GSB STUDENT'S CONTRIBUTION

HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' MOTIVES AND INSTITUTION CHOICE CRITERIA

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Abstract

The expansion of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) higher education in China and abroad has increased choices for Chinese students, but also brought along fierce competition among HTM institutions. To achieve sustainable competitive advantages in the global educational market, HTM institutions need to clearly understand the decision-making process of prospective students. A better grasp of the motives for opting for an HTM program and choice criteria considered will facilitate the planning of effective marketing strategies. A vast majority of the previous research on students' decision-making was conducted in the West and it was found that only little of it focused exclusively on HTM students in China. This latter point is precisely what prompted this study. Its purpose is thus (1) to investigate Chinese students' motives for studying HTM after high school, (2) identify the choice criteria Chinese students applied when selecting HTM higher educational institutions, and (3) explore Chinese students' desire to study abroad, their preferred countries as well as the factors influencing this choice. 390 freshly-enrolled Chinese HTM undergraduates at Fujian Normal University, Minjiang University, and Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University were selected as the sample. Based on the findings, managerial suggestions are provided to HTM educational institutions.

***Key Words*:** *Hospitality and tourism management (HTM), higher education, study motives, choice criteria*

Introduction

Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) higher education in China has gone through considerable changes over the last decades. Most prominent among the changes is the increasing number of HTM institutions and students. Between 1999 and 2005, the number of tourism institutions of higher education jumped up from 209 to 574 with the number of students rising from 50,000 to 275,000 (Gu & Hobson, 2008). This substantial increase is in part the result of the policy of massive expansion of university enrolment adopted in China since 1998. The rapid growth of HTM institutions also reflects the significant development of the HTM sector in China and concomitant rise of job opportunities for HTM students (Huyton, 1997).

The popularity of HTM programs among Chinese students is not only evidenced by the proliferation of HTM colleges in China, but also by the number of Chinese studying HTM abroad. Indeed, China is now the largest source of international students for HTM degree programs worldwide (Yao, 2004). At the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, U.S.A., for example, in the fall semester 2003, out a total student population in the HTM program of 1,929, Chinese students

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comprised 1.4 percent of the students at the undergraduate level, and 2.7 percent at the graduate level (Theriault, 2004). Likewise, in the UK where, at the University of Surrey, out of a total student population in the HTM program of 1,237 for the spring semester 2005, Chinese students made up 2.4 percent at the undergraduate level and 46 percent at the graduate level (Williamson, 2005). In Australia, HTM is now one of the top five fields of study for international students as enrolments in that field doubled over the 2002-2005 period (Gu & Hobson, 2008).

The recent expansion of HTM higher education in China and abroad has considerably increased choices for Chinese students. They now have a wide range of options to choose from and must go through a complex decision-making process before making up their mind. As a result, Chinese students have become increasingly more selective in their choice of educational institutions. They are price-conscious customers, demanding better value for their money.

This expansion has also increased competition among Chinese institutions providing HTM programs, which now have to compete with each other and with overseas ones as well. This is also the case for HTM higher institutions abroad vying with each other for Chinese students set on studying overseas.

In light of all these recent developments and background information, it is the author's belief that there is an urgency better grasping the motives and choice criteria students applied when selecting an HTM institution. Identifying them is critical to understand Chinese students' HTM institution choice process. It is also of particular relevance to many HTM institution administrators who are concerned with the long-term effectiveness of recruitment practices.

Most of the research to date, however, has been conducted in Western countries. And only a small amount has focused on HTM students and an even a smaller one on Chinese HTM students and institutions. This research is intended as a pilot study providing a basis for a more encompassing research across HTM higher educational institutions in China – and abroad. It aims to investigate Chinese undergraduates' motives for studying HTM, identify the choice criteria they apply when selecting an HTM institution. In addition, this research will also explore Chinese students' desire to study abroad, preferred countries and the factors influencing their choices. Are their motives and choice criteria different from those of students in the West?

Prior to considering the findings of the survey conducted to address these various issues, this paper will articulate the methodology used for this research, reviewing the previous literature, mapping out a conceptual framework, and going over the questionnaire developed for this study.

1. Methodology

1.1 The Literature Reviewed

The literature reviewed pertains to the three specific areas at the core of this research: the motives for studying HTM, the choice criteria applied when selecting an HTM institution, and Chinese students' trends and motives for studying abroad.

Although the issue of Chinese's study motives is significant in the tourism and hospitality educational and management field, the relevant literature is relatively limited. The research available on this issue has identified several trends. Students' motives tend to be vocational rather than academic (Purcell & Quinn, 1996). Huyton (1997) concluded that a rapid increase in HTM program in China was consistent with the growth of the HTM industry and that changes in the industrial system provided more job opportunities for HTM students. This is consistent with the findings of Bushell et al. (2001) whose research shows that high school graduates are attracted to undergraduate HTM degrees because of the benefits the industry provide; contributing to their cultural enrichment, economic growth, and providing challenging and exciting career opportunities to people with a

variety of talents and interests. This is also in-keeping with Zhao's (1991) showing that students believe that working in the HTM field leads to respectable careers.

