When it comes to the college search, it is important to consider the insight of mothers.

As a soon-to-graduate high school student in Chongqing, China, Ziye Liu ’12 knew that she wanted a different kind of college experience, something other than the large, comprehensive university that she could anticipate attending if she remained in China. “I started to be really interested in liberal arts colleges,” Liu said. “I really liked the small-school atmosphere.”

She decided to study in the U.S., but there was one problem: where to begin? “Very few people know about liberal arts colleges,” Liu said. “I really liked the small-school atmosphere.”

Hope helpfully connected Ziye Liu with a current student from China who could share some perspective. They started talking, and both discovered just how small the world can be.

They met for the first time on campus in May, but Dan Tian ’08 and Ziye Liu ’12 of China are nearly family friends. It was a book by Dan’s mother concerning her college search that ultimately led Ziye to Hope when her mother read the volume and realized that Hope matched Ziye’s interests as well.

Tian participated in the Phelps Scholars Program and Hope’s Asian Perspective Association (HAPA) and the International Relations Club (IRC). She has recently completed a master’s in accounting at Notre Dame University and has gone on to work with a Big-Four accounting firm in Silicon Valley.

Like Tian, Liu is pleased with her Hope choice. She, too, has been involved in multiple campus activities, including the Phelps Scholars Program, HAPA and the IRC. She was a resident assistant with the Phelps Scholars Program this past year, and will be an RA in Columbia Apartments next year. She participated in the Japan May Term earlier this summer, and in the fall will be in the Baker Scholars and continuing an internship with the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce.

“I feel like this was my best decision ever,” Liu said.

Although Tian helped bring Liu to Hope, she wasn’t able to greet her when she arrived as an incoming freshman—she graduated the previous spring. The two women stayed in touch online, however, and were able to work out their first in-person meeting on campus this spring as the college’s Finals Week drew to a close.

Appropriately, the conversation turned to their mothers. Liu noted that she had made a point of telling hers that she was finally meeting the person who had inspired her own Hope journey.

“My mom is so excited,” she said. “She said, “I want to thank Dan’s mom.””