



**CATÓLICA
LISBON**
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA



Lancaster University
MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

**What are the Influencing Factors for
Chinese Students in Choosing a British
Higher Education Institution?
— From a Consumer Behavior Perspective**

MSc Management

IMSc in Business Administration

Name: Muyunshan Zhuang

Student ID: 152111153

Supervisor: Dr. Morven McEachern

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Abstract

In recent years, there is an increasing number of Chinese students who plan to pursue higher education abroad. Among their preferable overseas study destinations, the UK is definitely one of the most popular options. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the influencing factors considered by Chinese students in the process of choosing UK universities as well as degree programs from a consumer behavior perspective. Meanwhile, the study also aims to contribute to the limited number of literature that has attempted to develop a further study of why and how Chinese students decide to study in the UK and to provide managerial implications for education marketers. In order to achieve these objectives, both primary and secondary data were collected in this research and a quantitative study was conducted by means of questionnaire. A sample of 100 respondents was asked questions pertaining to the study.

The results of this study show that Chinese students select UK over other countries as their study abroad destination mainly due to its short duration. Secondly, Chinese students would mostly take into account such predictors as university ranking, location and graduate prospects in the choice of UK university and course ranking, graduate prospects, and professional staff and well-recognized lecturers in the decision of a specific course while ranking is perceived as the most influential factor when choosing both a British university and course. In addition, Internet followed by previous UK Chinese students and education agencies, is regarded as the most informative information source for Chinese students. Moreover, there also some demographic differences in the perception of studying in the UK discovered in this study. Based on these findings as well as the literature, some recommendations were drawn thereafter.

Key words: Decision making, Chinese students, UK HE institutions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the study undertaken and the conceptual rationale behind. It then presents the aims and objectives for the research. Later, it provides the readers with a structure of the whole dissertation for a better understanding of each chapter. Finally, a brief summary of the chapter is attached.

1.2 Background and Rationale

Mainland China is currently the largest source country of overseas students in the world (Yao, 2004). Evidence from the Beijing International Education Institute (BIEI, 2010) has shown that the top three destinations for those intending to pursue their higher education (HE) abroad were the USA (43 per cent), the UK (19 per cent) and Australia (12 per cent) (People's Daily, 2010). In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese students coming to the UK to pursue higher education. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveals that China sends more HE students to the UK than does any other country (HM Office for National Statistics, 2009).

This so-called 'education consumption' by Chinese students has brought considerable wealth to the British HE institutions. For example, Nania and Green (2004) report that at the University of Essex, Chinese students in the 2003-2004 academic year provided funding for the university equal to 29 per cent of that provided by the UK government. Thus, Chinese students are a significant economic driver upon Great Britain, especially given the recent financial crises. The Chinese higher education market is vast and the global market competition for high quality international students is stiff. As a country with a world class reputation for its educational quality, Britain is an active player in this market to attract and enroll the most excellent Chinese students and scholars. Faced with challenges from its US and Australian counterparts, it is

important for the UK to examine the ways how Chinese students choose HE institutions and have a deeper understanding of the major influencing factors of their decisions so that it can better meet Chinese students' needs. In so doing, this will enable UK education institutions to gain competitive advantage and secure a larger segment of market.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

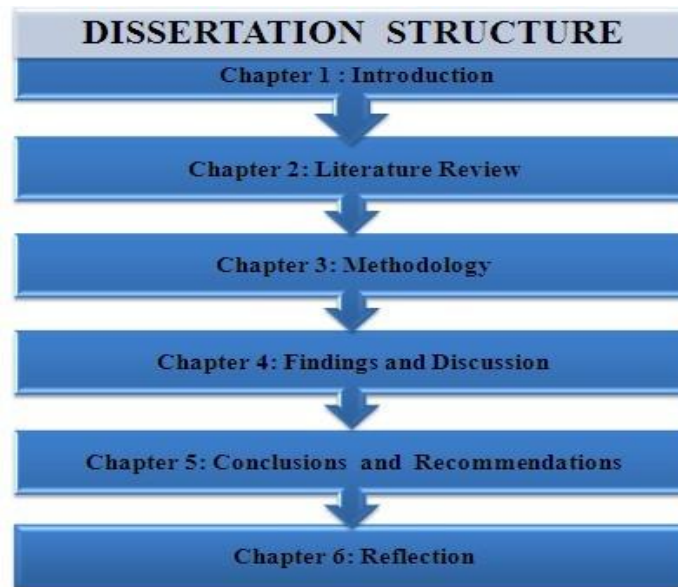
The main aim of this research is to examine the decision making process of Chinese students' choice behavior of HE degree programs at UK HE institutions, which means the study aims to analyze the decision making models of Chinese higher education customers in choosing a British institution. In order to achieve this goal, the study will seek to:

- a. identify as many of the influencing factors on why and how Chinese students choose a UK university over other countries.
- b. investigate the nature of the decision-making process behind UK university choices made by Chinese students and its influences on this process.
- c. add to the limited number of literature that has attempted to develop a further study of why Chinese students decide to study abroad and in particular, the UK.
- d. generate both pragmatic and practical suggestions and strategic recommendations for UK universities in general and in particular LUMS who is competing with its peers both from home and abroad in recruiting the brightest Chinese students.

1.4 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation can be divided into six foremost chapters as shown in Figure 1.1 and described below.

FIGURE 1.1 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE



Chapter 1 has outlined the background for the study. The research topic is introduced and the research aims and objectives are mentioned here. To provide an indication of the flow of the study, the content of each chapter is given as follows:

Chapter 2 illustrates a review of the previous literature on consumer decision making models, as well as the application of these models to student's decision making behavior when choosing a British HE institution.

Chapter 3 discusses the research method, to be more specific, the ways of data collection and analysis, along with the research philosophy is presented in detail. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed in the study and the research is basically divided into two phases. Questionnaire and interview design, modification, sampling, and measurement procedures are all included in this chapter. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed in the study and the research is basically divided into two phases.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis and interpretation of the data in the form of hypothesis tests. It then compares the findings to the empirical literature.

Chapter 5 attempts to integrate all the key findings of this study to generate research conclusions and discuss the implications of the study. Both practical and strategic

recommendations are made to British universities. Contributions are also highlighted here, along with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6 provides a critical reflection of the whole research process.

1.5 Summary

This chapter has facilitated an insight into the issues leading up to this research. Moreover, as the consumer decision making behavior literature is limited in the study area of students' choice of HE institutions, a strong justification is provided for the undertaking of this research. Finally, the present study's aim and objectives along with the structure of the dissertation have been specified. The next chapter provides a detailed review of the literature relating to different consumer decision making models and the application of these models in the choice of UK universities for Chinese students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first section presents an overview of the literature on consumers' decision making models and related theories which pave the way for bridging the gap in analyzing the decision-making process of prospective international students in general (Cubillo et al., 2006). Although limited research exists, a brief overview of previous literature concerning student decision making in the context of university choice. In addition, a number of key factors that affect students' choice of a British university are also suggested here.

2.2 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior research is still relatively a new area, as it has only been studied for about 40 years (Engel et al, 1993). The study of consumer behavior focuses on how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1997). 'Choice is at the heart of marketing, and marketers strive to understand the processes that consumers use to decide what and when to buy.' (Kotler and Fox, 1995) For consumers, there exists a sophisticated mechanic to making decisions (Solomon et al, 2009). In this study, the choice of institution is related to the students as consumer on the demand side (Binsardy and Ekwulugo, 2003; Gomez and Murphy, 2003; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Nagaraj et. al. 2008). As for student consumer decision making, the research pioneer Punj and Stealin (1978) stated that little is known about underlying student consumer behavior and the way they select a college. The same can be applied to the study of Chinese students particularly, as there is much to learn about how prospective Chinese students attend to, absorb and store data to make logical and rational choices regarding a British university.

When consumers make very important decisions, for example, choosing a UK

university, they are actually engaged in extended problem solving and carefully go through the steps (Solomon et al, 2009). The extended problem solving (this will be deeply explained later in this chapter) is also referred to as extensive problem solving by Kotler (1997). In contrast to habitual decision making, such as when buying a box of cereal, the extended problem solving calls for cognitive learning during the process of decision making while habitual learning is needed for habitual decision making. As studying abroad requires high involvement (money and time: the choice of service may last for one year of master and three years for undergraduate) and high risk (of a wrong choice), it is probably the most significant and expensive initiative that Chinese individuals ever undertake in their lives (Mazzarol, 1998). The decision making process by Chinese students is apparently extended and complicated and it is of great significance for UK institution marketers and recruiters to investigate and understand.

In order to maintain its favorable position in the international student market and attract more overseas students, the UK is certainly seeking to gain advantages in the Chinese talent market competition. Birch (1996) concludes that the UK is facing a high level of competition in the HE market although it has a good academic reputation. James et al (1999) agrees and states that universities have to face more intensive competition for recruiting students in higher education markets, and especially in some developing countries. Maringe (2006) also argues that analyzing students' choices is central to developing institutional positioning in an increasingly competitive HE environment. Above all, the institution is responsible to determine how current and potential student customers make their decisions, for example, what factors they consider, how they weigh the relative importance of these factors, the process by which they arrive at a decision, and the impacts that work in that process. By understanding these facts of decision making and choice, the institution is able to be more effective and confident in attracting and satisfying its target customers (Kotler and Fox, 1995). It is also pointed out that by having a clear understanding of

applicants' decision making process and their choices is very useful to understanding the UK HE market (Maringe, 2006). In addition to the reasons above, investigating these processes will help in improving HE institutions' marketing strategies (Pimpa, 2003).

2.3 Theoretical Decision Making Models

Consumer decision making is complex and unpredictable. A consumer's decision-making process is affected by environmental factors and individual factors (Rousseau, 1990). Understanding these influences can help marketers mix the proper strategies for the right products in order to satisfy consumer needs (Nicosia, 1966; Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, 1968, Bettman, 1979; Howard and Sheth, 1969).

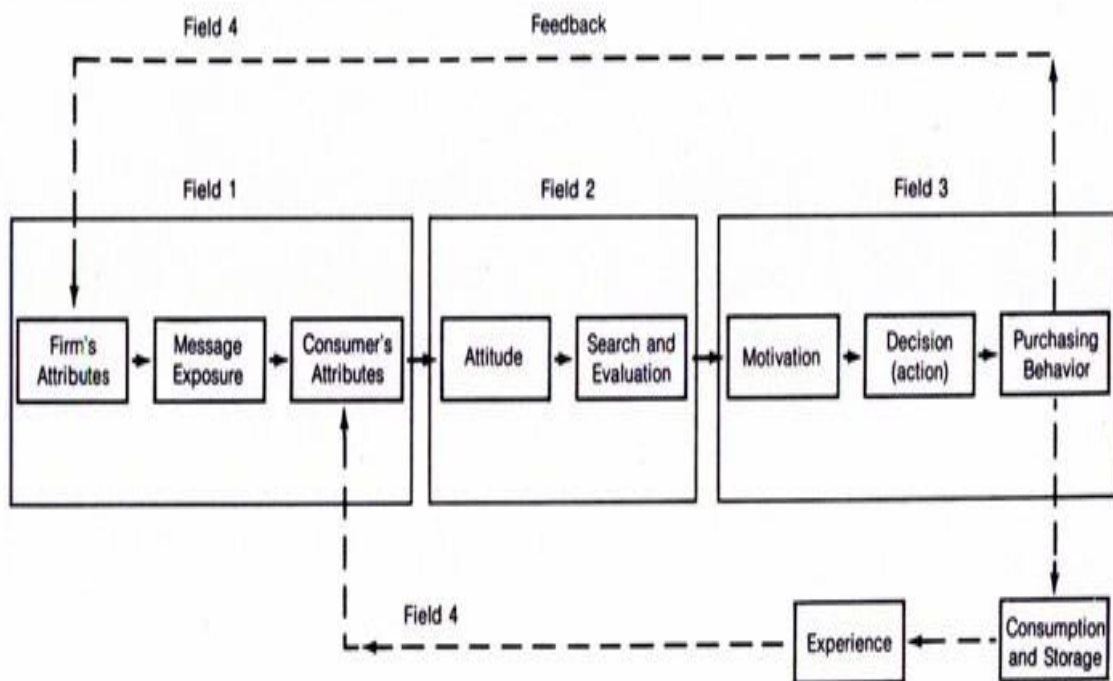
Decision making is actually a psychological construct and it is the cognitive process of making choices among multiple alternatives. According to Wang et al. (2004), decision making is one of the 37 fundamental cognitive processes formed in the layered reference model of the brain. Most of the authors (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Barkow et al., 1992; Gigerenzer, 2000)) promote the cognitive view of decision making, thus the researcher chose the cognitive approach for this study and a couple of cognitivist models of consumer decision making will be discussed in detail later in this section.

Many researchers, such as Nicosia (1966), Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968, 1973), Howard and Sheth (1969), Robertson (1971), and Hansen (1972), and Kotler (1997) have viewed consumer decision making as a multistage, problem-solving process. For the purpose of this dissertation and given the length and time limitations, this chapter will mainly focus on the four widely agreed models. They are Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969), Kotler (1997), and the Engel-Kollat- Blackwell (EKB) early (1973) as well as late (2001) models.

2.3.1 The Nicosia Decision Making Model (1966)

Figure 2.1 elaborates Nicosia's decision making steps that consumers adopt before buying goods or services. To understand the model, it can be simplified by grouping together its various elements into fields and subfields. Various components of the model are connected through direct as well as feedback loops.