Schmidt (2002) found that the decision to study HTM was affected by personal, demographic, psychological, and social factors. Using a sample of Australian students, O' Mahony et al. (2001) concluded that awareness of an interest in the hospitality industry, parental influence, and career counselors were significant motivational factors. On the basis of its analysis of respondents' motivations for undertaking tourism and hospitability courses, Davidson & King (2008) suggested that prospective students be divided into the following groups*:* tourism enthusiasts; education compromisers; experience seekers; and self improvers.

Choice criteria are the various features or benefits a student looks for when going through the process of selecting a college as s/he evaluates and chooses among a series of alternatives. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997) showed that the criteria students use to evaluate universities are usually expressed in terms of school attributes. This finding is in-keeping with earlier studies, which, even though conducted in different contexts, with different methodologies and samplings, had similar or identical findings. For example, Baird (1967) and Bower & Pugh (1972) identified 'Good Faculty' as an important factor for students to consider when choosing a college. Both Chapman (1979) and Murphy (1981) recognized 'Cost' as the determinant in a students' decision.

It is interesting to note that five researchers identified *Quality* as an influencing factor though they used different terms to refer to it: 'high academic standards'; 'high standards'; 'quality of the institution'; and 'academic reputation' respectively. It was found that all the studies conducted in the1990s identified 'Reputation' and 'Quality' as important institution attributes, suggesting that reputation and quality remain important factors influencing students though their meanings may slightly vary. For example, Sevier (1991), Qureshi (1995), Lin (1997) and James *et al*. (1999) emphasized the quality and reputation of an institution; Martin and Dixon (1991), Chapman, R (1993), Mazzarol et al. (1996), the quality and reputation of its academics; and Coccari and Javalgi (1995) its faculty.

In the1990s*,* 'Financial Considerations' were also influencing factors (Martin and Dixon, 1991), (Sevier, 1991), (Coccari and Javalgi, 1995), (Qureshi, 1995), (KalliO, 1995) and (Joseph & Joseph,1998). James et al. (1999), however, concluded that the costs incurred had not been a decisive in applicants' choices.

The relevant literature in the early 2000's also identified 'Reputation' and 'Quality' as key attributes (Soutar & Turner, 2002), (Price, 2003). Still, while 'Courses and Curriculum' were also reported to be important factors (Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004), (Shanka *et al*., 2005), 'Graduate Career Prospects' came as the number one priority (Holdsworth & Nind, 2005) along with 'Financial Considerations' (Ivy, 2001), (Mazzarol, 2002). Table 1, Appendix 1 summarizes all the institution attributes identified in the literature reviewed.

China now is the largest source country of overseas students in the world. According to Yao (2004), the total population of Chinese overseas students for the period 1978-2003 was about 700,000. It started to increase in 1996 and in the early 2000's saw its growth speed up, with major jumps in 2000, 2001 and 2002 of 65%, 118% and 47% respectively and a historic height of 125,000 Chinese students going overseas to study in 2002; a fivefold increase over 1996. In line with the economic globalization, the international education market is booming. The huge benefits to be derived from it have not gone unnoticed and many countries have been promoting their education services to Chinese students and seeking to cater to their needs.

Davey (2005) identified several factors prompting students to pursue their higher education overseas. The most common reason is to obtain internationally-recognized and

respected qualifications. Coupled with this are the opportunity to improve one's English language and communication skills and benefit from high teaching standards, and the desire to experience western culture, gain permanent residence, and fulfill parents' ambitions. A set of destinations, which students recall and/or consider, were identified, for example, the UK, USA, and Australia. On the basis of all these findings and in line with the issues this study is to explore, a conceptual framework was articulated.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study is based on Kotler's & Fox' *Highly-Complex Decision Making Model and Successive Sets in Decision Making* ((1995). The first step in exploring a prospective HTM student's motives is to gather his/her profile (gender, family income, etc). Once a profile has been established, the next step is to look at the motives for his/her studying HTM, the first stage of which is the 'Awareness Set'.

For purposes of this study, the Awareness Set consists of the HTM institutions of higher learning - both in China and abroad - which a prospective student has heard of. To be part of a student's Awareness Set, HTM institutions must somehow make their way into this set. Out of all the HTM institutions a student is aware, s/he then narrows down the list to his/her 'Consideration Set'.

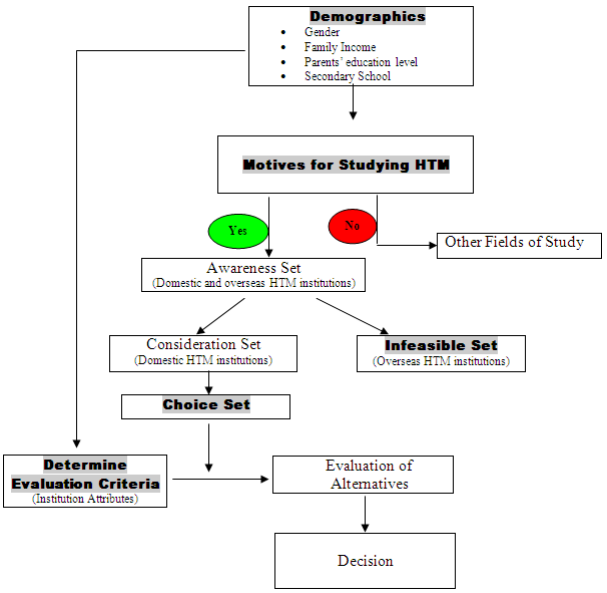
The Consideration Set is only made up of a number of domestic HTM institutions. It does not include any overseas one since, at this juncture, it is assumed, that for various reasons, the HTM institutions outside China, of which a student is aware, are not feasible for him/her to consider further. Exploring these reasons is one of objectives of this study. All these HTM institutions not deemed feasible end up in an 'Infeasible Set'.

