**Programme:** MSc Business Analytics

**Preferred Advisor:** Dr Zexun Chen

## Study on the UK’s Universities' Preference for the Educational Backgrounds of Chinese Postgraduate Students

## Proposal Summary

This proposal, following a brief overview of past research papers on the phenomenon of unequal admission thresholds in universities in the UK, US, and China, has identified the following research question: At the postgraduate level, do UK universities exhibit preferences for certain educational backgrounds? Therefore, this proposal focuses on the UK’s Universities and plans to conduct further research by crawling admission data provided by authoritative influencers on Weibo, one of China's most famous social media platforms.

## Existing Concepts

According to Fetter (1997), university admissions officers in the United States, when assembling the incoming freshman class that best aligns with the institution's goals and values, often give additional consideration to characteristics including athletic ability, musical talent, rural background, lower socioeconomic status, gender, alumni relations, leadership capabilities, geographic location, and unusual life experiences. Furthermore, in the UK, a similar phenomenon was studied by Zimdars (2010) at the University of Oxford, where he found that the university's admissions committee adjusts applicants' grades based on their schooling situation, which can explain the statistical observation that applicants from private schools have a lower chance of admission compared to those from public schools. In China, an educational inequality phenomenon brought about by a recruitment method known as Independent Freshman Admission was also observed by Liu et al. (2014).

The aforementioned studies primarily focus on the undergraduate level. The aim of this research is to analyse admissions data at the postgraduate level to determine if the phenomenon of unequal admission thresholds similarly exists.

## Research Questions

In recent years, the demand among Chinese students for UK master's degrees, attributed to the short duration of the programmes and their relatively reasonable costs, has seen an increase, contributing to the flourishing UK international education market. On Chinese social media, there are prevalent rumors that the most crucial criterion considered by UK universities for admissions is the undergraduate academic performance, and other factors are considered insignificant. To investigate the existence of this admission preference, my research question will focus on conducting statistical analysis or social network analysis of the admissions data that is most discussed on Weibo, a Chinese social media platform, specifically regarding the UK’s Universities, to uncover any potential patterns.

For my data sources, I plan to use a script from the following GitHub repository: https://github.com/dataabc/weiboSpider, to crawl Weibo data from a well-known influencer and practitioner in the Chinese study abroad community, Cook Cui Zhong Bo Wen (崔钟博汶Cook). I have successfully obtained data related to the UK’s universities including University of Edinburgh, etc. after adjusting necessary parameters and filtering. Next, I will attempt to annotate the data, categorizing admitted students' educational backgrounds into groups such as 985/211/non-985/211 universities, along with their admission outcomes.

## Proposal References

ESPENSHADE, T. J. & CHUNG, C. Y. 2005. The opportunity cost of admission preferences at elite universities. *Social Science Quarterly,* 86**,** 293-305.

ESPENSHADE, T. J., CHUNG, C. Y. & WALLING, J. L. 2004. Admission preferences for minority students, athletes, and legacies at elite universities. *Social Science Quarterly,* 85**,** 1422-1446.

FETTER, J. H. 1997. *Questions and admissions: Reflections on 100,000 admissions decisions at Stanford*, Stanford University Press.

LIU, L., WAGNER, W., SONNENBERG, B., WU, X. & TRAUTWEIN, U. 2014. Independent Freshman Admission and Educational Inequality in the Access to Elite Higher Education. *Chinese Sociological Review,* 46**,** 41-67.

ZIMDARS, A. 2010. Fairness and undergraduate admission: a qualitative exploration of admissions choices at the University of Oxford. *Oxford Review of Education,* 36**,** 307-323.

## Analysis Methods

1. For data organization, use Python to search for records in the CSV file that match conditions based on keywords related to the research.
2. After completing data labelling, it is planned to use STATA for regression analysis.

**Research Method:** Quantitative

**Dissertation Format:** Traditional Research Dissertation