FIGURE 2.1 THE NICOSIA MODEL



Source: Nicosia (1966)

As one of the earliest models on consumer decision making, Nicosia's model (1966) focuses on the relationship between the marketing organization and its potential consumers. Nicosia tried to explain the dynamics involved in decision making. Meanwhile, the various components of the model are seen as interacting with each other, with none being essentially dependent or independent. On one hand, the marketing organization through its marketing program, such as advertising and promotion, affects its customers. On the other hand, the customers through their response to the marketer's action, affects the subsequent decisions of the marketer. Thus, the cycle continues. In addition, this model also provides insights about how the

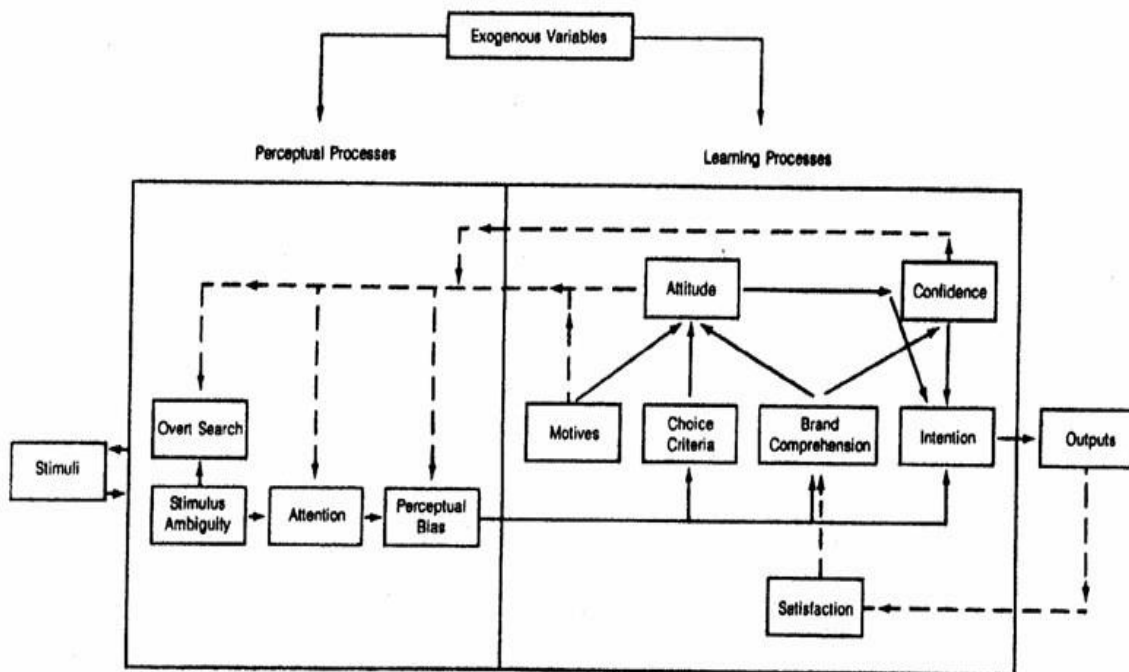
non-action kind of variables, namely, attitude and motivation, present in the environment and how they relate to the consumer actions, such as, search and evaluation and the decision making at the consumer end. It highlights the means and end relationship between these variables.

Francesco Nicosia assumes that the consumer is seeking to fulfill certain goals and that initially there is no existing relationship between the consumer and the marketer or the firm, so no positive or negative predispositions toward the firm exist in the consumers' mind. However, this model does have some limitations which include a lack of detailed explanation of the internal factors, which may affect how the consumer develops his attitude toward the product.; an inadequate understanding of the influence and interrelationships among the consumer attributes represented by subfield; and the questionable assumption that no prior consumer knowledge or experience with the product exists. For example, a Chinese student may have a previous contact with a British university, say a student visitor or an exchange student, then when it comes to choosing a university for himself to get further study, he might select his preferred university in a way different from those Chinese students with no existing knowledge at all. Moreover, this model was criticized by commentators because it was not empirically tested (Zaltman et al., 1973), and because of the fact that many of the variables were not defined (Lunn, 1974).

2.3.2 Howard and Sheth Decision Making Model (1969)

Among the most frequently quoted early theories of all consumer behavior models is the Howard-Sheth model (Figure 2.2) which was developed in 1969. In contrast to Nicosia's model, it is however, a comprehensive theory of buyer behavior that has been developed as a result of empirical research (Horton, 1984).

FIGURE 2.2 THE HOWARD AND SHETH MODEL



Source: Howard and Sheth (1969)

According to Pellemans (1971), this model suggests three levels of decision making: extensive problem solving, limited problem solving and habitual response behavior.

a. Extensive problem solving

‘When the buyer is confronted with a new brand that represents unfamiliar product class’ (Pellemans, 1971, p.18), the consumer is said to be engaged in extended problem solving. At this level, the consumer does not have any knowledge about different brands and he would start to seek information and evaluate the choice criteria.

b. Limited problem solving

This situation exists for consumers who have little knowledge about the market, or partial knowledge about what they need. In order to arrive at a brand preference, some brand comparative research is carried out to find more information which is often ambiguous and needs more comprehension.

c. Habitual response behavior.

This occurs when the consumer has a vested goal to purchase a certain product and

he knows the brand very well so that he needs less information. It generally takes place regarding frequently purchased items when the time period between awareness and purchase is short enough to avoid the loss of memory about the product.

The Howard-Sheth model (1969) is a learning model designed to explain the brand choice of an individual faced with several choice alternatives as in the case of Chinese students choosing different UK HE institutions. It concentrates on individual buyer's problem solving processes which includes psychological and environmental factors. This model tries to explain rational brand choice behavior within the constraints of limited individual capacities and incomplete information. This model specifies four distinct sets of factors in the decision making process (1) stimulus input variables, (2) perceptual and learning constructs, (3) response output variables, and (4) exogenous variables.

Howard and Sheth identified various steps of consumer decision making in different buying situations and provide the causality between the variables (Pellemans, 1971). This model is a useful framework for understanding the complexities of consumer decision making due to its precision with which a large number of variables have been linked in the working relationships to cover most aspects of decision making. However, the limitations of this model lie in that the distinction between the exogenous and endogenous variables is not clear cut, that some of these variables are not easy to measure, others defy a precise definition, and that sometimes there exists variations between definition and operational specification of a variable. Additionally, some areas like perceptual bias have not been specifically explained. Taking all the above disadvantages into consideration, it may have little practical value for marketing practitioners.

2.3.3 Early Engel-Kollat- Blackwell's Decision Making Model (1973)

The model (Figure 2.3) made an attempt to include all the stages which the consumer

will go through during his decision making process. In this model interactions of the steps are clearly demonstrated (Engel et al., 1973). The proposed five principal parts in this model are: motivation and recognition of need, information search, evaluate alternatives, purchase and outcome.

FIGURE 2.3 THE 1973 EKB MODEL



Source: Blackwell, 1973 (1973)

However, there are still some issues about this model. Among the critics, Rice (1993) claimed that the EKB model should be a feedback loop. Later, Foxall (2005) further suggested that more attention should be paid to the post purchase evaluation and that the post purchase evaluation is substantial as it might influence directly on future purchase patterns. More EKB model information will be provided on the late version in Section 2.3.5.

2.3.4 Kotler's Decision Making Model (1997)

Based on the early EKB model (Blackwell, 1973), Kotler developed his own decision making model. According to Kotler (1997), a consumer usually goes through five stages (Figure 2.4) in the decision making process, that is, need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation, which form the basis for the study of consumer buying behavior.

FIGURE 2.4 THE KOTLER MODEL



Source: Kotler (1997)

In this model, the decision making process begins when the consumer recognizes a problem or need. After the consumer identifies a problem, he/she is likely to search for more information. Then the buyer would be choosing among the alternatives, making comparisons, which is a stage being cognitively driven and rational. Later, the final decision is made and implemented. However, the carrying out of a decision is never the end of the decision making process.(R.Wayne et al, 1993), which is according to Kotler(1997), followed by a post purchase evaluation to measure the satisfaction of the consumer's experience with the product.

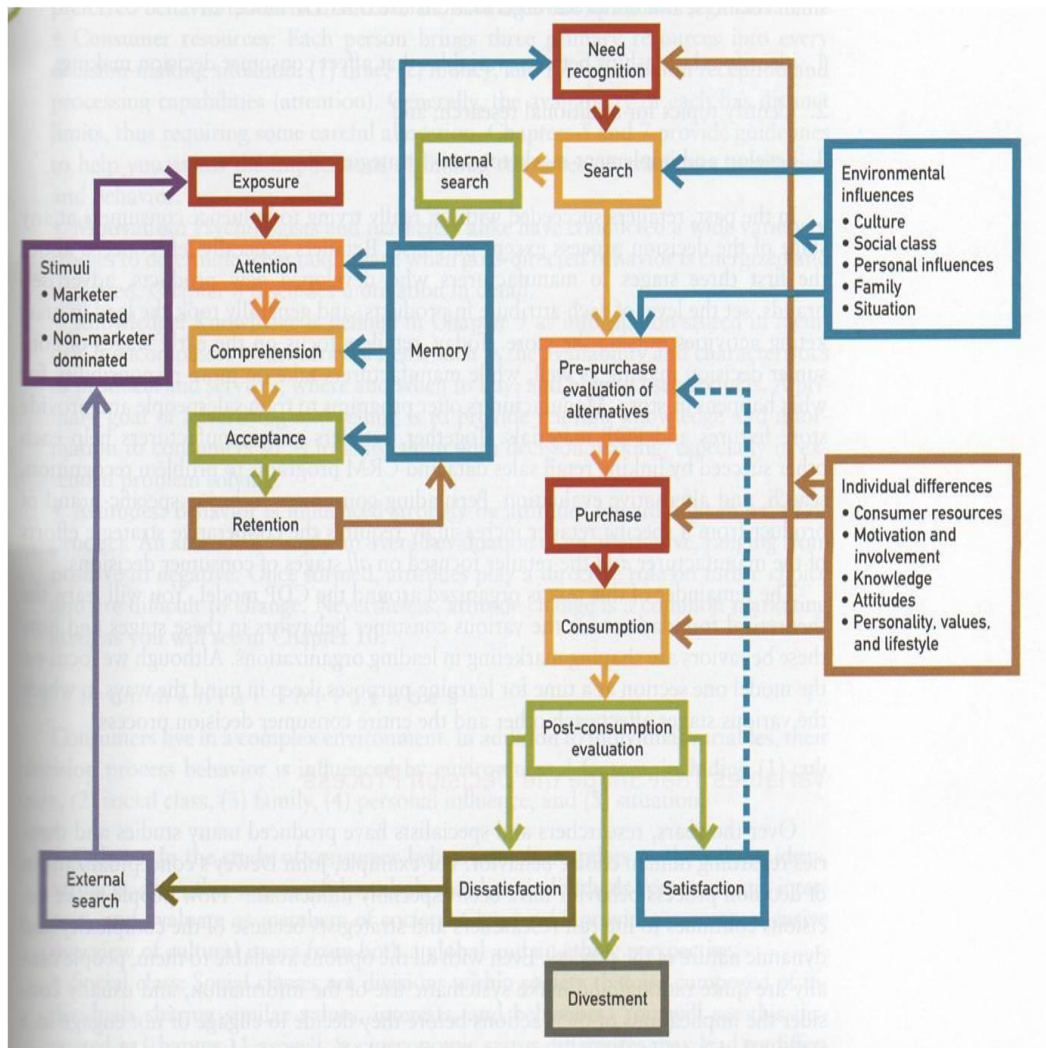
Kotler's model seems to cover most of the activities in the course of consumer decision making. However, firstly, this model is, in fact, an over simplified linear one which fails to see the decision making process as a cycle or loop. By that the author means that the last step, post purchase evaluation, is not completely isolated from the other parts. As Hill and O'Sullivan (1999) point out, most purchases are influenced by the use of the product, even if post-purchase dissonance occurs. The post-purchase evaluation as the consumer's learning outcome would inevitably affect one's attitude in his next decision making if the same need arises. The result of this stage is a final level of satisfaction, which may in turn result in either a loyal as well as faithful consumer who is willing to repurchase or the one who switches brands or discontinues buying the same product (Singh, 2003). Moreover, the evaluation criteria can influence other consumer's decision making as well by word-of-mouth just as the consumer's own decision is influenced by other individual. Secondly, this process

ignores some details, such as the consumer criteria or influencing factors before people make purchase decisions.

2.3.5 Engel-Kollat- Blackwell’s Decision Making Model (2001)

As the initial model has continued to evolve since original publication in 1968 (Engel et al., 1968), the latest EKB model (Figure 2.5), also called Engel, Blackwell and Miniard model (EBM) (2006), is one of the most famous models regarding consumer decision-making.

FIGURE 2.5 THE EKB MODEL



Source: Blackwell et al. (2001)

Although this model was later developed by Blackwell et al. (2001) is basically interested in the whole purchasing process, the decision making part of it is still of great value for students in this area. It is more comprehensive than Kotler's model in that 'the model provides a clear depiction of the process of consumption making it easy to comprehend and intuitively pleasing' (Foxall, 1990) and meanwhile, the model allows people to simulate or approximate as realistically as possible the complications of consumer preference, choice and purchase behavior (Teare, 1998). The variables and the interrelationship between them are similar to the early EKB but have done some slight modifications. Firstly stimuli is received and processed by the consumer in conjunction with memories of previous experiences, and secondly, external variables in the form of either environmental influences or individual differences. The environmental influences include culture, social class, personal influence, family and situation (Blackwell et al., 2001). These environmental factors tend to affect the intentions and attitude of a consumer, which shapes an individual's perception in ways that it influences the decisions of him/her. While the individual influences refer to consumer resource, motivation and involvement, knowledge, attitudes, personality, values and lifestyle (Blackwell et al., 2001). According to Blackwell et al (2001), individual differences in demographics, personality, resources (e.g. time, money and information reception and processing capability), motivation, attitude, knowledge influence the decision making of an individual. As can be seen from the figure, this model presents a clear pattern of decision making yet recognizes that a number of variables interact to affect the final decision. 'Divestment' as a construct was added to this latest model as a modification over the early EKB model. It mainly refers to the operations of disposal, recycling or remarketing, which is more suitable to be applied to tangible products than services, such as higher education, thus it is not within the discussion scope of this study.

On the other hand, this decision making approach is, however, criticized to be too

restrictive to adequately accommodate the variety of consumer decision situations (Loudon et al., 1993; Erasmus et al., 2001). For instance, the role of individual motives for purchase is only alluded to within need recognition, appearing to somewhat neglect a rich theoretical and important area of consideration (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Loudon et al., 1993). In this model (Figure 2.4), it seems that the impact of environmental and individual factors is restricted to certain process within the model. Nevertheless, this is not the case. In fact, their influences can reach a wider process, say, individuals' impact on marketing stimuli. Likewise, as what is pointed out by Loudon et al. (1993), the environmental and individual variables have drawn criticism due to the vagueness of their definition and role within the decision process. For example, how differences in personalities of different individuals can lead to different decision making processes. Nor does the model explain how these values can be applied in a way that they can adjust to different personality types. Additionally, the model does not show what factors shape these items, and why different types of personality can produce different decisions, as has been pointed out by Taylor and Fleenor (1998) that little is known about the individual difference factors from this model.

Overall, the EKM model seems to be best model for studying international students' decision making behavior. Decision making process begins when they recognize there is a need for them to go abroad and study. Only after that do they start to seek information about their overseas destinations and relevant institutions. By asking knowledgeable friends, consumers can obtain details about experience qualities (Nagel, 1981). The acquisition of word of mouth information acts as a risk reducing strategy for those embarking on higher education (Saunders and Lancaster, 1982). After a certain time period of comparison and evaluation including application, the students finally accept the offer of one of their target universities which they are going to attend. In the end, when they have gone to the university and had some experience, they are able to have their post purchase evaluation at this level.

2.4 Students' Educational Choices: Decision Making Behavior

When people make decisions, they participate in different sorts of decision making behavior. The student's decision can be seen as one form of consumer behavior (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). There are still insufficient research on understanding students' decision-making process and university choice (Moogan et. al., 2001; Veloutsou, et al. 2005; Maringe, 2006; Cubillo et. al., 2006).