The student then moves to examine each of the institutions in his/her Consideration Set. As s/he continues to gather information, a few HTM institutions remain very appealing, and will constitute his/her 'Choice Set'.

After assessing each institution in the Choice Set on the basis of his/her choice criteria, a student will eliminate certain alternatives and proceed to make a choice out of the few remaining alternatives, which will in turn be evaluated leading to a final decision. This last step presupposes of course that evaluation criteria (institution attributes) have been articulated by that student.

Consideration of these various steps (Awareness Set, Consideration Set, Evaluation of Alternatives, and Decision) makes clearer the process by which overseas institutions are initially considered then rejected (Infeasible Set) and helps to better understand the linkages between them and how a final decision comes to be made as students narrow down their choices from a number of domestic and international options to a few domestic ones and then further eliminate some to end up with one school. Figure 1 below maps out these various stages in the decision-making process.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



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As indicated by the darkened boxes in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework, this study will investigate the following Boxes: Demographics, Motives for Studying HTM, Choice Set, Determine Evaluation Criteria, and Infeasible Set.

1.3 Target Population and Samples

The target population of this study consisted of freshly-enrolled undergraduate students currently studying in HTM programs in China. Working with students currently enrolled made it possible to assess the target population's actual final decisions with regard to HTM institution choice, as opposed to their initial intention, which may have included studying abroad. A requirement of a maximum one-month long period after enrollment was imposed so as to ensure that students would still be able to recollect with a reasonable degree of accuracy their motives for studying HTM and the choice criteria they applied in their HTM institution selection.

Considering that China, a huge country with a geographically dispersed population, would have been expensive and time-consuming to survey, area sampling (cluster sampling) was adopted. The sampling for this study was also confined to specific types of people who could provide the desired information. Therefore, the sampling for this study was students from universities, which met the following criteria set by this author to attain the research objectives:

1. higher educational institutions in the Fujian province in China since this author lives in that province and could thus conveniently survey students there;
2. higher educational institutions providing HTM undergraduate programs;
3. higher education institutions that were comparable and accessible.

Three universities satisfying these three requirements were selected: Fujian Normal University; Minjiang University; and Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University.

Since this research was self-funded and intended as a pilot study for a more encompassing research across HTM higher educational institutions in China and possibly abroad, the size of its samples, including its overall scope, was modest.

According to the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), the number of HTM students in the Fujian province in 2007 was 13,383. The number of freshly-enrolled HTM undergraduates from these three universities selected as the sample for this study thus came to 390 students, which allowed 5% of tolerable error (Anderson, 1996).

1.4 Data collection and instrument

The primary data was collected in October 2008. A five-part questionnaire was developed as the instrument to collect data, using a 5-point scale, with '5' indicating 'strongly agree' and '1' 'strongly disagree'. Ranking an attribute as '1' meant that it was considered 'Not important at all', while ranking it as '5' meant it was very important to the respondents.

Part one of the questionnaire: *Motives for Studying in an HTM Program* (see Table 3, sub-section 2.2 infra), required Chinese students to indicate their motives for studying in an HTM program, either at home or abroad. The questions, a total of 17, were based on a number of previous studies (see 1.1 supra). In keeping with Chiu's (1999) and Kim's (2007) studies, the 17 items considered were grouped into 5 domains: Job Opportunity,' 'Interest in the Practical Aspects,' 'Apparent Attraction,' 'Interest in a Foreign Country,' and 'Ease in Studying.'

Part two, *The Top 3 Alternative Universities Considered when Selecting an HTM Institution* (see sub-section 2.4 infra) was designed to investigate the alternative top 3 comparable universities the respondents had considered when selecting their HTM institutions.

Part three, *Choice Criteria Used in HTM Institution Selection* (see Table 4, sub-section 2.3 infra), aimed to identify institution attributes that HTM undergraduate students took into consideration when selecting an institution. The list of choice criteria questions was compiled

from the choice criteria listed in previous literature (see 1.1 supra). For analytical purposes, the 22 choice criteria were categorized into 6 domains: Financial considerations', 'Entry requirements', 'Suitability of program', 'Reputation', 'Physical aspects & facilities', and 'Graduate career prospects'. Respondents were required to rank 22 institutional attributes on a scale of 1-5 to show the importance they attached to each of them.

Part four, *The Intention of Studying Abroad* (see sub-section 2.5 infra) was designed to explore i) respondents' countries of choice, ii) respondents' reasons for wanting to study abroad (see Table 5 sub-section 2.5 infra), and iii) determine the factors leading to the infeasibility of studying abroad (see Table 6, sub-section 2.5 infra).

