur in a private one-on-one individualized consulting. According to the experience of the interviewees who provide both one-on-one consulting and class-setting workshops to students, using the class setting in ECCs will enhance the student experience and encourage students to lead their college application. ECCs could facilitate class settings by building or renting larger classrooms to give lectures and organize discussion groups. Large spaces could also be converted to classrooms or flexible individual consulting rooms when needed. ECCs could also consider providing class setting consulting services in high schools.

- As the expansion of the international education and the growth of ECCs, more international graduates and native English-speaking educators are entering China's education consulting industry. Development of better standards for evaluating education consultants and encouraging favorable performance is necessary, instead of relying only on criteria related to education background and native language. ECCs could provide training and assessments related to the knowledge and skillset of education consultants. Meanwhile, students' evaluation and satisfaction should be considered in consultants' assessment and payment. Transparent feedback from students, colleagues and supervisors on consultants' performance could be included in the evaluation mechanism. Moreover, as referred to in the literature, evidence of unethical behaviours related to the education agents has been reported. Except for the required expertise of being an education consultant, the ethical standards of education consulting should be developed and emphasized in the consultants' training and be included in the evaluation mechanism.

5.2.2 Recommendations for U.S. Educational Institutions

Except for the suggestions for ECCs, the author proposes the following for U.S. educational institutions to promote the positive role of ECCs:

- Institutions could conduct an anonymous survey for admitted students on their experience with ECCs to see how ECCs impact their enrolment decisions and their subsequent overseas study. Those ECCs that have positive influences on students' post-enrolment experiences could be selected to build a cooperative or agent relationship with institutions.
- Institutions could provide more support to those selected ECCs with a strong educational dimension. Because many U.S. institutions are inviting consultants of

ECCs to visit their campus and attend on-campus information sessions of institutions for marketing purposes, intensive training sessions including updated institutional information, advising skills (for both long-term preparation and application guidance) and school research skills could be provided by the U.S. institutions to education consultants on-site together with the marketing activities for a fee. These training sessions could also be provided by the institutions regularly online for a fee.

- Most of the time, international office members at higher education institutions will not be as knowledgeable about how students perform after their enrolment compared to academic staff. The international office of institutions could make closer connections with academic staff to investigate common challenges international students experience after their enrolment. If higher education institutions could establish more comprehensive partnerships with ECCs other than working with ECCs just for international recruitment, they can make suggestions about how ECCs can help students better prepare in advance. The educational dimension of the distinct consulting services of ECCs will be enhanced. ECCs could also share their insights as informal educators with both academic staff and international officers. This constructive and collaborative partnership will benefit international students in the different stages.
- For the issue of inequality, because ECCs are edu-businesses and they have a motive for profit, it is hard for ECCs to provide equal services to all students. Meanwhile, except for a small number of state-financed students, the government will not provide scholarships to students who choose to study abroad at their own expense. The higher education institutions play the most significant role to address the issue of inequality among prospective students. Institutions could make their information and resources more transparent and easy to approach for students who will not work with ECCs.

During their visit to China for recruiting international students, admission staff could visit more public schools and attend educational events to provide information to students directly. Also, institutions could provide similar programs as ECCs provide, such as academic English programs, application help kits, before and after enrolment cultural transition programs. The fees could be made affordable for students who come from lower income families.

5.2.3 Recommendation for Further Research

As discussed in section 1.1 of this chapter, this research has revealed a diversity of practices of ECCs. The reconceptualization of the role of ECCs could be a future direction of research in the internationalization of higher education and is an important step to enhance the student post-enrolment experience and optimize internationalization strategies. Collecting data from students is also needed to examine the students' perspective on the role of ECCs. Furthermore, given that the business model of ECCs is perpetuating the inequality among prospective students during the commercialization and internationalization of higher education, more research is needed to address how states, schools, ECCs and higher education institutions can promote equality among prospective students.

5.3 Personal Reflections

I have worked for years in the field of education and have had opportunities to witness the changes in China's education consulting industry. According to my working experience and observation, the industry as a whole is facing challenges such as a lack of standards, some unethical behaviors, and the high turnover rate among consultants, but it is transforming and maturing. New programs and services are being developed, such as workshops that focus on applications to top institutions; platforms that provide extra-curricular activities and volunteer opportunities; and summer programs for learning academic

English or cultivating leadership abilities. More independent consultants are entering the industry and serving students as mentors, many of whom also build a long-lasting friendship with students. Many ECCs and independent consultants are no longer agents who merely sell institutions to students or simply prepare application materials for students. They are sharing their academic and cultural experience or insights (many have been international students themselves) and helping prospective students make a smooth transition to a new and challenging overseas environment. I hope this paper can help struggling education consultants see greater value in their work. I hope this study can improve ECCs support for students and help educational institutions see new possibilities to benefit students and themselves in the internationalization of higher education.