It is not always easy to analyze student preferences and expectations, as well as the relationships of these with institutional priorities, since they are extremely complex. The complexity lies in the highly participatory nature of the higher education marketers and the interrelationship between the actions of students and those of universities. It is by the higher education process that forms student expectations, and the higher education process itself is in turn shaped by the content of student expectations. So far there is not a theoretical framework that can explicitly make clear these relationships. (James, 2001)

Students' choice and decision making process is, according to Moogan and Baron (2003), a complicated interactive process and is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices (Maringe, 2006). Maringe and Carter (2007) suggest that there are four brand theories which try to explain how students make these complex choices in education. They are structural, economic, status-attainment and information-processing, also known as combined student choice behavior models.

2.4.1 Structural Student Choice Behavior

This theory of choice tries to explore students' choice making 'in the context of institutional, economic and cultural constraints imposed upon choosers whose choices and decisions can be predicted along socio-economic, cultural and ethnic lines'

(Maringe and Carter, 2007). Student consumers acquire positive or negative stereotypes based on their association with varied demographic (age, sex and religion), socioeconomic (income and occupation), cultural (tradition, and custom) or ethnic (race and lifestyle), and political, ideological segments of society.

This theory attaches importance to the external factors which influence choice. Such external influences as peers' opinion, university selectivity level, university marketing efforts, cultural values and norms and financial assistance, etc. interact to form a student's general expectation of university life. However, with the emphasis over-placed upon the external factors, the choice behavior is criticized for disregarding the influence of internal factors.

2.4.2 Economic Student Choice Behavior

Economic choice theory is based on the assumption that students want to maximize their utility and minimize their risks (Rapose and Alves, 2007). In the education area, students are all investors, thus they would be discreet about the money they invest. Becker's (1964) work on human capital develops the model of the individual's investment in education. Willis and Rosen (1979) improve the human capital theory further and assume that the returns to human capital affect the amount of education an individual will choose or receive. The consequence of choosing a wrong university leads to higher opportunity costs than studying at a home university, such as higher tuition and living costs.

This theory indicates that students will make economy-oriented choices between institutions based on costs, expected future earnings and benefits. Thus, during the decision making process, the students ought to be fully aware of their needs, and spend enough time and efforts looking for information on different universities and courses so as to make the most economic choice. Kotler and Fox (1995) are among many of the important supporters of this theory. Schiffman and Kanuk (1997)

mentioned that many early theories concerning consumer behavior were based on economic theory, on the notion that individuals act rationally to maximize their benefits (satisfactions) in the purchase of goods and services, and that this can be applied to student choice behavior as well.

Nevertheless, this type of choice behavior suffers from the disadvantage of neglecting individual rationality. Kyrk (1930) defined education for rational consumption as the rational use and developed it further into variety means. Similarly, Maringe (2006) claimed that choice is a rational process that is constrained by realistic perception of opportunities. Therefore, besides cost- efficiency, some other factors like an individual's interest in the course itself should also be taken into account.

2.4.3 Status-attainment Student Choice Behavior

Unlike economic choice behavior assuming that students can make cost-efficient decisions, the status-attainment theory which is based on sociology, social networks and academic conditions, and the role of family implies that student decision making is under the impact of social values. For example, a world famous university is being chosen not only for its functional performance as a place for education, but also for the social image the university evokes. Apart from that, the other main difference with the economic models is that it involves a more interactive process between variables defining the social context and individual student characteristics. Researchers like Boyle (1966), Alwin and Otto (1977), and Sewell and Shah (1978) derived a number of factors that might influence students' decisions. These factors include: family socio-economic background, academic ability, the influence of significant others, high school performance, educational aspirations, motivation, and high school characteristics.

Hence, it is undoubted that status attainment is one of the forces that influence student choice making. However, this is only part of the explanation, since we cannot deny

the role that other significant forces play in student decision making processes. Maringe and Carter's (2007) improved status-attainment theory concluded that while decisions and choices made by students are under the influence of economic, cultural and structural forces, these are filtered by the preconceptions derived from family background, culture, life history and personality.

2.4.4 Combined Student Choice Behavior

Certainly, some students may apply more than one of the above choice behaviors. Consequently the combined choice model came into being. The combined choice behavior model is, as the name suggests, a combination model of all the three previous models. According to Rapose and Alves (2007), since these models combine sociological perspectives with a rational decision, they would allow adequate analytical power to convince people. Hossler et al. (1989) state that the distinctive feature of the combined models concerns their attempts to identify the factors that affect the decision making process from a policy analysis perspective. In other words, the combined models try to describe the various economic and social forces that affect individual decision making so as to find opportunities for intervention in the process of the students' choices. This is in the very interest of HE institutions. This model includes both the constraints that influence student decisions and the activities that can be undertaken to affect this decision-making process. There are many combined models but the four most widely cited are the following: Hanson and Litton (1982), Jackson (1982), Chapman (1984) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

2.5 Factors Influencing International Students' Choice of a University

Why might a HE purchaser choose a particular university abroad? Shen (2006) sees the short period of time in some countries, e.g. UK, as part of the reason for students to go and pursue further study in those countries. Later Lowe (2007) found that students saw studying abroad as a means of improving their language skills, e.g. English and that they perceived foreign universities as having a good reputation and

high standards. What is more, high reputed or high quality degree and graduate prospects are emphasized as well by many of the international students. For example, while British Council research implies that Chinese students choose the UK for its high-quality degrees, Jazreel Goh Yeun Yeun (Director of Education Marketing with the British Council in Beijing) holds that, 'Employers in China are extremely interested to recruit these UK graduates' (China Daily, 2007), which could serve as the ultimate purpose for international students' choosing to get a degree from another country.

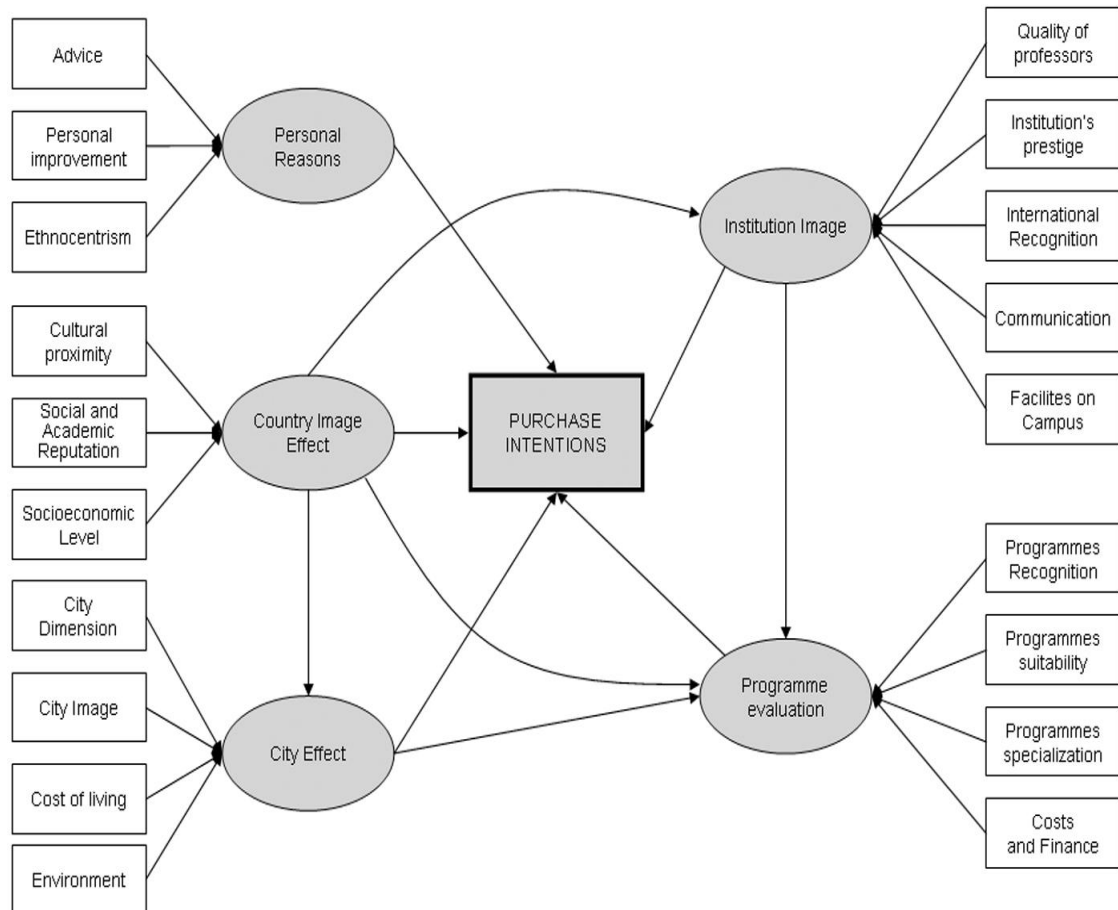
A series of surveys have been undertaken by Cuncliffe (1993) and Rogers and Smith (1993) to identify the needs of overseas undergraduate students before and during their courses. The results from the surveys showed that the majority of overseas students identified the reputation, content of course, entry requirements and the agency's price charged as the most important factors when selecting a university in another country and a HE recruitment agency. Whereas the research conduct by Stewart and Felicetti (1991) to study overseas students in their initial choice of the countries in which to study and then which university in particular, suggested that most international students tend to choose a university which they were satisfied with the information including fees, scholarship, facilities and ranking of the university that provided by HE recruitment agencies or by universities.

By reading the literature by other authors, the researcher found that all kinds of factors which were thought to affect international students choice include: a. better facilities provided overseas (Discenza et al., 1985; Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Bredo et al., 1993; Lauren, 1993; Connor et al., 1996; James, 2001; Moogan et. al., 2001; Binsardy and Ekwulugo, 2003, Russell, 2005; Ivy, 2008), though some other researchers might place little weight on facilities-related factors, despite the evidence of their influence on student studying experience (Yorke, 2000); b. university's image or reputation and provision of international education (Mazzarol, 1998; Moogan et. al.,

2001; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Binsardy and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell, 2005); c. broad range programs or courses (Mazzarol, 1998; Moogan et. al., 2001; Ivy, 2008); d. good job prospects (Soutar and Turner, 2002; Maringe, 2006).

Moreover, it is noticeable that Cubillo et al. (2006) attempt in proposing a theoretical model that integrates factors which influenced the decision-making process of international students by analyzing different dimensions of the process and explaining the factors which determine choice of institution. It is presented in Figure 2.5.

FIGURE 2.5 A MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PREFERENCE



Source: Cubillo et al. (2006)

As is shown in the model, an international student's decision making is influenced by a number of factors, namely, personal reason, country image effect, city effect, institution image and program evaluation. Additionally, these variables interact with

each other. This theoretical model appears to be comprehensive and reasonable. However, it still has an important drawback of a lack of supporting empirical evidence to validate the variables and or the order of which they are considered (Xun, 2006). Further validation of this model can be obtained in the event of testing these variables within the theoretical framework of the Blackwell et al. (2001) decision-making model in the context of Chinese student choices of UK Universities.

2.6 Summary

This chapter discusses the importance of this research followed by a critical analysis of key decision making models. It then narrows the decision making theories down to the international students' decision making behavior. A brief examination is presented regarding each type of the specified student choice behavior. Finally, the chapter concludes by analyzing a number of influencing factors upon students' choice of university.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into five subtopics wherein the first part provides an insight to the research philosophy. Secondly, in the part of research design, a comparison between primary and secondary research, qualitative and quantitative methods are discussed in detail as well as the method chosen for this research, that is, a quantitative method of survey. Thirdly, the design of the questionnaire with specific reference to this study is clarified. Finally, the last two parts mainly focus on the techniques for sampling, data collection and data analysis respectively.

3.2 Research Philosophy

When it comes to research philosophy, feasible consideration is given to the concept of ontology and epistemology along with different related research paradigms. Since these parameters illustrate the nature of truth and reality and pave the way for the researcher to minimize personal bias and irrational thinking, thus to ensure that the research is carried out towards a rational direction.

Ontology is a study of the nature of being, existence, or reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations from a philosophical perspective. Blaikie (1993) sees the ontology as ‘the science or study of being ‘and as part of social sciences, it covers the ‘claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other’. Ontology, in its nature, directs our view out of both objective reality that really exists and subjective reality which conjures up in the mind. People are said to have a number of deeply embedded ontological assumptions which will affect our perceptions of what is real and whether we attribute existence to one thing over another. If these underlying assumptions are not recognized and closely analyzed, the research may get into the impact of some side-effects of them, such as taking things or phenomenon for granted, narrow

mindedness and biased point of views, which could cause negative effects on the result of the research.

Frequently cited in parallel with ontology is epistemology. If ontology is the science of finding out what the reality is, then epistemology would be a study of exploring how that reality is measured, and what constitutes knowledge of that reality. Epistemology is, according to Maynard (1994, p.10), 'concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate'. In line with the statements of Blaikie (1993, p.6), Hamlyn (1995, p.242), suggests that 'Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis'.

Formed from basic ontological and epistemological theories, the 'research paradigm' (Blaikie, 2000), also described as the 'research philosophy' by Saunders, et al. (2007), constitutes positivist, interpretivist and realist approaches. Of the three prominent paradigms in contemporary social research, positivism is still the prevailing one. Positivism assumes the social world exists objectively and externally, that authentic knowledge comes from positive verification which are able to explain cause and effect relationships, and which can lead themselves to predicting outcomes. (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006) Positivism is reached by direct observation and experience on the basis of sound reason, facts, truth or true reality and, it is measured empirically using quantitative methods- surveys and experiments - and statistical analysis (Blaikie, 1993; Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). Realism claims that reality exists independently of observers and therefore, takes a bit from both positivism and interpretivism. While realism admits that natural and social sciences are different, and that social reality is pre-interpreted, which is part of the interpretivist concept, it also recognizes that science must be empirically-based, rational and objective, which is held by positivist theory.

A positivist paradigm is followed in this research and a quantitative survey is conducted by the researcher. This is because the research objective of this study is to probe Chinese student decision making behavior and it requires a comprehensive understanding of the influencing factors upon their choice of UK university. The employment of the questionnaire method was made taking into consideration the ease of coding and statistical analysis that it provides because of its structured questions (Wright and Crimp, 2000). A survey provides the possibility to statistically analyze the data, cause and effect relationships and further predict conceivable tendency. More details on the selection of a quantitative survey are given later in this chapter.

3.3 Research Hypotheses and Questions

Given a positivistic stance, before the discussion about the research design, the research hypotheses as well as questions which would later be tested and answered by the data collected must be accurately and clearly defined, since they are one of the first methodological steps the observer has to take when undertaking any research. In order to meet the objectives of this study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3), a couple of hypotheses are proposed. They are:

H1: The most important reason for Chinese students to choose a UK university over others is the good educational reputation.

H2: Chinese students choose a British university according to its ranking.

H3: Chinese students attending top 10 UK universities (according to Times Good University Guide 2012 table, see Appendix 1) pay more attention to university ranking than others do.