Part five, *Demographic Profile of Respondents* (see Table 2, sub-section 2.1 infra), sought background data for profiling the respondents, ranging from gender to educational and family background. Though this information is considered first in the findings (section 2 infra), it is customary to put questions pertaining to demographics at the end of a questionnaire so as not to act as a deterrent for respondents to answer the whole questionnaire as they may not see right away the relevance of collecting personal data.

2. Findings

2.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 2: Demographic Factors of Respondents (N=390)

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	51	13.1
Female	339	86.9
Annual Family Income		
Not working	50	12.8
Under US$5,000	259	66.4
US$5000-10000	77	19.7
More than US$10000	4	1.0
Parents' Education Level		
Below college education	348	89.2
College level and above	42	10.8
Recent Secondary School		
High school	352	90.3
Secondary vocational school	16	4.1
Others	22	5.6
Total	390	100%

As shown in Table 2, with female respondents accounted for 86.9% of the total 390 respondents, and male respondents for the remaining 13.1%, females make up the majority of Chinese undergraduates studying in HTM programs in China. Clearly, HTM in China is a female-dominated study field.

As for *Annual Family Income*, 259 out of the 390 respondents come from families with an annual income below US$5,000. Only a minority (1%) has an annual family income of more than US$10,000. This finding shows that the large proportion of Chinese HTM undergraduates come from middle class families.

The next item, *Parents' education level*, shows that only 42% of respondents' parents received college education, which means that most Chinese HTM undergraduates are the first generation of university students.

As regard to their educational background, the vast majority of the Chinese HTM undergraduates (90.3%) graduated from high-school with only a small proportion of them (4.1%) graduating from secondary vocational schools, suggesting that among the prospective students interested in HTM studies, a majority of then comes from high school graduates.

2.2 Motives for Studying an HTM Program

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Motives Studying HTM

Motive items	N	Mean
Domain A: Job Opportunities	390	**3.2400**
Motive1: The rate of employment in the hospitality and tourism industry is high after graduation.	390	3.10
Motive2: There is a variety of job opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industry.	390	3.67
Motive3: The salary level is high in the	390	2.78

hospitality and tourism industry.		
Motive4: Compared to other fields, people working in the hospitality and tourism industry gets more chances to be promoted.	390	2.51
Motive5: The hospitality and tourism industry has growth potential.	390	4.13
Domain B: Interest in Practical Aspects	390	**3.5812**
Motive6: This field is practical rather than theoretical.	390	4.19
Motive7: I have more interest in this field than in others.	390	3.40
Motive8: I like to serve others.	390	3.15
Domain C: Apparent Attraction	390	**3.6915**
Motive9: The scenes or pictures of the hospitality and tourism industry appearing in movies or TV look attractive.	390	3.92
Motive10: The working environment in this field apparently looks good.	390	3.76
Motive11: People working in this field look beautiful.	390	3.39
Domain D: Interest in a Foreign Country	390	**3.6530**
Motive12: Compared to other fields of study, there is a higher opportunity to interact with more foreigners and foreign cultures in this field.	390	3.81
Motive13: I can have the opportunity to take more overseas business trips or have meetings in foreign countries	390	3.29
Motive14: More opportunities to use a foreign language.	390	3.86
Domain E: Ease in Studying	390	**2.5444**
Motive15: Compared to other fields, it seems easier to study in this field.	390	2.58
Motive16: My score on the university entrance exam qualified me for this major.	390	2.57
Motive17: I don't like mathematics.	390	2.48
MOTIVE	390	**3.3420**

All the motive domains had a mean score above 3.0 except for domain E (Ease in studying). The two domains receiving the highest mean scores were domains C (Apparent attraction) and domain D (Interest in a foreign country) with means of 3.69 and 3.65 respectively. These findings suggest that Chinese students' choice of HTM as their major is related to intrinsic motives of interest in foreign cultures and love for the attractiveness of the hospitality and tourism industry.

The fact that respondents had the lowest mean score (2.54) in domain E (Ease in studying) shows that perhaps students are anticipating HTM studies to be a challenge rather than a casual "walk in the park".

It is interesting to note that of all the 17 motive items, motive 6 (This field is practical rather than theoretical.) in Domain B (Interest in practical aspects) had the highest mean score (4.19). 328 out of 390 respondents saw it as the main reason for studying HTM. This is in keeping with Purcell & Quinn (1996) who suggested that the motivation for HTM students tended to be vocational rather than academic. Closely following motive 6, motive 5 (Hospitality and tourism industry has growth potential.), with a mean of 4.13, ranked second. This means that the acknowledged growth potential in the hospitality and tourism industry is the main reason for students to opt for an HTM program. This is consistent with Huyton (1997) who concluded that the rapid increase in HTM programs reflected the growth of the HTM industry and job opportunities for HTM students.

