Title: The Developing Purpose of Low-income Students in China's Elite Universities

In the process of China’s transformation from a socialist to a post-socialist society, China’s entire system of education has experienced breathtaking expansion and reform. Chinese higher education funding has become increasingly tuition-based. In this context, first-tier universities increasingly accept students from more financially well off backgrounds. While second-tier universities are inclined to accept more poor students. The university experiences and social needs of low income students have emerged as a critical educational problem and topic of research in China. My dissertation study is designed to explore the college experiences of low-income students in Tsinghua University, where low income students are increasingly less likely to be admitted, a characteristic shared by China’s other most elite institutions. I hope to understand and explain how Tsinghua University (and by extension other elite institutions) with advantaged financial and material conditions and resources, missions, and targets for educating students is serving students from economically needy backgrounds. Specifically, I am interested in how family poverty and university culture influence students' experiences, including educational adjustment, expectation, and daily action. I am also interested in exploring the extent to which institutional policies are in place to serve such students and how and whether such policies can and should be improved.