H4: Financial factors (including tuition fees and funding) are among the top 3 determinants for Chinese students when choosing a British university and course.

H5: Family or parents have a great impact on Chinese students' choice of a UK university.

H6: The Internet is regarded as the most informative source of information

concerning UK universities.

H7: The longer time students spend in information searching, the greater satisfaction about the university.

H8: Chinese students tend to apply for British universities by themselves than turn to educational agencies.

H9: There is a relationship between work experience and Chinese students' satisfaction of their experience at a British university.

H10: Male Chinese students are more concerned with graduate prospect when selecting a UK university as well as course.

In addition to the aforementioned hypotheses, questions for this research include:

1. Why do Chinese students choose a British HE institution over that from other candidate countries, such as USA or Australia?
2. What are the influencing factors for Chinese students in the process of selecting a UK university?
3. What decision-making models can be applied to analysis prospective Chinese students?
4. What can we learn from the decision-making process of Chinese students in choosing a UK HE institution (implications)?
5. What can British universities do to attract more Chinese overseas students (recommendations)?

To address these questions, a proper research methodology should be adopted for further study.

3.4 Research Design

Research design is a planned strategy to investigate as well as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. The structure covers the complete scheme of the study. It includes an outline of anything the researcher will need to do, basically from setting up the hypotheses and putting down their operational implications to final

interpretation of the data collected (Kumar, 2005).

The research methodology outlines the general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project by dictating particular tools required for carrying out the research process (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). In comparison, the research design is described as a picture which shows researchers' directions for fulfilling research objectives in order to solve specific problems (McDaniel and Gates, 2001). Kumar (2005) suggests that a research design is 'a procedural plan' of communication to discover solutions to the research questions proposed. Thus, to fulfill the research objectives, research is generally carried out step by step. Therefore, Table 3.1 below outlines the generic marketing research process proposed by McDaniel and Gates (2001).

Table 3.1 The marketing research process

Step 1	Verify the need for information
Step 2	Define the objectives of the research and information needs
Step 3	Determine the research design and identify the sources of data
Step 4	Forming the data collection process
Step 5	Design sampling plan
Step 6	Collect the data
Step 7	Process the data
Step 8	Analyse the data

Source: McDaniel and Gates. (2001)

3.4.1 Primary VS Secondary Research

Primary research is seen as the process in which the experiment data is collected specifically for the research objectives at hand. Kumar (2005, p.46) labeled primary sources as 'first-hand information' and secondary sources as 'second hand data'. Primary research is praised for its high applicability, comparability and availability in spite of its relatively high cost and time constraints (Craig and Douglas, 2000). In

accordance with Welman et al. (2005), the priority is given to primary research rather than secondary as with each transfer of information from one source to another, the research may distort the quality of the information. Thus, primary data collection is included in the research.

Secondary data refers to the data which has been gathered for other purposes before, and is relevant to the topic that the researcher is currently working (McDaniel and Gates, 2001). The main benefit of secondary research consists in the considerable time and cost saving, and accessibility of information which can be only obtained from it (Aaker et al., 2001). Besides, secondary research is of special importance at the initial stage of the research due to its easy access to the relevant research field. However, careful identifications of the validity and relevance to the research topic should be given to secondary data. For this study, the researcher has used secondary data including tables, charts, quotations, etc. from the source of both books and Internet. In chapter two, the literature review which examined previous publications relating to the research topic, served as a secondary study to provide theoretical support to this research.

From the perspective of research data, both primary and secondary data contribute to the overall marketing research process while qualitative and quantitative data make up the primary data when they are used specifically to address the research problem (Malhotra, 2004). A clear relationship between the four types of data is shown in Figure 3.1.

FIGURE 3.1 THE CLASSIFICATION OF MARKETING RESEARCH DATA



Source: Malhotra (2004)

In order to collect primary data, the research can focus on the qualitative method or quantitative method or both aspects for data collection. This is discussed next.

3.4.2 Qualitative VS Quantitative Methods

There are two research methods, qualitative and quantitative research processes. Before the argument of the rationale to use quantitative methods for this study, the distinction between these two types of research method should be explained. To begin with, qualitative research refers to research producing findings that do not intend to provide statistical or scientific data (Strauss and Corbin, 1991) whilst quantitative research is the study that relies primarily on the collection of quantitative data.

Next, the differences between qualitative and quantitative are considered here. Table 3.2 lists the major practical and theoretical comparisons between qualitative and quantitative research methods. From Table 3.2, we know that qualitative research is less structured involving small samples of respondents carefully selected (representative) to obtain deeper and more penetrating insights into research topics (Wilson 2006). While quantitative investigation is more structured, involves large samples of individuals, and is more easily replicated, quantifiable, and statistical in nature (Wilson, 2006). In the opinion of Nau (1995), a quantitative approach looks for

‘distinguishing characteristics, elemental properties and empirical boundaries’ and tends to measure ‘how much’, or ‘how often’.

Table 3.2 The comparison of qualitative and quantitative research

Comparison Dimensions	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Sample	Smaller sample sizes and often not representative of the population	Larger sample sizes that are representative of the population
Research instruments	Unstructured or semi structured	Structured research instruments
Type of questions	Open-ended questions, probing	Non-probing
Information from each respondent	Much	varies
Administration	Require interviewer with special Skills	Fewer special skills required
Ease of replication	Difficult	Easy
Findings	In-depth due to use of open-ended questions Detail on behavior, attitudes and motivation	Statistical and scientific, more objective Less detail on behavior, attitudes and motivation
Data analysis	Subjective and interpretive	Statistical and objective

Source: Ryerson University (2005)

The validity of the two methods has provoked numerous controversies. Some authors hold that qualitative is a useful method in that it provides a rational and idealistic way of understanding human problems (Duffy and Wong, 1996; Levine and Perkins, 1987; Sarason, 1974), while others regard qualitative as ‘unscientific’ compared with quantitative methods (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). Meanwhile, some researchers call for the using of quantitative methods to statistically analyze quantitative data in a scientific basis whereas others contend that quantitative methods cannot go beyond the numbers and thus in-depth results are hard to formulate. Malhotra (2004, p.12) concludes that ‘It is a sound principle of marketing research to view qualitative and quantitative research as complementary, rather than in competition with each other’, since both methods have their pros and cons. Therefore, selecting one research

method over the other does not mean that there are limitations with the remaining method. Rather, it is just because the chosen one can serve the research in a more appropriate way.

3.4.3 Rationale of Using Quantitative Method

After a close comparison of qualitative and quantitative research methods, taking into consideration the study objectives as well, a quantitative method is selected for this study. To be more precise, an online survey is adopted. Davies (2007) suggested that questionnaire-based research is popular and widely used in the social, psychological and environmental science as well as professional settings. Other reasons for adopting this method are as follows. Firstly, this method, enables the researcher to cover a large number of geographically dispersed samples at a comparatively low cost, yet the quantifiable data obtained from the questionnaires can still provide necessary data to examine the research questions. Moreover, the survey could be undertaken by different respondents at the same in different places through the Internet, which maximizes the time for data collection to some extent. Secondly, quantitative research is often used to quantify or measure a research problem (Easterby-Smith, 2008). To examine the variables that influence Chinese student decision making and the correlation between some of them, a statistical analysis is needed to test these variables. Last, the research target population – Chinese students are more willing to reveal the information about their privacy, such as their universities, courses, and age group through anonymous questionnaires than they would in any qualitative method.

In summary, it is also argued that quantitative research ensures the possibility to reach as many respondents as possible and is time-saving as well as a cost-efficient approach which can be statistically interpreted. Consequently, an online survey is considered to be the most appropriate methods to collect the required data for this research.

3.5 Questionnaire Development

The survey was created in the form of an online questionnaire, using the professional tool of SurveyMonkey. The initial questionnaire (draft) was drawn up in English and then translated into Chinese so that the final questionnaires given out to participants were in Chinese which will help to attract more respondents in the target group - Chinese students. An independent back translation of one of the questionnaires was undertaken to check the accuracy of the original translation before the distribution of the questionnaires.

As a whole, the questionnaire was divided into the following three sections:

Section A: General questions on students' opinion in their decision making process;

Section B: General views on students' evaluation of UK higher education;

Section C: Personal details.

Prior to the questions, an introductory text was presented, which not only introduced the research topic to the subjects, but also helped to obtain their consent for participation in the study.

In total, there were 33 questions which included 3 open questions, 4 multiple answer questions and 26 single answer questions. According to Aaker et al. (2002), there are two different question forms: open-ended and closed. Both types of questions serve different purposes: open-ended questions for getting personal information whereas closed for obtaining as many responses as possible. The questionnaire's overall development was based on the literature review in chapter two, whilst the questions were designed in order to help with the fulfillment of the study's objectives which is covered in chapter one. These questions were raised in a sequence from general to specific ones. Generally speaking, the questions were composed largely encompassing the following aspects:

- a. Personal background
- b. Factors that influenced the decision to study in the UK (where appropriate) and to choose a particular course and university.

- c. Personal aspirations and perceptions of opportunities available, including recommendations for the later Chinese UK HE applicants.

Before the questionnaire was finalized, initial feedback was given by Dr. Morven McEachern from Lancaster University. Meanwhile, a series of pilot tests were carried out among a couple of Chinese students from the same university. Revisions and adjustments were made based on comments from both Dr. McEachern and the target students. In doing so, the researcher could make sure whether or not there were any errors in the questionnaire (Craig and Douglas, 2000). At last, a survey link with the content of the questionnaire was created and sent to potential participants by email. The final complete English version of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 2 while the Chinese version for UK-based students is available at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6YZNYTJ>.

3.6 Sampling

Any sampling techniques can be classified into either probability or non-probability procedures. Probability sampling is defined as a sampling procedure for drawing a sample from the whole population (Wilson, 2006). Thus, every individual in the target population has an equal chance of being selected. While non-probability sampling is, on the contrary, a technique which does not give all the individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected. The contrast concluded by Kumar et al. (2002) between the two sampling approaches is demonstrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Probability vs. non-probability sampling

Probability Sampling	Non-probability Sampling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple random sampling • Stratified sampling • Systematic sampling • Cluster sampling • Multistage sampling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenience sampling • Judgmental sampling • Quota sampling • Snowball sampling

Source: Kumar *et al.* (2002)

As the researcher as well as the respondents are bounded by time, money and work commitments, it is almost impossible to randomly sample the entire population. What's more, non-probability sampling is a less expensive method, allowing researchers to focus on the most important respondents (Wilson, 2006). Referring to the advantages and disadvantages of the two techniques, non-probability sampling was employed by the researcher in this study. Although a non-probability sample can be operated at the ease of the researcher's will, in order to minimize errors in sampling, researchers still ought to make sure whether the sample is as representative as possible of the targeted group (Christy and Wood, 1999; Craig and Douglas, 2002). In doing this, the 100 subjects were selected based on their accessibility or by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher. All of them are current or previous Chinese students studying in a British HE institution. Both undergraduates and postgraduates are taken into account. To ensure the study reaches a large scope of respondents and the objectivity of the research itself, the subjects were chosen from a variety of courses at different UK universities regardless of their gender, socio-economic status, or any other variables.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues should be taken into consideration in any of the researches. There is no exception with this research. During the research process, all kinds of measures were taken to ensure that this research would do no harm to these voluntary participants and that all participants had made up their minds to assist the author with full and reliable information as to what is required. In doing so, the following three rights of the subjects were at least guaranteed then. First, all the respondents had been informed of the nature as well as the purpose of this research prior to the survey, which is also a rule stipulated in Data Protection Act 1998 by Market Research Society (2005). Besides oral communications, to double-check that the participants have clearly understood the content of the research, an introductory text was presented at the beginning of the questionnaire stating aims of the surveys and the

whole search as well. Second, only after getting the consent from the participants, the researcher is entitled to ask them to take the survey on a voluntary basis (Market Research Society, 2005), which means nobody was forced or threatened to participate in the survey. Third, in order to protect the privacy of all the participants, the questionnaire will be taken anonymously, and data collected be kept to the author personally for researching only instead of any commercial utility. Only after making sure that data collection was undertaken in an ethical fashion could the authored run more smoothly in other parts of the research.

3.8 Data Collection and Analysis

After the piloting and revision for the questionnaires, it comes to the data collection and analysis phase. Besides sending the link by email to potential respondents and asking them to help spread the survey, other strategies were tried in an attempt to increase access, such as contacting Chinese student societies in different universities and using personal contacts, but these turned out to be largely ineffective. In the end, 100 responses were obtained from 24 British universities covering ranks 1 to 50 in the Times Good University Guide 2012 table (see Appendix 1). All responses were included in the sample since participants were forced to give a response to every question by default setting.

As has been pointed out by Aaker et al. (2002), data collected through primary research often involves statistical analysis so as to simply discuss each answer separately or to observe relevance between variables. Both Microsoft Excel and SPSS were employed for the sake of data interpretation in the research. The former was used for data editing, coding, and adjusting to prepare for data analysis, while the latter was used not only to report frequency distribution of each question such as mean, mode, standard deviation, etc., but also to observe relationships among variables.

3.9 Summary

This chapter began by shedding light on the research philosophy, and thus defended following a positivist paradigm. Next, the research design in the format of an online questionnaire was described. Following this section, the chapter highlights the adopted sampling technique, ethical considerations given to the study as well as details of the analysis of the data collected. The next chapter will provide details on the data analysis and interpretations.

Chapter4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data derived from the primary research as well as present the findings in order to answer research questions and to achieve the research objectives of this study. Before the introduction of the results, a profile of the respondents in the survey is given. Then the findings are presented in the form of hypotheses tests to verify the validity of the 10 hypotheses stated in Chapter 3. Finally, a discussion of the findings is provided and comparisons are made in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2.

4.2 Respondent Profile

To begin the analysis, a profile of the respondents who participated in the survey is given to help readers develop a clear idea of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the majority of respondents are male students which account for 64% of the total number while female students account for 39%. The major age group is between the ages of 24 to 29, which made up 64% of the whole population. In addition, 97% are graduates and 3% undergraduates, and most of them (76%) do not have any work experience.

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Categories	Percentage
Gender	Male	61%
	Female	39%
Age Group	18 and under 18	1%
	19-23	25%
	24-29	64%
	30 and above	10%
Work Experience	Yes	24%
	No	76%
Type of Study	Undergraduate	3%
	Graduate	97%

Having familiarized the readers with the profile of this study's sample, the tests of each hypothesis (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3) now follow.