2.3 Choice Criteria Used in HTM Institution Selection

Table 4: Importance of Choice Criteria

Choice Criteria Items	N	Mean
Domain A: Financial Considerations	**390**	**3.4051**
Choice1: Total cost of education	390	3.53
Choice2: Availability of financial aid	390	3.18
Choice3: Providing more scholarships	390	3.50
Domain B: Entry Requirements	**390**	**3.4795**
Choice4: Ease of university admission	390	2.96
Choice5: University entrance exam scores	390	3.93
Choice6: Offers flexible entry	390	3.55
Domain C: Suitability of Program	**390**	**4.2628**
choice7: Nature of the courses (dynamic content, including many traveling activities, a lot of field trips etc...)	390	4.15
choice8: Program structure (curriculum and internship program)	390	4.38
Domain D: Reputation	**390**	**3.9942**
choice9: Institution has been ranked highly by a recognized body.	390	3.90
choice10: Majority of teaching faculty has Doctoral degrees.	390	3.91
Choice11: Program is well known in the field.	390	4.03
choice12: Alumni speak highly of the teaching quality	390	4.14
Domain E: Physical Aspects	**390**	**4.0659**

Choice13: Location of the institution	390	3.81
Choice14: Size of the institution	390	3.52
Choice15: Attractiveness of the campus	390	3.85
Choice16: Safety of campus	390	4.39
Choice17: Availability of quiet areas	390	4.40
Choice18: Excellent facilities	390	4.34
Choice19: Good social life on campus	390	4.16
Domain F: Graduate Career Prospects	**390**	**4.3068**
choice20: Whether or not employers are likely to recruit from this institution.	390	4.35
choice21: The institution provides excellent information on career opportunities.	390	4.34
choice22: The institution's graduates are easily employable.	390	4.23
CRITERIA	**390**	**3.9191**

Out of the 6 choice criteria domains, domain F (Graduate career prospects) received the highest mean score (4.31), closely followed by domain C (Suitability of program) with a mean score of 4.26 as the choice criteria included in these domains were considered particularly important by respondents in their HTM institution selection.

These results reveal that Chinese students show greater sensitivity to anticipated benefits as reflected in a keenness to align their HTM study to their potential career paths. This finding mirrors previous researches that argue that, since the purchasing of higher education is a high involvement decision, students are no longer passive choosers, but are increasingly anticipating the return to the investment they put into their higher education studies.

Out of the 22 institution attributes evaluated, not one single attribute scored lower than 2.96, and none higher than 4.40, with a mean score of 3.91 on a five-point scale recalling that 3.91 lies biased toward 'Important'. This outcome clearly indicates that all 22 choice criteria factors were determinant for respondents in their HTM institution selection. The top six attributes included: 'Availability of quiet areas' (4.40), 'Safety of campus' (4.39), 'Program structure' (4.38), 'Whether or not employers are likely to recruit from this institution' (4.35), 'Excellent facilities' (4.34) and 'The institution provides excellent information on career opportunities' (4.34). These clearly were the most important institution attributes the respondents considered in their HTM institution selection. Altogether, these six attributes reflected the respondents' underlying concern that the correct short and long-term personal decision had been made. While these 6 attributes rated the highest in terms of importance, only a mall gap was found between the highest and lowest rating attributes. This suggests that developing a preference for one institution over another is a complex process and that, while students do consider other factors, their final choice is mostly determined by these six most important attributes.

2.4 The Top 3 Alternative Universities Considered when Selecting an HTM Institution

The findings indicate that Fujian Normal University, one of the universities sampled, was the one most often selected, with Jimei University second, and Xiamen University third. Along with the other two sampled universities (Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University and Minjiang University), these top three HTM universities were competing with each others as each of them was considered by prospective students as an alternative to the others.

2.5 The Intention of Studying Abroad

i) Preferred Country

The data analysis indicates that slightly over half the respondents initially intended to study abroad. The USA was the number one choice. Australia came second, followed by France, the UK, and Japan. This set of recall could be a result of more proactive promotional strategies implemented by the educational authorities. Other countries mentioned by some of the respondents as possible HTM destinations included Canada, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, Italy, Singapore, and Korea.

ii) *Reasons for Wanting to Study Abroad*

Table 5: Reasons for Wanting to Study Abroad

Ranks	Reasons	Count	Col %

1	Desire to experience a different culture	153	39.2%
2	Desire to practice and improve English	128	32.8%
3	Gain a competitive advantage and differentiate myself in the job market	127	32.6%
4	Look for a chance to work abroad	55	14.1%
5	Limited choices and quality of education in China	37	9.5%
5	Desire to remain in a foreign country and gain permanent residence	37	9.5%
6	Fulfill my parents' ambitions	18	4.6%
7	Difficulty to gain entry to top Chinese institutions	14	3.6%
8	Others	10	2.6%
	Total	196	50.3%

The three following items: the 'Desire to experience a different culture'; the 'Desire to practice and improve English'; and the desire to 'Gain a competitive advantage and differentiate myself in the job market' came on top of the respondents' lists of the most compelling reasons for them to consider studying abroad.

