During the summer before I entered the college, I was intrigued by a book ‎“Democracy in America”written by Alexis de Tocqueville. The book vividly described his keen observation of the burgeoning American civil society in 19th century and its unique support for the representative democracy in the country. Tocqueville’s description was truly insightful, which led me to think deeper into the civil society development in China and the interaction between Chinese political elites and grassroots class.

With my growing interest in social sciences, I read many academic papers in college and later learned state-of-the-art empirical research methods. What enlightened me most was Professor Gary King’s paper on Censorship in China. By using computer-based text analytical methods, Professor King analyzed the content of millions of social media posts across China. The paper arrived at a seemingly counterintuitive but concrete conclusion that the censorship programs are more aiming at collective expression and actions than government criticism. I thus was impressed by the power of statistics and data visualization, and became determined to explore the potential of utilizing big data and quantitative methods for social science research.

Majoring in financial mathematics during my undergraduate study, I laid a solid foundation in mathematical, statistical and economics theories. Apart from earning excellent scores in *Calculus* and *Linear Algebra*, I also challenged myself in more advanced mathematical courses, such as *Multivariable Calculus* and *Mathematical Reasoning Logic and Problem Solving*. While the courses, *Sampling and Hypothesis Testing* and *Statistical Distribution Theory*, introduced me to the fascinating world of statistics, the *Linear Statistical Models* and *Applied Probability* courses not only helped me become proficient with statistical programming tools, such as R, STATA and MATLAB, but also enriched my understanding of most commonly used statistical models, including multivariable linear regression model, Time Series, and Markov Chain. Besides, I had rigorous trainings in economics and finance through courses like *Econometric of Time Series* and *Foundations of Financial Computing*. Equipped with this in-class knowledge, I eagerly looked forward to tackling a real-world problem.

Applying these quantitative skills in my graduation thesis further honed my expertise. This project focused on exploring economic factors that negatively affect rural development in China’s urbanization from 1978-2008. I independently designed and implemented the project using mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis. In addition to designing questionnaires and conducting in-depth interviews with randomly selected nineteen poor households in Maoba Village of southwest China to collect suffice rural development information from the field, I cleaned and processed data from National Bureau of Statistics, built a linear regression model and run hypothesis test with R. My research led to the conclusion that both institutional and political factors have attributed to the limited capital for economic and social development in rural areas. This research experience was my first attempt to apply statistical methods in political economics studies. Though feeling a sense of achievement, I realized my lack of practical experience in applying statistical theories in tackling real world cases. This had resulted in the problems of unreliable second-source data and unrealistic assumptions when building models. Besides, this project also emphasized the importance of acquiring systematic political science training. Therefore, I decided to pursue my master’s degree in Chinese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

Through the postgraduate study, I established a theoretical framework of social science and developed a particular interest in issues of contemporary China. To further fortify my quantitative skills and explore my research interest in Chinese elite politics and civil society development, I joined Professor Jiang Junyan’s research projects on maintaining the Chinese political elites database and Chinese civil society organizations database since June 2018 and August 2018 respectively. The most challenging part for me was to perform data cleaning with R. By referring to relevant literature, self-learning programming skills and frequently discussing with Professor Jiang, I finally completed identifying missing values and removing invalid records from the preliminary over 74,000 Chinese civil society organizations information categorized by region and unified social credit code. Moreover, I have been utilizing the database to analyze the uneven distribution of China’s civil society organizations across geographic regions and how it is linked with the corresponding NGO regulations of provincial governments. The research not only sharpened my statistical programming skills with R but also made me clearly aware of the challenges in processing immense amount of data.

Leveraging the rich academic resources in CUHK, I have audited several graduate-level statistical courses, from the fundamental *Statistical Inference* and *Linear Model* to *Multivariable Analysis* that explained Bayesian statistics and *Advanced Statistical Computing* that covered EM algorithm. However, the more I delved into quantitative studies in my current research, the more I realized my limitations in applying quantitative models and statistical tools to best fit with big data in political science areas, especially to derive insights from the two databases that I have recently updated. Hence, I am determined to pursue a master’s degree of Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences at Columbia University.

How to combine quantitative methods with social science is such a fascinating field. In the short run, postgraduate training would be an indispensable and precious chance for me to develop deeper understanding of statistical modeling techniques and political science theories. As my curiosity drives me to drill into the field of Chinese Political, I would love to apply for a Ph. D. program and pursue a career of research and teaching as a faculty member at top-level universities in China. I am enthusiastic about explaining the profound relationship between state and civil society organizations by utilizing big data to analyze public policy making process at the local level in China.

With its interdisciplinary nature, flexibility in curriculum design, and emphasis on written and oral communication about research findings, I believe that the Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences (QMSS) program is the optimal choice to achieve my aspirations. I anticipate taking the *Social Network Analysis* course, which will teach me to analyze network data by adeptly using statistical software R. Through completing the scripting and graphic design projects in the *Data Visualization* course, I will get familiar with computational methods and various programming tools for creating effective visualizations. Apart from the core coursework, I am also attracted by the non-QMSS electives offered by other department, including Statistics and Political Science. I am certain that the rigorous quantitative training in QMSS will fully prepare me to continue my doctoral study and future research career.