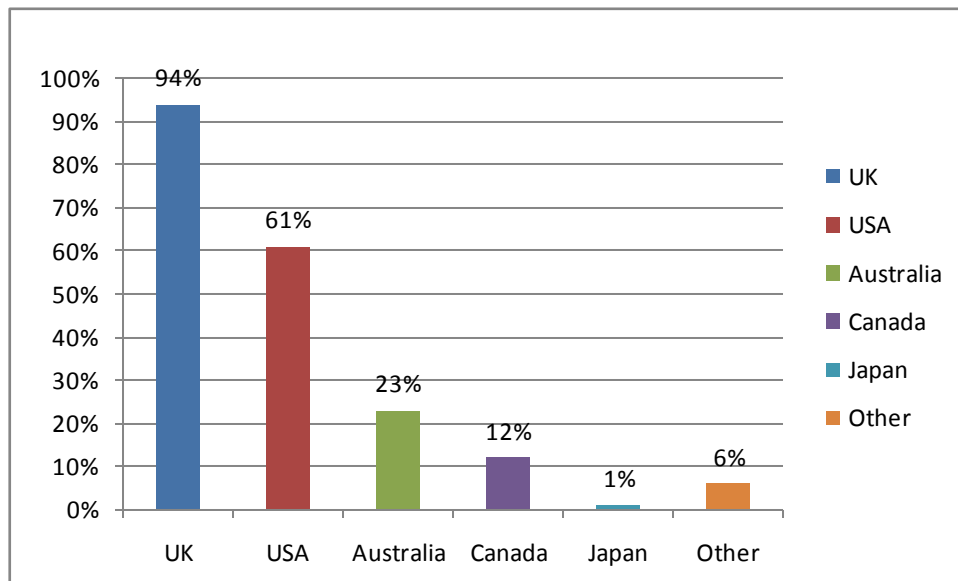
4.3 Hypotheses Tests

4.3.1 Hypotheses 1

The most important reason for Chinese students to choose a UK university over others is the good educational reputation.

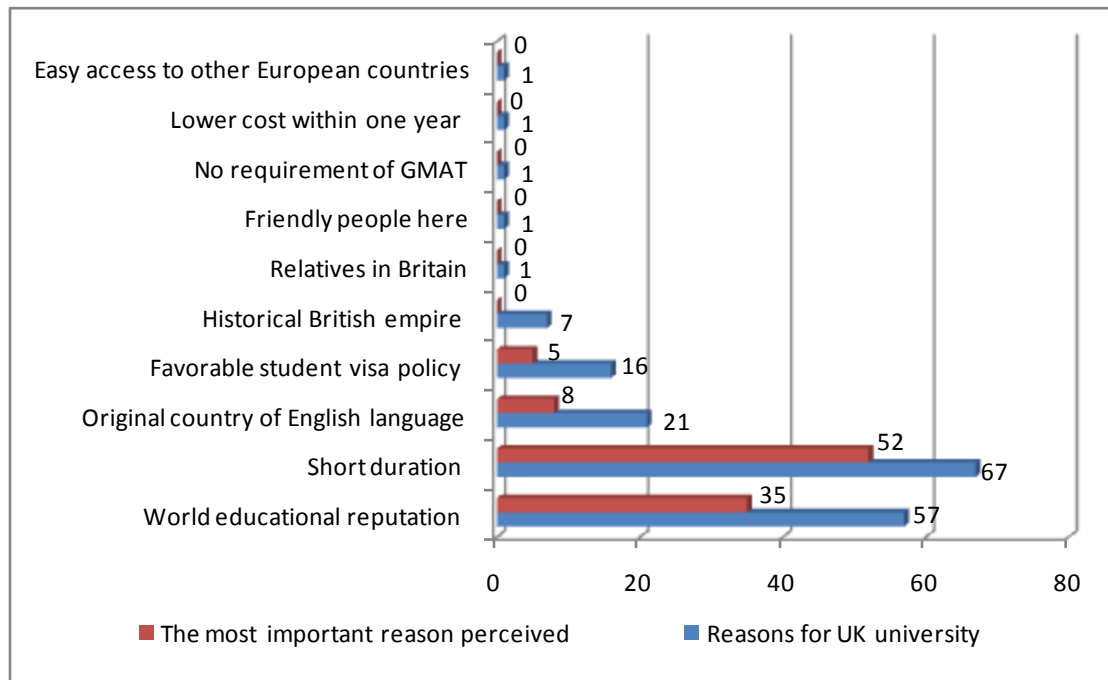
Figure 4.1 illustrates the preferable study abroad options for Chinese students. The majority of respondents (94%) selected the UK followed by USA (61%). Australia (23%) and Canada (12%) were considered as well. Moreover, only 1% considered Japan as a preferable place to study while 6% students went for other countries.

FIGURE 4.1 PREFERABLE OVERSEAS STUDY DESTINATIONS FOR CHINESE STUDENTS



As for the reasons why the participants chose a British HE institution over those in other countries, Figure 4.2 depicts the research participants' answers, in terms of their perceptions of the probable reasons to choose a British university. It is suggested that 67% of students perceived the '*short duration*' of UK universities as a preferable factor in their choice of university while 52% students viewed it as the most important reason. The '*world educational reputation*' comes second with support from 57% who regarded it as one of the main reasons to go a British university and 35 % held it as the most important factor. The above two reasons appear to be the most outstanding influences for Chinese students while the '*original country of English language*' (21% and 8% students), '*favorable student visa policy*' (16% and 5% students) and '*historical British empire on which the sun never sets*' (7% students) do play tertiary roles in Chinese students' decision making when choosing a UK university.

FIGURE 4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE REASONS FOR A UK UNIVERSITY OVER OTHERS



Other possible reasons included ‘*relatives in Britain*’, ‘*friendly British people*’, ‘*no requirement of GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)*’, ‘*lower cost within one year compared with other countries*’ and ‘*easy access to other European countries*’ were also added by the respondents. Therefore, based on the evidence above, **H1** is rejected since ‘*short duration*’ is perceived to be the most important reason for choosing UK universities over others.

4.3.2 Hypotheses 2

Chinese students choose a British university according to its ranking.

While **H1** is an assumption made between the choices of UK and other countries, **H2** means to explore the determinant of a British university on the premise that the Chinese students have decided to go to Britain. Thus this hypothesis is with special reference to choosing a British university in particular. The attention is now turned to many of the specific factors that are considered by Chinese students when selecting a British university and they can be seen in Figure 4.3.

FIGURE 4.3 PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRIORITY IN CHOOSING A UK UNIVERSITY

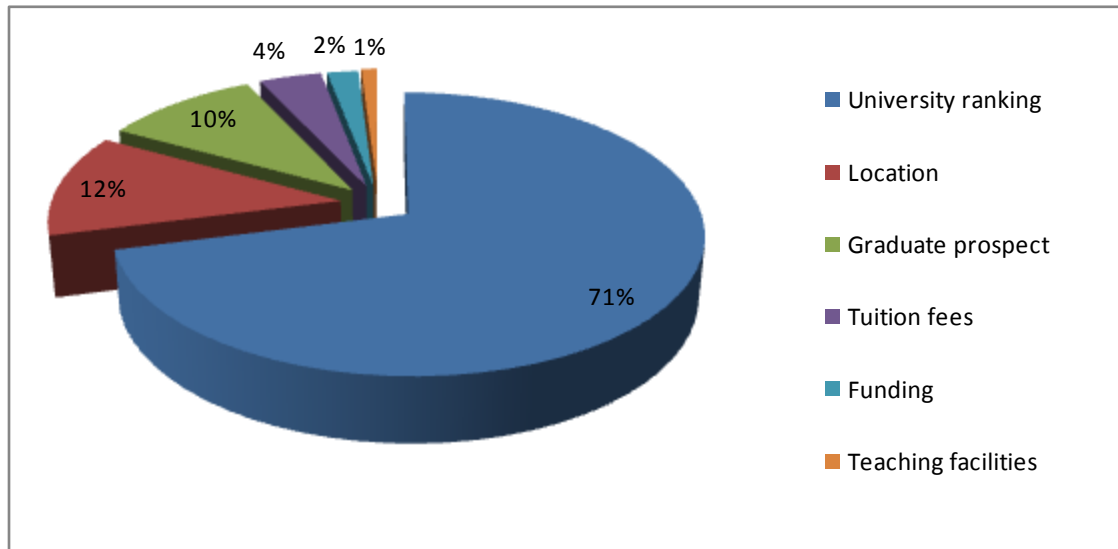


Figure 4.3 shows the differences in Chinese students' priority of UK university selection. It is demonstrated that 71% of the samples chose '*university ranking*' as their priority, which makes a sharp comparison with the contributions of other elements. Twelve per cent of respondents voted for '*location*' of the university followed by '*graduate prospect*' held by 10% students. Other attributes, such as '*tuition fees*', '*funding*' and '*teaching facilities*' are considered as well by 4%, 2% and 1% of subjects correspondingly.

The survey results also show that among all the subjects, 47% students have taken one of the top 10 universities as their first options. Therefore, most of Chinese students rely on '*university ranking*' as the uppermost reference, which indicates that the null hypothesis, namely, **H2** is accepted.

4.3.3 Hypotheses 3

Chinese students attending top 10 UK universities (according to Times Good University Guide 2012 table, see Appendix 1) pay more attention to university ranking than others do.

Within this test, the samples can be categorized into two groups: one constitutes Chinese students from top 10 UK universities in accordance with Times Good University Guide 2012 (2011) and the other from non-top 10 universities. There are 42 respondents in the former group and 58 in the latter. The comparison of the perceptions of ‘*university ranking*’ by the two groups are displayed in Figure 4.4.

FIGURE 4.4 TOP 10 UK UNIVERSITY CHINESE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ‘UNIVERSITY RANKING’

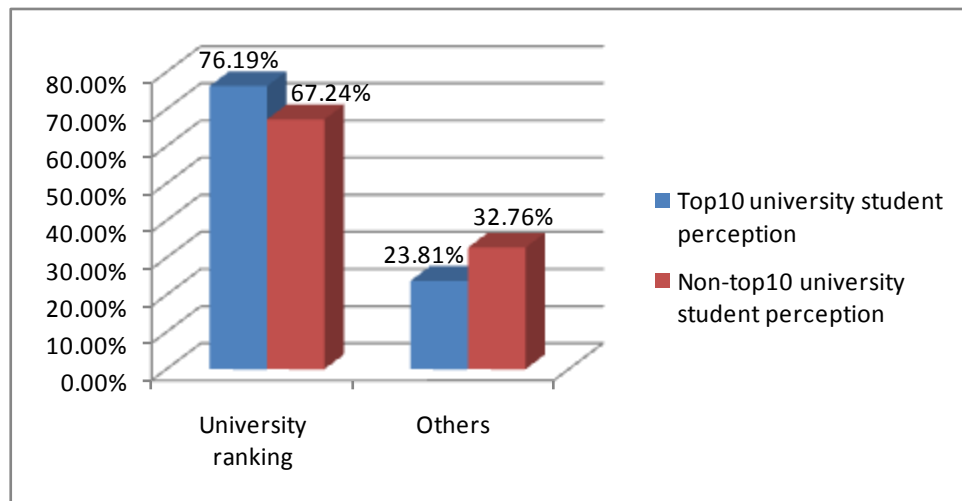


Figure 4.4 shows that among the 42 top 10 university Chinese students, 76% of them rated ‘*university ranking*’ as the preference whilst the percentage among non-top 10 university students is 67% which is roughly 9% less than that in top 10 university Chinese students (76%). On the other hand, more non-top 10 university Chinese students, that is, about 33% of them, compared with nearly 24% from the top 10 UK university Chinese students in the survey, would like to take other factors rather than ‘*university ranking*’ into account, for example, ‘*location*’, and ‘*graduate prospects*’. In short, Chinese students attending top 10 UK universities do attach more importance to university ranking than those going to non-top 10 universities. Therefore, **H3** is confirmed.

4.3.4 Hypotheses 4

Financial factors (including tuition fees and funding) are among the top 3 determinants for Chinese students when choosing a British university and course.

As one of the socioeconomic influencing attributes, financial factors can be viewed as one of the vital considerations by some Chinese students. Here the financial factors refer to both elements of 'tuition fees' and 'funding' which includes scholarship and bursaries provided by British universities. Both the contributions of the priority in choosing a UK university and a course were calculated with the outcome revealed in Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6 accordingly.

FIGURE 4.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRIORITY IN CHOOSING A UK UNIVERSITY

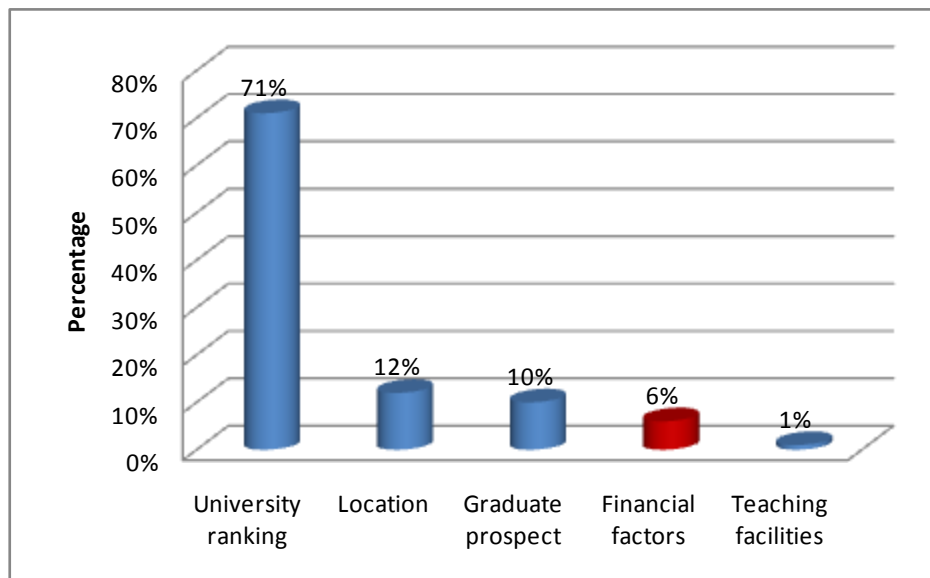
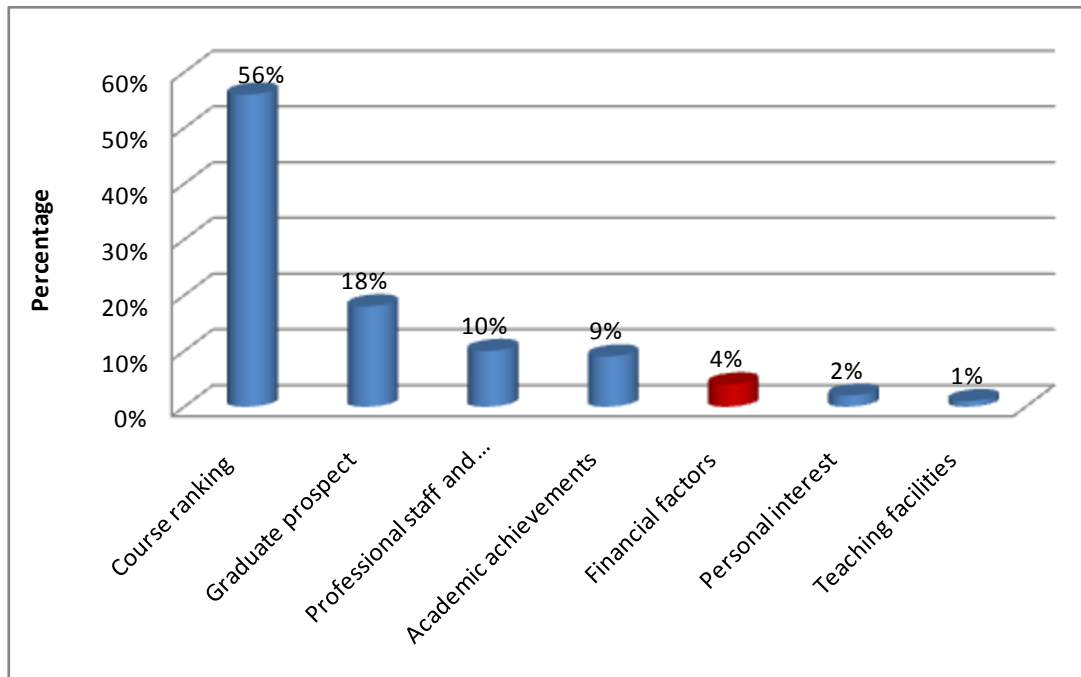


FIGURE 4.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRIORITY IN CHOOSING A COURSE AT UK UNIVERSITIES



Surprisingly, the assumption has overestimated the role finance plays in Chinese students' decision making. Only 6% of total participants took '*financial factors*' as the top consideration of a UK university, and it is rated No.4 of all the factors (Figure 4.5) while the top 3 are '*university ranking*', '*location*' and '*graduate prospects*' (also shown in Figure 4.3). Meanwhile, when seeking for a course in the UK, even less Chinese students (4%) attend to '*financial factors*', which makes them 5th among all the possible factors, after '*course ranking*'(56%), '*graduate prospects*'(18%), '*professional staff and well-recognized lecturers*'(10%) and '*academic achievements*'(9%). Consequently, **H4** is rejected.