In line with Davidson's & King's (2008) findings, which show that 'Difficulty to gain entry to top Chinese institutions' and 'Fulfill my parents'Ambitions' are regarded as the 2 least important items, this research also ranks these two reasons at the bottom of the list.

iii) *Factors Leading to the Infeasibility of Studying Abroad*

Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Factors

Rank	Influential Factors	Count	Col %
1	High cost of education	167	42.8%
2	Visa restrictions	61	15.6%
3	Difficulty to gain entry	50	12.8%
3	Couldn't get related information	50	12.8%
4	Language obstacles	42	10.8%
5	My parents would like me to stay in China	33	8.5%
6	Others	24	6.2%
7	Afraid of being homesick	19	4.9%
8	Worry about cultural adaptation	13	3.3%
9	Safety and security concerns	11	2.8%
	Total	196	50.3%

The survey shows that the 'High cost of education', 'Visa restrictions', 'Difficulty to gain entry' and 'Couldn't get related information' were the top four factors influencing respondents' decision not to go abroad. It is worth noting that the other factors listed ('Safety and security concerns', 'Worry about cultural adaptation', 'Afraid of being homesick', 'My parents would like me to stay in China', and 'Language obstacles') had been considered in previous surveys in the 1980's and 1990's as significant factors in HTM students' choices whereas they are identified as the least influential factors in this study. The reasons for this change are unclear, but could be related to the fact that after 30 years of opening-door policy by China, young Chinese people are better equipped with English skills, more culturally aware, full of confidence in their ability to culturally adapt, and eager to enjoy greater independence, starting with their HTM decision.

3. Hypotheses testing

In order to better investigate study motives and choice criteria, the study examined the differences in study motives and choice criteria by demographics: gender, family income, parent's education level, and secondary schools (H1 and H2), and the correlations between study motives and choice criteria (H3). To test these three hypotheses, t-test, one-way ANOVA and Pearson r were applied.

***H1*:** There is no difference in Chinese undergraduates' motives for studying HTM when determined by demographics (gender, family income, parent's education level and secondary schools).

As a whole, there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of their

motives for studying HTM. Males showed a higher level of study motives on 'Job opportunities' than their counterparts. This shows that, compared to females, males can be more motivated by 'Job opportunities' to study HTM.

Very significant discrepancies were found in motives in terms of family income. The group whose family income was 'more than US$10,000' showed the lowest level of study motives on 'Job opportunities', 'Interest in practical aspects', 'Interest in foreign country' and 'Ease in studying'. Conversely, it is not surprising to see that respondents from families 'Not working' showed the highest level of study motives on 'Job opportunities', 'Interest in practical aspects', and 'Interest in foreign country'.

No significant difference was found in motives in terms of parents' educational level, which pinpoints that regardless of their parents' educational level, all the respondents scored nearly equally on the motives for studying HTM.

Generally there was no significant difference in motives in terms of their secondary schools. However, if we look closely at each motive domain, further investigation shows that respondents graduated from high schools valued 'Job opportunities' 'Interest in practical aspects', 'Apparent attraction' and 'Ease in studying' more highly than the other two groups of respondents. Respondents from secondary vocational schools rated 'Job opportunities' and 'Interest in practical aspects' lower than the other groups, but showed the highest level of study motives on 'Ease in studying'. This observation is not surprising since it is common in China that students from secondary vocational schools are relatively lower school performers than students from high schools.

H2*:* There is no difference in Chinese undergraduates' HTM institution choice criteria when determined by demographics (gender, family income, parent's education level and secondary schools).

As regards choice criteria employed by Chinese HTM undergraduates, there was no statistically significant gender difference, but there were statistically significant differences in terms of the respondents' family income, which emerged on 'Financial considerations' and 'Graduate career prospects'. The respondents from 'Not working' families were more concerned about 'Financial considerations', while the respondents from 'More than US$10,000' families valued 'Graduate career prospects' as the least important institutional attribute.

Although there was no statistically significant difference in choice criteria in terms of parents' education level, when further analysis conducted, very significant differences were found on 'Entry requirement' and 'Graduate career prospects'. The respondents whose parents didn't receive higher education valued 'Graduate career prospects' more highly but measured 'Entry requirements' less important than their counterparts.

In terms of secondary schools, differences were significant across all the choice criteria domains except 'Reputation', which reveals that 'reputation' is a key institutional attribute to the respondents no matter what kind of secondary school they were from. The Scheffe test outlined that the group that was different from the others was the group of students who graduated from secondary vocational schools.

H3*:* There is no correlation between Chinese undergraduates' motives for studying HTM and the choice criteria employed by Chinese undergraduates in their institution selection.

As shown in Table 7 infra, 'Job opportunities' had a strong negative correlation with 'financial considerations' at .01 significance level, which means the more the respondents were motivated by 'Job opportunities', the less they concerned about the financial issues involved in HTM

institution choice.

'Interest in practical aspects' correlated positively with 'Entry requirement', 'Suitability of program', and 'Graduate career prospects' all at .01 significance level, which suggests that the respondents who were motivated by 'Interest in practical aspects' were more inclined to use 'Entry requirements', 'Suitability of program', and 'Graduate career prospects' as the choice criteria to evaluate the HTM institutions.

