

Statement of Purpose

My desire to study cross-cultural psychology initially came from my experience during the summer of my freshman year. After the traumatic earthquake in Wen Chuan, in southwest China, I volunteered at the Chinese Red-Cross Foundation for a month, helping to build online donation networks. During this time I learned that two volunteer teams of psychologists went to Wen Chuan to help earthquake survivors who were at high risk for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Despite the great efforts of the psychologists, the interventions were not that successful. Few people were willing to open up and talk to the psychologists, and so the effects of the intervention remained minimal. Looking at those survivors' faces full of pain and sorrow, I kept asking myself why this was the case. Could it be that the interventions originated in western cultures do not fit the needs of Asians, particularly Chinese? If more research existed on people from Asian cultures, would the outcomes have been better? Realizing that the focus of most psychological studies has long been on North Americans and Europeans, I found an intense ambition to study people from other cultures, especially East Asian cultures. Therefore, it is with great enthusiasm that I pursue a career in social psychology by attending the PhD program at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

After my volunteer work during the summer, I came back to school and took more psychology courses. I have become more interested in how culture can shape identity, cognition, emotion and behavior, and have been trying to look for answers for those aforementioned questions. In Social Psychology and Abnormal Psychology, I learned how the independent self-identity in western culture and the interdependent self-identity in East Asian culture can influence human behavior; and how some specific mental disorders could be derived from one's culture. I find these topics particularly thought-provoking, yet information about these topics is limited in lectures and textbooks.

In addition to psychology courses, I have also taken courses on East Asian cultures, with a focus on Japan, and will obtain a minor in East Asian Studies upon graduation. I am fluent in Chinese (Mandarin), and have obtained an intermediate level of Japanese in college. As one of the difficulties in cross-cultural psychology research is the language barrier, I believe my language skills will certainly fit the need of cross-cultural studies.

In my junior year I spent one semester studying in Japan, during which I have not only improved my Japanese language skill but also closely experienced another culture other than Chinese and American cultures. This eye-opening experience allowed me to delve deeper into the field of cross-cultural psychology. I took a course on Cross-Cultural Psychology, which broadened my knowledge of various psychological research and theories in this field. I also helped Dr. Norasakkunkit, at Kyoto University, with his research comparing Hikikomori in Japan and Social Phobia in western cultures. I was intrigued by

how similar symptoms (fear of social life and tendency to stay at home) can be derived from two distinct psychological mechanisms, as fear of offending others in Hikikomori and fear of embarrassing oneself in Social Phobia. Through these experiences, I became more aware of the importance of culture in the field of psychology.

Throughout my undergraduate work, I have gained research experience that will be valuable for graduate studies. Over the past two years I have worked in the Memory Lab at Ohio Wesleyan University, with Dr. Bahrck, Dr. Hall and Dr. Baker, on their studies on semantic memory process in relation to context and age. I was involved in various aspects of the research process, through which I have gained skills and knowledge on conducting literature searches, forming hypotheses, programming of computer tests, contacting and testing participants, collecting and analyzing data, etc. With the generous help of my mentors, I have also studied the effects of cueing and age on the instability of access in semantic memory and presented the results at the school Summer Science Research Symposium.

I have also participated in various activities outside of the academic setting, including teaching and volunteering, which have helped me to become a more well-rounded person. I worked as an elementary school tutor in the Columbus Initiative Program, and also assisted with preschool activities at the Early Childhood Center of Ohio Wesleyan University. The interaction I had with young children and my observations on how teachers brought child psychology theories into practice, broadened my knowledge of how psychology could apply to the real world. I also volunteered at a local consumer operated mental health service center—Annie's Outreach Center in Delaware, OH. Here, I have talked with and had activities together with people who are suffering from schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, mental retardation, etc. The experience offered me an opportunity to interact with a variety of people and to improve my communication skills. During this process, I also learned to be more objective when working directly with these clients.

This year I designed my departmental honors project under the supervision of Dr. Leavy, the chairperson of the psychology department. I was interested in how anxiety is experienced by university students with a different culture background. Anxiety has been well studied cross-culturally. However, after much background literature reading, I found few studies focused on international students who are enrolled in universities in the United States. Since most of the studies were conducted in an English setting, the potential influence of language used on students' self-reported anxiety level also remains unmeasured. It is possible that cross-cultural differences in psychological traits, such as anxiety, may be due to the language in which the trait is measured, rather than the culture of the research participant. Therefore, with my Chinese language background, I am exploring the effect of language on self-reported anxiety of Chinese-English bilingual university students. I am using both the Chinese (Mandarin) version and English version of State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Social Avoidance and Distress (SAD) scale, to test whether participants will report their anxiety levels differently when being presented

with the questionnaires in two different languages. I would also like to explore the language related anxiety experiences of the Chinese international students by asking them to fill out a survey. I am currently in the process of data collection for this study.

My long-term career goal is to teach at the university level and conduct research with an emphasis on East Asian cultures. For now, my current research interests include, but are not limited to, self-representation, anxiety, and human cognition, with a cross-cultural focus. During my search for graduate programs, I found out that the psychology program at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor has a strong emphasis on culture and diversity, with well established labs such as the Culture and Cognition Lab, and the Center of Culture, Mind, and Brain. I would especially like to work with Dr. Richard Nisbett, on his research on differences in East Asian and Western reasoning styles; Dr. Fiona Lee, on her research about how power, social identities, and cultural values affect individuals; or Dr. Twila Tardif, on her studies of care giving in Chinese families. With the shared interests, I am confident that I will be a good candidate who will fit well into the program. I think the social psychology PhD program at the University of Michigan would aid me in attaining my goal, and my devotion and undergraduate training will enable me to contribute into the social psychology program at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.