4.3.5 Hypotheses 5

Family or parents have a great impact on Chinese students' choice of a UK university.

Regarding the questions of 'who chose the UK university for you? (multi

answers)’and ‘whose opinion was the most important for you to make the final decision of which university to go (single answer)?’ were asked. China is a country where people perform collectivism and family members tend to rely on each other, especially in an era of ‘one child policy’ when parents are more likely to get involved in their child’s decisions making process than ever before. It is under such a circumstance that **H4** was established. However, the analysis of Chinese students’ perception of their parents’ role in helping them to choose a satisfactory British university reveals that students themselves took most of the responsibility for their decision.

Figure 4.7 and 4.8 respectively rate the top 5 influences which are the results for each of two questions mentioned above. Figure 4.7 suggests that the main influence which obtains the support of 72 students, followed by ‘educational agencies’ (31 students), ‘ex-teachers’ (16 students), ‘parents’ (14 students) and ‘friend or relatives’ (13 students). Compared with Figure 4.7, the overall outcome in Figure 4.8 is slightly different with ‘previous UK Chinese students’ (13 students) rated second, ‘educational agencies’ (10 students) third, ‘parents’ (8 students) fourth and ‘ex-teacher’ (13 students) last.

FIGURE 4.7 TOP 5 INFLUENCES ON THE CHOICE OF A UK UNIVERSITY

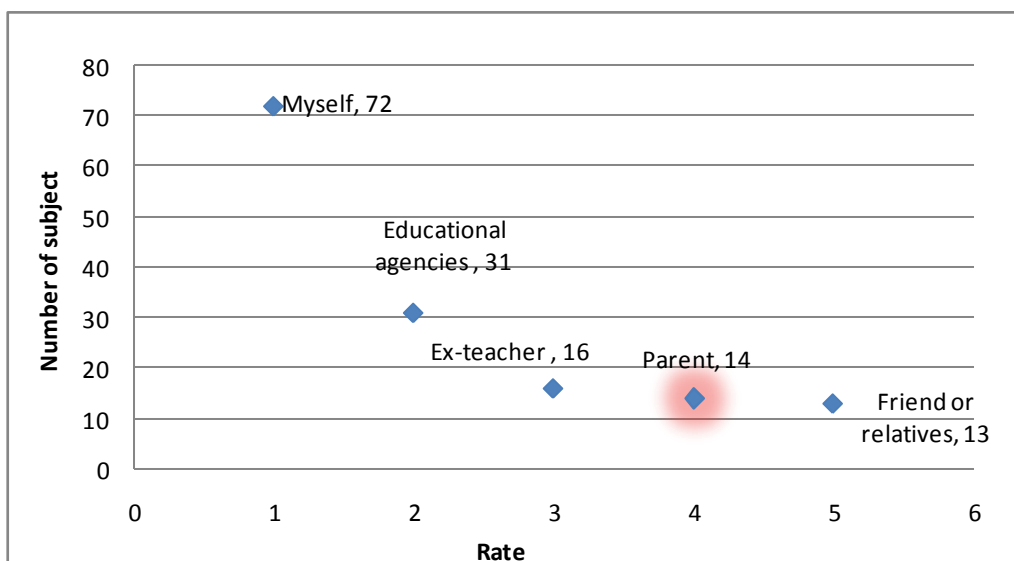
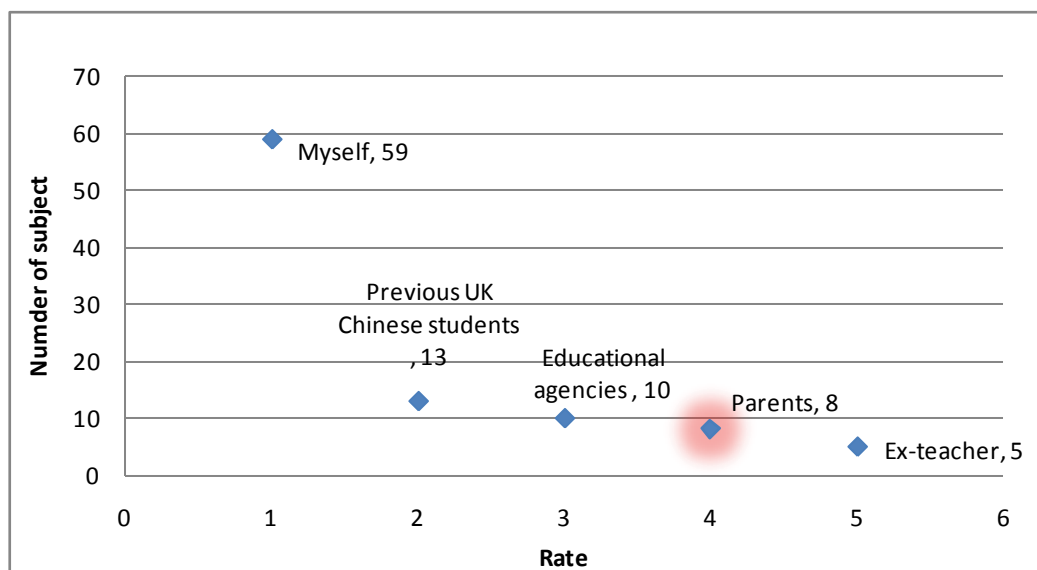


FIGURE 4.8 TOP 5 INFLUENCES ON THE FINAL DECISION OF A UK UNIVERSITY



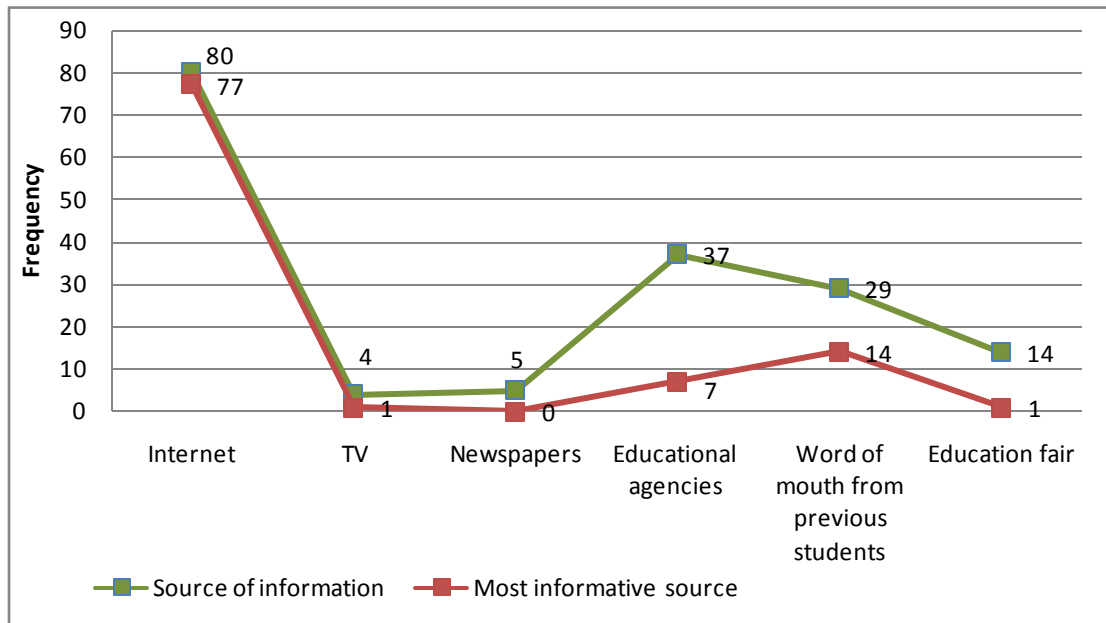
From the two graphs we can see that *parents* (see spot in red shadow) are ranked No.4 in the answers of both questions, which means it is neither as influential force as *educational agencies* or *ex-teachers* nor as *previous UK Chinese students* or *educational agencies* in the final decision making process. Therefore, we can safely conclude that besides making choices independently, Chinese students are more open to external consultation from past UK Chinese students, educational agencies or ex-teachers. Thus, *H5* is rejected.

4.3.6 Hypotheses 6

The Internet is regarded as the most informative source of information concerning UK universities.

To ascertain which the most informative source of information for students, a comparison of the responses for the question of ‘which of the sources of information did you seek out to help make your choice of university (multi answers)?’ and ‘which of the information sources do you think is the most informative (single answer)?’ was executed. The outcome is shown in Figure 4.9.

FIGURE 4.9 PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION



*The option of 'other' for the question of source of information on which Chinese students have ever relied has been removed from Figure 4.9, as only one respondent chose this option and indicated 'ex-teacher' as an alternative.

Figure 4.9 illustrates that the *'Internet'* (157 responses in total) is the most popular information source employed by Chinese students to seek out information about different universities and courses in the UK with 80 participants regarding it as one of useful ways of getting information and 77 perceiving it as the most informative way. *'Educational agencies'* (44 responses), is the second important information source, and the third widely used source is *'word of mouth from previous students'* (43 responses). It is also noticeable that in the question to select the most informative source alone, it is *'word of mouth from previous students'* (14 responses) instead of *'educational agencies'* (7 responses) that stands out to be the second popular information source only after the *'Internet'* (77 responses). To summarize, there is no doubt that the Internet turns out to be the most informative source of information, which indicates that **H6** is accepted.

4.3.7 Hypotheses 7

The longer time students spend in information searching, the greater satisfaction

about the university.

Bivariate Pearson correlation tests (Appendix 3) were carried out to examine the relationships between the '*time spent in information collecting*' and the three variables concerning students' level of satisfaction.

Table 4.2 Pearson correlation between information collection time and satisfaction

Variable One	Variable Two	Sig. value (two-tailed)
Time spent collecting information	Satisfaction of university	0.017
Time spent collecting information	Satisfaction of course	0.507
Time spent collecting information	Cost-effectiveness	0.174

Table 4.2 shows that there is a correlation between '*time spent collecting information*' and '*satisfaction of university*', yet what the particular relationship calls for is more details. Referring to the independent correlation test output between the two target variables in Table 4.3, the Pearson correlation value between '*time spent collecting information*' and '*satisfaction of university*' is 0.238* which indicates that they are significantly correlated and there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the more time Chinese students spent in information collecting, the more satisfaction with the UK HE institution they are likely to experience after attending it. Thus, **H7** is accepted.

Table 4.3 Pearson correlation between information collection time and university satisfaction

	Time spent collecting the information about your preferred university	Does your university live up to your expectation?
Time spent collecting the information about your preferred university	1	.238*
		.017
	100	100
Does your university live up to your expectation?	.238*	1
	.017	
	100	100

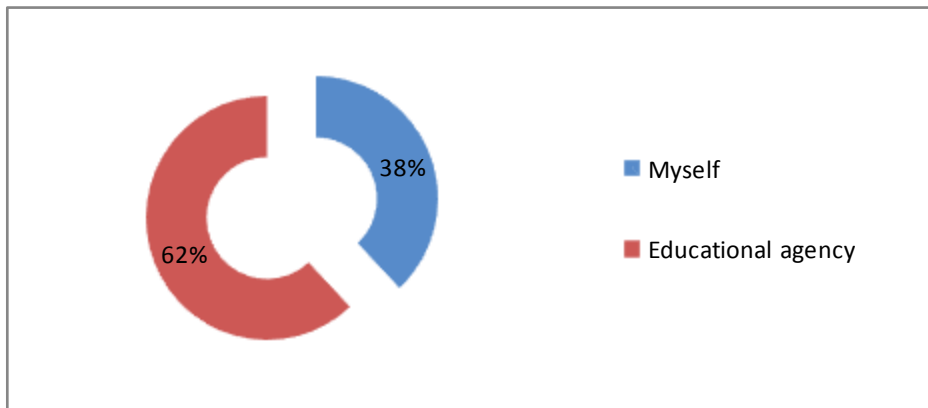
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.3.8 Hypotheses 8

Chinese students tend to apply for British universities by themselves than turn to educational agencies.

According to the answers to the question-‘Did you apply for British HE institutions by yourself or through an educational agency?’(Figure 4.10), the majority of the participants (62%) of the total preferred the help of educational agencies to applying on their own (38%). This is a reasonable contrast since Chinese students may not be familiar with British universities including the application procedure in the UK, neither are they good at English oral or written communications. Educational agencies seem to be the proper option for those students.

FIGURE 4.10 CONTRIBUTION OF WAYS OF APPLYING UK UNIVERSITIES



Along with the contribution of application ways, further analyses have been undertaken to investigate the age group and gender differences on the applying way preferences. A descriptive method of cross tabulation was adopted for the data interpretation. As can be concluded from Table 4.4, students between 19 to 23 years of age are more likely to depend on themselves (64%) in applying for British universities than turning to educational agencies (36%) whilst all other age groups tend to rely more on educational agencies.

Table 4.4 Cross tabulation on age group and ways of applying UK universities

Age group * How did you apply for British Higher Education (HE) institutions?