'Apparent attraction' had no correlation with 'Financial considerations', and 'Entry requirements', but had positive correlation with 'Suitability of program' at .05 significance level, and had positive correlation with 'Reputation', 'Physical aspects & facilities', and 'Graduate career prospects' at .01 significance level. This finding reveals that those primarily motivated by 'Apparent attraction' didn't take 'Financial considerations', and 'Entry requirements' but 'Suitability of program', 'Reputation', 'Physical aspects & facilities', and 'Graduate career prospects' into consideration in their HTM institution selection;

'Interest in foreign country' had positive correlation with 'Entry requirements' at .01 significance level, and had positive correlation with 'Suitability of program', and 'Reputation' at .05 significance level, which indicates that for the respondents motivated by 'Interest in foreign country' to study HTM regarded 'Entry requirements' as more important than 'Suitability of program' and 'Reputation' as the key institutional attributes in HTM institution selection;

And 'Ease in studying' had strong positive correlation with 'Financial considerations', 'Reputation', 'Physical aspects & facilities', and 'Graduate career prospects' all at .01 significance level, which reveals that 'Financial considerations', 'Reputation', 'Physical aspects & facilities', and 'Graduate career prospects' were the determinants for the students who were motivated by 'Ease in studying' in their HTM institution selection.

Table 7: Analysis of Correlation Coefficient between Domains 5 and 6 Criteria, Using Pearson Correlation

	Financial consideration	Entry requirement	Suitability of program	Reputation	Interest in Physical aspects	Graduate career
Job opportunities	-.305 (**)	.053	.078	-.049	-.076	-.034
Interest in Practical aspects	-.036	.163(**)	.263 (**)	-.035	-.013	.169(**)
Apparent Attraction	-.060	.082	.123 (*)	.172(**)	.196(**)	.157(**)
Interest in foreign countries	.089	.323(**)	.127 (*)	.104(*)	.064	.068
Ease in studying	.216 (**)	.089	-.082	.178(**)	.267(**)	.151(**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that Chinese students choosing HTM as their major is related to intrinsic motives of interest in foreign culture, love of the field, and recognition of the attractiveness of the hospitality and tourism industry. Besides the strong pull of the field as study preference, study motives for HTM students tend to be vocational rather than academic.

Students are anticipating a challenge from the experience of studying in an HTM program. It is important for HTM educational administrators to note that all the 22 choice criteria (institution attributes) identified by this study were considered important. Target respondents rated aspects of 'Availability of quiet areas', as most important, followed by 'Safety of campus', which indicates that students look for a safe haven and better learning environment.

The long-term aspects of employability did feature high amongst this group, which reveals that Chinese students are no longer passive consumers in this increasingly competitive higher education environment. They regard HTM higher education as preparation for careers, and

expect institutions to provide excellent information on career opportunities.

Generally, students from different demographics showed different sets of motives for studying HTM and valued the institutional attributes differently. As a consequence, the research suggests that the target audience of HTM higher institutions can be divided according to the demographic background of that audience and also according to its motivational factors. It can be further divided into many ways

according to the importance the target audience attaches to institution attributes in its HTM institution selection. For instance, to attract more of the prospective male students, information about job opportunities in the HTM industry should be more emphasized by HTM institutions.

As mentioned earlier, all of the 22 choice criteria identified by this study were considered important by the students surveyed. In order to attract prospective Chinese HTM students' and increase the share of the Chinese HTM recruitment market, HTM institutions must score well on all of these attributes, especially on those ranked as the most important ones by students, namely: 'Safety of campus'; 'Availability of quiet areas'; 'Program structure'; 'Whether or not employers are likely to recruit from this institution'; 'The institution provides excellent information on career opportunities'; 'Excellent facilities'; 'The institution's graduates are easily employable'; 'Good social life on campus'; 'Alumni speak highly of the teaching quality'; and 'Program is well known in the field'. Some of these, however, may be difficult for HTM institutions to alter in the short term since they are attributes based and built on long-term image and reputation.

Institutions not rating well on these key attributes could try to alter students' perceptions of where they actually stand on these key considerations, or could encourage students to attach more importance to those specific attributes in which these institutions excel. They could also try to persuade students to change their ideal levels for these attributes.

In addition to understanding their 'prospective students' by determining the factors they rely on to evaluate institutions and the ensuing results, institutions also need to identify their competitors in order to assess where they currently stand in relation to them in terms of the most significant attributes. With Fujian Normal University, Minjian University, Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, Jimei University, and Xiamen University being the five HTM institutions considered in the students' choice set, those five schools compete with one another.

Based on this study's findings, which determined the level of importance HTM undergraduates assign to each institutional attributes, these five universities could conduct surveys to determine students' perception of their own actual performance and that of their competitors with regard to each attribute. They could then use the Importance-Performance Analysis grid (I-P grid) to identify areas of potential weakness.

In obtaining and using ratings by current students, institution planners must keep in mind that students enrolled in these institutions may rate their college somewhat higher than those in which they did not enroll. Thus, ratings by admitted students, who enrolled elsewhere, and by qualified students who chose not to apply can be important in positioning studies.

One significant finding from this study is that half of the respondents contemplating studying abroad. The primary reasons for wanting to be educated overseas were: a 'Desire to experience a different culture', 'Desire to practice and improve their English', and 'Gain a competitive advantage and differentiate myself in the job market'. The implication of this finding is that domestic HTM institutions could establish courses relevant to internationalization to attract and retain this group of students interested in going overseas. This strategy is sound and

feasible because in the current socio-economic environment, the Chinese government and society place particular emphasis on internationalization. For example, graduated students with good English skills, and cross-cultural communication skills are much more attractive to employers in the HTM industry in China.