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Appendix A- Letter of Invitation



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies

Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374

Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

Letter of Invitation to be Interviewed

Dear education consultants,

I am writing to invite you to participate a research study entitled *The Role of Education Consulting in the Internationalization of Higher Education*. I am currently a Masters of Education student at the Department of Education Studies, University of British Columbia in Canada, under the supervision of the Principal Investigator Dr. Marilynne Waithman (marilynne.waithman@ubc.ca) and Dr. Wendy Poole (wendy.poole@ubc.ca). Before I came to UBC, I had worked closely with Chinese high school students and I have great interest in enhancing the experience of Chinese students as international students in higher education.

With the process of internationalization of higher education, the education consulting companies are playing a greater role. The purpose of this study is to examine the education consultants' perspectives regarding the changes in U.S. higher education consulting services since 2010 and to better understand the impact of U.S. higher education consulting services on students' experience after their enrolment in U.S. institutions.

You are invited to be interviewed and share your insights about this topic if you satisfy at least one of the following criteria: (1) Education consultants who have more than five years experience specializing in U.S. higher education consulting; (2) Directors, managers or team leaders who have more than three years experience in a U.S. higher education consulting department or company; (3) Key persons or program designers in a

recently developed U.S. higher education consulting program; (4) Education consultants who work closely with prospective international students heading to U.S. higher education and with students who are enrolled in U.S. institutions.

The interview will be approximately one hour in length. All interview responses and identities in this study will be kept confidential. All indentifying information will be deleted from the interview transcripts and final report.

If you would like to participate in the study by consenting to be interviewed, please contact me at jietian64@gmail.com.

It is my hope that the findings of this research will lead to findings that can help to enhance the educational experience of Chinese international students.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to learning from you.
Sincerely,

Jie (Jessie) TIAN

Appendix B- Consent form



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Research Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Role of Education Consulting in the Internationalization of Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marilynne Waithman
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
marilynne.waithman@ubc.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Poole, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
wendy.poole@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Jie (Jessie) TIAN
Masters Student in the Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
jietian64@gmail.com

Research Purposes:

The purpose of this study is to examine the education consultants' perspectives regarding the changes in U.S. higher education consulting services since 2010 and to better understand the impact of U.S. higher education consulting services on students' experience after their enrolment in U.S. institutions.

Research Procedure and Participation:

The study consists of up to six interviews. All participants, who will be drawn from experienced education consultants in China, will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview where they will be asked open-ended questions related to U.S. higher education consulting. All participation is completely voluntary and participants may chose to withdraw their responses at any point with no repercussions.

Interviews will be approximately one hour in length. The venues for these interviews are to be determined, based on what is comfortable for participants and what is mutually convenient for participants and researchers. The interview could be face-to-face or Internet supported. The interviews will be audio recorded upon the participants' approval.

Confidentiality and Data Storage:

All interview responses and identities in this study will be kept completely confidential. No identifying information will be revealed in this study. Quotations may be used, however, the names of persons contributing the quotes will not be revealed. All the data collected from the interview will be encrypted and stored in a password-protected computer. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to it. An electronic version of the data, including audio files, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the research supervisor's office on the UBC campus for at least five years after the study concludes.

Contact:

If you have any further questions or concerns, you are encouraged to contact the co-investigator, Jie (Jessie) Tian jietian64@gmail.com, or the research supervisor, Dr. Wendy Poole wendy.poole@ubc.ca.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the *Research Participant Complaint Line* in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at (604) 822-8598 or if long distance email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent:

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

I have retained a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to be audio taped during the interview.

I consent to participate in the study: *The Role of Education Consulting in Internationalization of Higher Education*.

Name (please print)

Participant Signature

Date

Please scan return the signed consent form to jietian64@gmail.com.

Appendix C- Interview guide

Interview Guide

Note: The participants are free to skip any questions they feel uncomfortable about or feel they cannot answer. The researcher will possibly change the order of questions or skip certain questions that have been answered together with other questions according to the participant's responses.

1. Background information

- a. Could you describe your career briefly in the area of U.S. higher education consulting?
- b. How long have you been working in the area of U.S. higher education consulting?
- c. How long have you been working for your current employer?
- d. What are your job responsibilities now?

2. Questions about primary U.S. consulting services

- a. How have the students' needs and requirements for U.S higher education consulting services changed since 2010?
- b. What are the current U.S. higher education consulting services you provide to Chinese students? Could you briefly describe each service?
- c. What services are most commonly chosen by students?

3. Questions about newly developed services

- a. What services or programs are newly developed? When did you begin to provide these services?
- b. Could you describe these newly developed services or programs (e.g., why they have been developed, the purpose of the services or programs, the targeted students)?
- c. What if any programs are designed to address the post-admission and post-enrollment needs of students?

4. Questions about the impact on students' experience after going abroad

- a. What feedback do you receive from the students and their parents regarding their primary challenges after they go abroad to study?
- b. What concrete feedback do you receive from the students and their parents regarding the impact of your consulting services on students' experience after they go abroad?

6. Questions about the lessons education consultants learned

- a. What do you think education consultants or education consulting companies can do to enhance the experience of Chinese students as international students studying abroad?

7. Conclusion of the Interview

- a. Is there any additional information that you think might help me better understand U.S. education consulting services offered in China?
- b. Do you have any questions for me at this time?