% within Age group

	How did you apply for British Higher Education (HE) institutions?		Total
	Myself	Educational agency	
18 and under 18		100.0%	100.0%
19-23	64.0%	36.0%	100.0%
24-29	29.7%	70.3%	100.0%
30 and above	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
Total	38.0%	62.0%	100.0%

Likewise, Table 4.5 depicts that a larger number of male Chinese students prefer educational agencies (72.1%) to doing it by themselves (27.9%). On the contrary, most

female students (53.8%) are more independent in terms of their UK university application.

Table 4.5 Cross tabulation on gender and ways of applying UK universities

Gender * How did you apply for British Higher Education (HE) institutions?

% within Gender

		How did you apply for British Higher Education (HE) institutions?		Total
		Myself	Educational agency	
Gender	Male	27.9%	72.1%	100.0%
	Female	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
Total		38.0%	62.0%	100.0%

From the above analysis, Chinese students would generally go to educational agencies for UK university applications, rather than applying by themselves though differences do exist within different age groups and genders. Therefore, *H8* is rejected.

4.3.9 Hypotheses 9

There is a relationship between work experience and Chinese students' satisfaction of their experience at a British university.

The analysis started by taking an independent sample T-test to investigate the differences between Chinese students with and without work experience in their satisfaction of studying in the UK (university, course, cost-effectiveness). The test result displayed in Table 4.6 suggests that although the equality of variances is fine between work experience and university, course and effectiveness expectations, a significant difference only exists between work experience and satisfaction of UK universities with $t= 2.428$, $v=98$, and $p=0.017 < 0.05$.

Table 4.6 T-test on the difference of work experience in the satisfaction of UK studying

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Does your university live up to your expectation?	.035	.852	2.428	98	.017
Has the chosen course met your learning needs?	.062	.804	1.586	98	.116
Based on your experience, is it cost-effective to study in the UK?	.493	.484	1.016	98	.312
			.914	33.237	.367

Additionally, a correlation analysis (Table 4.7) was implemented to work out the specific relationship between the two variables. The Pearson correlation value shown in Table 4.7 is -0.238 which means the relationship between work experience and UK HE institution satisfaction is a negative one. In this case, Chinese students having worked before are more likely to be dissatisfied with their study experience in the UK than those who have not worked. A possible reason for this may be that Chinese students with work experience tend to be more critical of or expect more from their investments in a British university.

Table 4.7 Pearson correlation between information collection time and university satisfaction

		Work experience
Work experience	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	100
Does your university live up to your expectation?	Pearson Correlation	-.238*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017
	N	100

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

Therefore, it is not accurate to say that there is a relationship between work experience and Chinese students' satisfaction of their experience in Britain, but instead, a negative correlation is discovered between work experience and satisfaction about UK universities rather than course or cost-effective perception. Thus, Hypothesis 9 is rejected.

4.3.10 Hypotheses 10

Male Chinese students are more concerned with graduate prospect when selecting a UK university as well as course.

Grown up in a country with a long history of male chauvinism, Chinese male students might tend to shoulder more social responsibilities out of tradition and pragmatism as well. But whether such an inclination is applicable to the choice of British universities is questioned. This hypothesis was tested by carrying out a Cross tabulation (Appendix 4). Table 4.8 is an abstract from the crosstabs output of 'gender and UK HE institution priority' and 'gender and course priority'. It suggests 6 out of 61 Chinese male students who considered '*graduate prospect*' as their priority in choosing a UK university compared with 4 out of 39 female students making the same choice. While in the choice of different courses, more male students (11 out of 61) as well as more female students (7 out of 39) placed '*graduate prospects*' as the most influencing factor.

Table 4.8 Gender differences in perceiving graduate prospect as a factor in choosing UK university and course

		Gender	
		Male	Female
Priority in choosing a UK HE institution	Graduate prospect	6/61	4/39
Priority in choosing a course		11/61	7/39

To make the comparison between the two genders more precise, Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12 were created pertaining to gender differences in the consideration of 'graduate prospect' in both UK university and course choices. The key comparison points are marked out in red circles in the two graphs.

FIGURE 4.11 GENDER DIFFERENCE IN THE PRIORITY IN CHOOSING A UK HE INSTITUTION

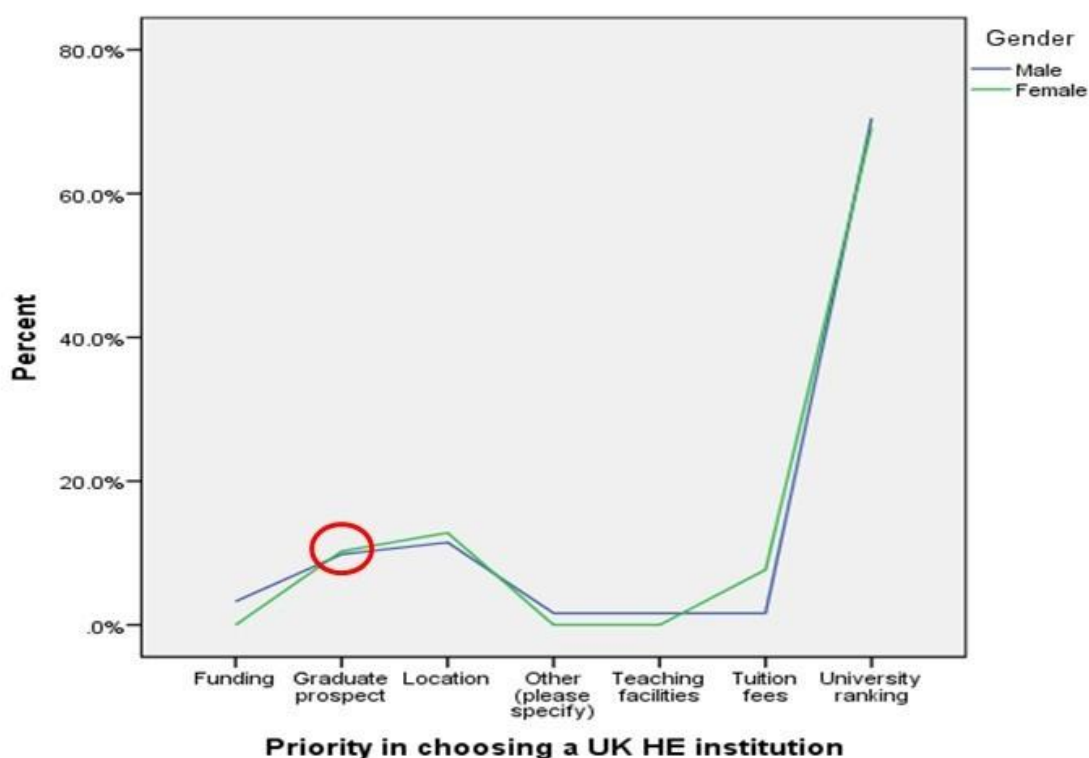
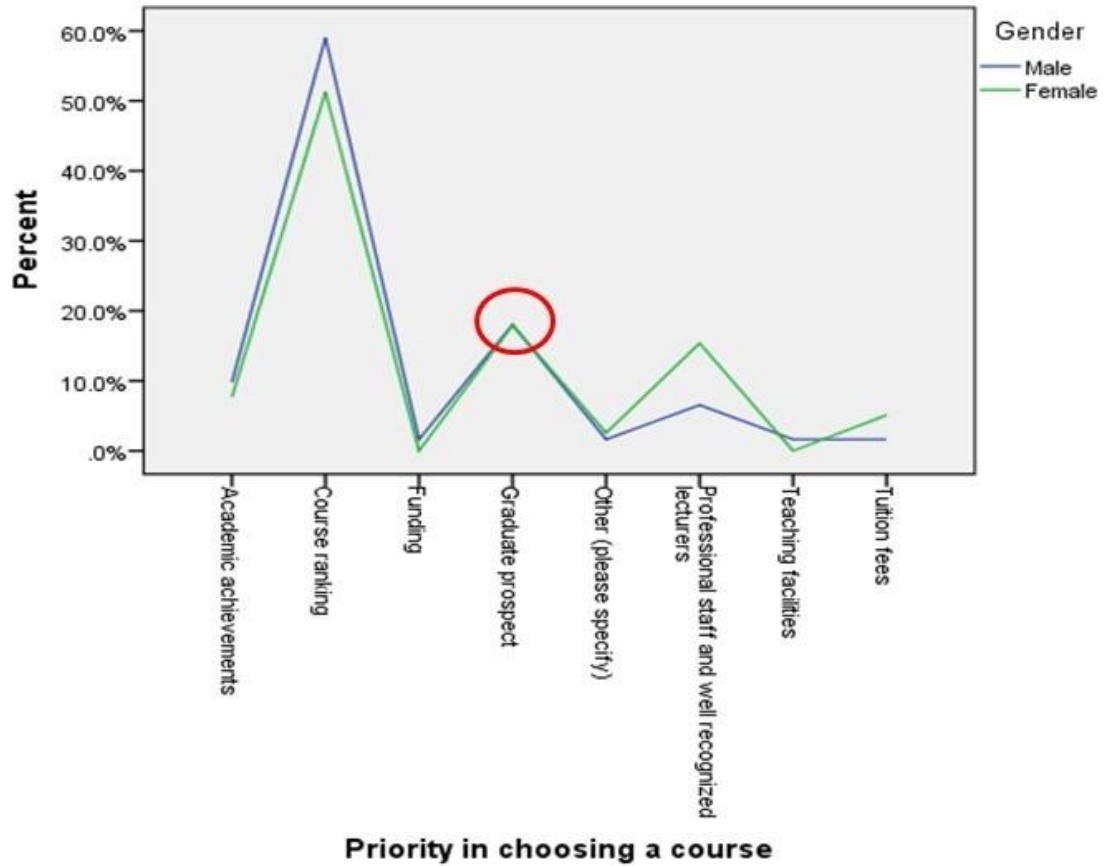


FIGURE 4.12 GENDER DIFFERENCE IN THE PRIORITY IN CHOOSING A COURSE AT UK HE INSTITUTIONS



In both graphs, the percentage of male and female who perceived ‘graduate prospects’ as the most influential factor are about the same level: around 10% in UK HE university selection priority and slightly less than 20% in course choosing priority, which shows that there is almost no difference between male and female students regarding ‘graduate prospects’ when choosing a UK HE institution or course. In contrast, there are, as perhaps expected, visible gender differences in relation to ‘funding’, ‘location’, ‘teaching facilities’ and ‘tuition fees’ in the choice of UK university as well as in the perception of ‘academic achievement’, ‘course ranking’, ‘funding’, ‘professional staff and well-recognized lecturers’, ‘teaching facilities’ and ‘tuition fees’ in the decision of a course. Based on the above analysis, **H10** is rejected in that the comparison resulted in no gender difference in the value of ‘graduate prospects’ when selecting a UK university as well as course.

4.4 Discussion

The Engel-Kollat-Blackwell's decision making model (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.5) did contribute a practical model with regard to the main stages through which prospective Chinese UK high education buyers would proceed. It should be noted that it is not necessary for every consumer to go through all the stages of this model and that stages of this model are not mutually exclusive. However, all the Chinese students did at some point in time progress through somewhere in the stages such as deciding which university and course to go to the UK, then which one and how to apply, etc. With the analyses made earlier in this chapter, there should be certain opinions gained about Chinese students' decision making in choosing a British university and course. To fit into the big picture of this research, there are some findings that need further discussion.

4.4.1 Why Study Abroad in the UK?

When Chinese students decide to study abroad, their targeted countries are high concentrated in the UK, USA and Australia, which are the most popular overseas study destinations among Chinese students nowadays (Xun, 2006). As for the reasons why Chinese students favor British colleges but not other countries, there are individual differences. Nevertheless, it is certain that 'short duration' is seen as the most prominent influence based on the previous analysis. This is in line with the view of Shen (2006) holding that shorter period of time required for a UK degree serves as an important reason for the popularity of studying in this country. Short duration becomes the most accepted advantage of studying in the UK rooted in the Chinese higher education system which issues a bachelor degree based on the accomplishment of four-year full time study, and a master degree on three-year full time study compared with merely three years for a bachelor degree and one year for a master degree in the UK. In addition, the 'world educational education' and 'original country of English language' come as the second and third recognized reasons perceived by

Chinese students.

The findings of Lowe (2007) are agreed with in that Chinese students choose the UK to study as a means of improving their English language skills. However, when questioned ‘which do you think is the best part about being a British university student?’, only 11% of the responses chose ‘to improve my English’ followed by 10% students choosing ‘to experience the unique British culture’, which is of less importance compared with 44% participants going for ‘international learning environment’ and 35% contented with ‘high quality education’.

Respondents also added factors like ‘relatives in Britain’, ‘friendly people here’, ‘no requirement of GMAT’, ‘lower cost within one year compared with American universities’ which may be replaced by ‘short duration’, and ‘easy access to other European countries’. Referring to GMAT, in fact, many of British universities, or business schools in particular would now require a score of GMAT as well, so this may not be a convincing factor.

4.4.2 Information Sources

The data suggests that Chinese students rate the Internet, educational agencies, word of mouth from previous students and education fairs as the three most important factors when deciding on a UK university or degree program. These sources are related to what Blackwell et al. (2001) identified as ‘environmental influences’.

In China, an increasing number of educational agencies have emerged in recent years and the overseas education market is vast with the increase in Chinese people’s purchasing power. They provide a series of services from studying abroad consultation, university and course application to visa application. It is no wonder that educational agencies have become so popular among Chinese students. In the mean time, private providers and provincial governments would organize different types of

fairs frequently throughout the year. These fairs are generally preceded by extensive Internet advertisements for the fairs that include synopses of many UK universities. This may also account for the high rating given by subjects to the Internet. However, it seems that even if the education fairs have got support from government, this did not bring any remarkable convenience to Chinese students regarding their decision to study in the UK (Figure 4.9, only 1 response considered it as the most informative source).

Also interesting to note is that while more Chinese students have resorted to educational agencies than depended on word of mouth from previous students, the latter is perceived as the second informative information source and the former the third (Figure 4.9). The reason potentially lies in that educational agencies are not completely open to all Chinese students due to certain internal business secrets and they are just responsible for those who pay for their services whereas previous UK Chinese students are more willing to share their experience without any concern for economic benefits.

4.4.3 Features that Attract

The students' preferences on the universities they attend to go vary among different students (Bois, 1956). In the process of choosing a British HE institution, 'university ranking' is rated as the top priority for most respondents. Further to that, it is found that Chinese students attending top 10 UK university tend to place more emphasis on university ranking than non-top 10 UK university students when choosing a desirable university, which is explanatory in that they might apply to universities out of intention. The other major predictors are in sequence as followed: location, graduate prospect, tuition fee, funding, and teaching facilities. This result confirms the findings of Stewart and Felicetti (1991) in that most international students tend to choose a university with satisfactory information including fees, scholarship, facilities and ranking of the university. But no respondents have taken 'entry requirements' and the

‘agency's price charged’ into consideration as noticed by Cuncliffe (1993) and Rogers and Smith (1993).