This study also provides valuable information on the factors influencing students' initial intention to study abroad. Besides the 'High cost of education' and 'Visa restrictions', the 'Couldn't get related information' and 'Difficulty to gain entry' categories were also in the top 5 factors identified by the respondents. What this research also shows is that many Chinese students – a number large enough to warrant concern – did not appear to be adequately informed of overseas institutions, though overseas institutions have a keen interest in attracting Chinese students. This raises issues regarding the dissemination of information to Chinese students.

- What information do Chinese prospective students want?
- Is the information easily accessible? Informative? Understandable?
- What information sources might be most effective to Chinese students?

These are also questions that domestic institutions should take into consideration. From a positioning standpoint, providing information to create awareness can help these institutions strengthen their positions in the recruitment market.

Conclusion

This study suggests that HTM institutions should apply an integrated approach to using information sources. Some studies pointed out to the limitations of open days for providing prospective students with reliable insights into what lies ahead because the quality of the academic and social experiences provided by university is far better understood during and after it, rather than before it. However, the author of this research argues that open days may provide a valuable initial orientation opportunity and create an initial impression that can be somewhat representative of the actual academic experience being offered, helping students visualize what 'being there would be like;' an effective recruitment opportunity. An old Chinese saying will handily come in support of this recommendation: 'an eye finds more truth than two ears'. 'Alumni speak highly of the teaching quality' was rated as highly important among all the 22 choice criteria, which suggests that for Chinese students, word-of-mouth is an effective marketing communication. This has implications for HTM institutions, nationally or internationally, to encourage the formation of alumni associations. These associations would be valuable channels for distributing the information that would influence the opinions and decisions of prospective students and their families. Since 'Whether or not employers are likely to recruit from this institution' was one of the attributes students were most concerned about, institutions could use the testimonials from employers who would attest to the quality of the graduates to enhance the institutions' market positioning.

Additionally, according to Kotler & Fox (1995), the decision about which institution to attend is a process that starts long before the final enrollment decision is made, so the author of this study suggests that marketing strategies need to reach the target audiences early.

Appendix 1

Table 1: *Synthesis of the Previous Studies in Institution Attributes Students Consider Important in their Institution Selection*

Financial Considerations	Cost of Education	R. Chapman (1979), Murphy (1981), Martin & Dixon (1991), Sevier (1991), Coccari & Javalgi (1995), Qureshi (1995), Lin (1997), Joseph & Joseph (1998), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Shanka, Quintal &

		Taylor (2005), Holdswoth & Nind (2005).
	Financial Aid	Maguire & Lay (1981), Discenza (1985), Hossler (1985), Sevier (1991), Qureshi (1995), Kallio (1995), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003).
Physical Aspects & Facilities	Location	Maguire & Lay (1981), Krampf & Heinlein (1981), Hooley & Lynch (1981), Discenza (1985), Hossler (1985), Martin & Dixon (1991), Kallio (1995), Joseph & Joseph (1998), James (1999), Donnellan (2002), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004), Shanka, Quintal & Taylor (2005), Holdswoth & Nind (2005).
	Facilities	Maguire & Lay (1981), Lin (1997), Joseph & Joseph (1998), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Price (2003), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004).
	Size of the Institution	Maguire & Lay (1981), Kallio (1995).
	Attractiveness of the Campus	Krampf & Heinlein (1981).
	Campus Atmosphere	Krampf & Heinlein (1981).
	Availability of Quiet Areas	Price (2003).
Reputation	Institution	Sevier (1991), Qureshi (1995), Kallio (1995), James (1999), Donaldson & McNicholas (2004).
	Program & Courses	Martin & Dixon (1991), James (1999).
	Academic	Murphy (1981), Hooley & Lynch (1981), Discenza (1985), Hossler (1985), R. Chapman (1993), Soutar & Turner (2002), Price (2003).
	Staff	Mazzarol (1996), Ivy (2001).
	Quality	Mazzarol (1996, 2002).
Entry Requirements	Entry scores	James (1999), Yamamoto (2006).
	Ease of University Admissions	Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003).
Course and Program Issues	Program Structure	Donaldson & McNicholas (2004).
	Course Suitability	Maguire & Lay (1981), Soutar & Turner (2002), Price (2003).
	Course diversity	Baird (1967), Maguire & Lay (1981), Kallio (1995), Qureshi (1995), Ivy (2001).
	Degree and Major Availability	Sevier (1991), Coccari & Javalgi (1995).
	Nature of the Courses	Donaldson & McNicholas (2004).
Quality & Standard	Institution	R. Chapman (1979)
	Academic	Baird (1967), Bowers & Pugh (1972), Lin(1997), Ivy (2001), Soutar & Turner (2002), Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003), Shanka et al. (2005)
	Degree	R. Chapman (1993), Holdswoth & Nind (2005).
	Faculty	Baird (1967), Bowers & Pugh (1972), R. Chapman (1993), Coccari & Javalgi (1995).
	Facilities	Price (2003)
Graduate Career Prospects	Graduates are easily employable	Mazzarol (1996), Soutar & Turner (2002), Mazzarol (2002), Holdswoth & Nind (2005).

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