As for the priority in selecting a course at UK universities, similarly, course ranking is ranked first (Figure 4.6) followed by graduate prospects, professional staff and well-recognized lecturers, academic achievements, tuition fees, funding and teaching facilities. However, when compared with the studies of Mazzarol (1998), Moogan et al., (2001) and Ivy (2008), the students in this study did not rate ‘broad range programmes or courses’ as important. Such a difference may be explained by the fact that Chinese universities are trying to provide a wider courses range in the last decade and a variety of programmes are now available at many universities and colleges in China which have bridged the gap in programme range in HE institutions between China and western countries.

Among all the factors, ‘graduate prospects’ are viewed as a top 3 influence in both priorities in choosing a UK university and course (Figure4.5 and Figure 4.6) as pointed out by Jazreel Goh Yeun, ‘Employers in China are extremely interested to recruit these UK graduates’ (China Daily, 2007) as well as defined by Soutar and Turner (2002) and Maringe (2006) as ‘good job prospects’. Apart from that, the financial influence on the decision of Chinese students has been analyzed independently. In contrast with economic student choice behavior (Chapter 2, session2.4.2) supported by Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) that students would maximize their benefits, only 6% and 4% respondents put such financial factors as tuition fees and funding as their priorities in UK universities and course choice respectively. This may be a trend with the recent development of the Chinese economy and the intention to study abroad for Chinese students.

4.4.4 Experience Evaluation

According to Kotler (1997) and Blackwell et al. (2001), there is a post-consumption evaluation after the consumption activity in the model of decision making. Then, as

discussed before, to choose a right university and course is highly risky in terms of the intangibility of the service as well as the time involved. Furthermore, not only does the higher education process shape student expectations, the education process is itself influenced by the character of student expectations (James, 2001). So Chinese students' post-consumption evaluation can be of significant importance to both UK HE institutions and future Chinese students coming to the UK. Therefore, part of the survey has contributed to investigate the satisfaction of Chinese students with regards to their studying experience in Britain.

Overall, 74% of Chinese students 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the university they attended have lived up to their expectations, the course chosen has met their learning needs and that it is cost-effective to study in the UK. In addition, 85% think that they would still choose to come to the UK given another chance. Both cases show a high level of satisfaction. At the same time, group differences still exist in time spent in information collecting and work experience. One of the survey results have indicated that the longer time Chinese students spend in collecting relevant information, the more satisfaction they will get from the UK study experience. Longer information searching helps to gain a deeper understanding of the universities and courses and thus is more likely to inform a rational decision. As a result, more satisfaction will be attained. While the research suggests that Chinese students with work experience tend to be more discontented with the UK studying experience than those who do not have any work experience, it is believed that the high expectations of Chinese students with work experience could be the main cause.

4.5 Summary

To this end, the results from the data analysis were presented in this chapter. The chapter started by testing 10 hypotheses which presented a certain sequence akin to the primary stages of the EKB decision making model. After the hypotheses tests, a further discussion was provided. In the discussion section, certain theories which have

been covered previously were verified. Some of them were contradicted while others were enhanced by the results of this study. The next chapter will offer general conclusions drawn from the whole study, highlight the contributions along with practical recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

On completion of the data analysis and its comparison with the existing literature, this chapter now integrates all the key research findings to generate final conclusions of the study. In addition, the implications, recommendations, the limitations of this research as well as suggested avenues for future research are presented.

5.2 Research Conclusions

Overall, this study has helped to gain a better understanding about Chinese students' decision to seek higher education in the UK and their choice of preferred course. The contributions of this research can be classified into the following three aspects:

Firstly, why do Chinese students choose the UK as a place of study and further to that, how do they choose their desired institutions and courses? The short duration of the qualification was found to be the most important factors influencing and attracting students to come to the UK, instead of the USA, Australia, Canada or Japan which are other popular overseas study destinations for Chinese students. As for the choice of a particular college or degree programme, ranking comes first for both. The other highly ranked importance predictor for choosing a UK university as well as course is graduate prospects (Soutar and Turner, 2002; Maringe, 2006). There is no gender difference in considering graduate prospects as a determinant of UK university choice, which is against traditional Chinese culture that highlights male are supposed to shoulder more social responsibilities than female. Financial factors are not seen as so important in Chinese students' choice of either HE institution or course as some other authors perceive (Stewart and Felicetti, 1991). Meanwhile, some students may choose a UK university due to its location and select a course because of the professional staff and well recognized lecturers and academic achievements.

Secondly, how do they make decisions? Their decision making was found to be influenced mainly by the opinion of other students themselves followed by suggestions from previous UK Chinese students and educational agencies. Contrary to expectation and Chinese tradition, the family or parents do not play a significant role in influencing the process of Chinese students' choice of studying in Britain. Most Chinese students have resorted to the Internet for collecting information of relevant British universities and courses and it is also regarded as the most informative information source. Besides, educational agencies, word of mouth from previous students and education fairs have more or less contributed to providing students with the information needed as well. However, generally speaking, although Chinese students initially chose British universities and then make a final decision by themselves, they tend to depend on an educational agency to help with university applications. Furthermore, Chinese students between 19 to 23 years old are more dependent on themselves for applying to UK universities than other age groups and surprisingly, male students rely more on educational agencies than female students. Anyway, educational agencies are likely to somewhat have an impact on or intervene with Chinese students decision making.

Thirdly, what do they think of their choices? The study shows that some 80% of the total samples are satisfied with their UK study experience. Moreover, the more time Chinese students spend in information collection beforehand, the more satisfied they will be with the learning outcomes gained. However, students without work experience at all turn out to be more satisfied than those that have work experience. The satisfaction level includes the satisfaction of the university and course, perception of cost-effectiveness, and 'whether to make the same choice to come to UK given another chance'. Referring to the specific content of what makes it satisfying, Chinese students consider the international experience they obtained to be the most significant advantage and value the international learning environment as the best part of their study in the UK.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Taking the aforementioned conclusions into consideration, some proposals and suggestions to UK HE institutions as well as to relevant domestic educational organizations in China can be made.

Starting with British higher education institutions, since international students' original needs are diverse, marketers ought to appeal to multiple needs and wants (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004). First of all, the range of short duration courses, for example, one year master's degree programme, should be expanded whilst keeping to the present good education quality. As the top positioned factor considered by Chinese students when deciding to study in the UK, is the short duration of the degree programme, it reduces the living expenses despite a strong British pound (Chen and Zimitat, 2006), which is no doubt a big advantage or differentiator of UK universities over their competitors. Therefore, it is advisable that British universities carry on promoting this as one of their main competitive advantages in the global education market, particularly the market in China.

In second place, due to Chinese students' priority of ranking in their choice of both UK universities and courses, British universities should, on the one hand, make an effort to achieve a higher standard among all HE institutions thus elevate their course ranking and overall university ranking as well and on the other hand, highlight their rankings in league tables in their promotional materials or media campaigns targeting international students. In the meantime, graduate prospects is another substantial fact that should be enhanced in parallel with university ranking since it is regarded as the second biggest determinant that catches a Chinese student's eyes. In addition, now that educational agencies play an important role, e.g. serving as information source, general consultancy and helping with university application etc. in the Chinese students' decision making process, British HE institutions could take the initiative to

associate with many of the educational agencies in China to build a platform for Chinese students to learn more about the courses, universities and even life in the UK rather than waiting passively for Chinese students to come. In doing so, not only the awareness of the institutions will have been raised, especially for those whose rankings are not convincing enough to draw Chinese students' attention in the first place, but also students are able to get firsthand information from the HE institutions through direct communication, which reduces students' perceived risk and increases the chance of actual enrolment.

For Chinese education organizations, what they can do is try their best to provide assistance to students for finding an institution to meet their learning needs and self-satisfaction (Meyer et al., 1977). Firstly, it is the responsibility of educational agencies in China to communicate effective UK university information as much as possible with prospective students. Although many Chinese students have turned to certain educational agencies for help, they ended up to be more satisfied with the messages obtained from previous UK Chinese students, which indicates that educational agencies ought to be more careful about the information that they give out. More reliable and practical advice is required from them to maintain the prestige and also achieve long term sustainability in the education market.

Next, the implication for higher education marketers on the overseas education fairs in China is to know exactly what Chinese students are looking for and to better accommodate their needs. There are many education fairs run throughout the year. However, they do not seem to work as effectively as they could, which may result from the mix-up of different exhibiting institutions (most of them are not so well established colleges) and the over-general information obtained. Instead, Chinese students would like to know something about their desired courses and universities in detail from the education fairs though most of them target those students who do not yet have a clear goal of where or which institution to go. More importantly, since

students prefer to search information on the Internet, any notice, schedule or promotion activities related to education fairs can be posed on-line to reach as many target students. Last but not least, all the domestic educational marketers in China may consider building a good relationship with China-based alumni who can spread word of mouth and work as a UK institution ambassador in their home country. Apart from the Internet, word of mouth from previous UK Chinese students is viewed as an informative source of information. In this case, many of the education organizations will be more competent to live up to potential students' expectation once they manage to get support from the Chinese alumni who have graduated from British universities.

5.4 Research Limitations

In the course of achieving the overall aims and objectives, this research was also subjected to a number of limitations. For one thing, as far as the accuracy of the sample is concerned, a small sample can lead to results that are not as representative as expected. Due to time constraints, only 100 Chinese students from 24 universities out of over 100 HE institutions in the UK took part in the survey despite coming from different courses. At the same time, some academics criticized that this type of (on-line) survey is likely to have a low response rate (Wilson 2002). While it is said that a heterogeneous population can enhance the validity of the sampling to a great extent (Malhotra, 2004), the samples in this study might appear to be homogenous, and they should have covered a larger group of Chinese students from more British colleges and degree programs given adequate time during academic terms instead of summer holidays when many students are away from campus.

A non-probability sampling method may also be questioned of its 'randomicity'. As a result, around one fifth of the participants are Chinese students from the same university (Lancaster University) while the rest of them come from 23 other HE institutions and 97% of the participants are graduates with contrastive 3% undergraduates. This may bias opinion since Chinese students eventually attending

the same university or degree level are bound to have certain similar perceptions or common views and this may not be representative of all UK HE institutions in general.

Another limitation is acknowledged in the content of the research where according to the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell consumer behavior model (2001), only part of the environmental influences, namely, 'culture', 'personal influences' and 'family', and individual inferences, such as 'consumer resources', 'motivation and involvement', 'personality, values and life style' which impact on Chinese students' choice of UK universities and courses have been analyzed, leaving the other determinants of both environmental influences and individual inferences out of the research scope.

Additionally, along with the weaknesses that accompany the adoption of a quantitative research method (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2), the questionnaire suffers from its own disadvantage, that is, respondents may have had finished the on-line surveys in a hurry using click ticks, thus intentionally avoided some of the answers calling for extra typing work, e.g. others (please specify), which may result in less accurate outcomes.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research will further counter-act the limitations addressed above and consolidate the results.

A bigger as well as more diversified sample size for future research is necessary in that it can improve the accuracy and reliability of the study. Ideally, samples are supposed to be taken from a variety of universities and courses while taking symmetrical demographical and geographical distributions into account as well. Besides, it will be helpful to do such a research exercise by getting in touch with Chinese alumni from UK universities, which can be an effective resource of sample.

Having applied the EKB model to students' decision making, this study has merely investigated some of the choice making influences proposed in the model. Further research is recommended to identify the importance of 'social class' and 'situation' of environmental influences as well as 'knowledge' and 'attitude' of individual influences involved in the decision making of Chinese students when choosing UK HE institutions, or to expand the research otherwise to focus on a single influence for example, the importance of culture in Chinese students' decision making behavior.

This research was conducted on a quantitative basis, whereas further study based on qualitative research can be carried out, as this would allow more exploratory and in-depth data collected and go beyond the researcher's preset format of a questionnaire by asking open questions which could draw on collective wisdom and absorb useful ideas or factors.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the final conclusions derived from the current study in regard to the influencing factors in the choice of UK universities by Chinese students. In addition, the practical implications for British HE institutions and also for domestic education organizations in China were mentioned. The dissertation concludes by presenting the research limitations and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 6: Reflection

6.1 Learning Outcomes of the Dissertation

While the undergraduate dissertation of the author was about the differences between Chinese and British higher education, this graduate dissertation probes further into the decision making of Chinese students in the process of choosing a British higher education intuition which has integrated the researcher's learning on consumer behavior, especially the decision making behavior during the master classes in the past year with her undergraduate background majored in educational studies.

Throughout the dissertation, the researcher had great opportunities to obtain wide and thorough knowledge on consumer decision making behavior with specific reference to Chinese students. Additionally, this dissertation provides the author with a chance to explore the overseas education market in China. Meanwhile, some interesting findings which the researcher has no idea at all before have been discovered, such as gender difference in UK university application and the different perception by Chinese students with work experience upon the satisfaction of studying in the UK.

6.2 Personal Learning as a Researcher

By selecting a topic which is familiar to as well as interests the researcher, she is more likely to benefit from it. Apart from the practical study, the author has acquired a great deal valuable experience in the course of conducting a survey as a researcher. It can be narrowed down into the following aspects:

- ◆ Time management. To plan rationally the time duration for each stage of the research, e.g. how long to spend in data collection and data interpretation, is important an orderly researcher. And more importantly, to finish the dissertation within the limited time scale is a basic requirement to meet for all researchers.
- ◆ Project management. Right from raising research questions, carrying forward the survey and finally coming up with solutions to the questions and presenting the

findings on paper, all this demonstrates project management skills.

◆ Questionnaire design. It is the first time for the author to make a questionnaire by herself. From the first draft to piloting, the author has got a better understanding of the saying that 'practice makes perfect'.

◆ Data analysis by SPSS. The application of SPSS used to be a big challenge for the researcher and through this study she has so far had a good command of those essential data analysis using the software.

All in all, there is no doubt that these learning outcomes not only enhance the researcher's master learning in the past year, but also they will help her to go further in the future academic researches.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Times Good University Guide 2012 Table

Rank	Name	Student satisfaction	Research quality	Entry standards	Score
1	University of Oxford	86	4.00	536	1000.00
2	University of Cambridge	84	4.10	559	968.00
3	London School of Economics and Political Science	74	3.60	513	870.00
4	Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	77	3.00	519	835.00
5	University College London	78	3.00	477	819.00
6	Durham University	81	2.80	487	815.00
6	University of St Andrews	83	2.60	485	815.00
8	University of Warwick	80	2.70	480	779.00
9	Lancaster University	81	2.70	407	766.00
10	University of Exeter	83	2.60	439	762.00
11	University of York	82	2.70	437	759.00
12	University of Bath	80	2.20	459	745.00
13	University of Bristol	77	2.80	467	740.00
14	University of Sussex	81	2.40	380	731.00
15	University of Edinburgh	76	3.00	442	725.00

16	University of Nottingham	79	2.20	428	717.00
17	University of Sheffield	81	2.50	426	715.00
17	University of Leicester	84	1.90	399	715.00
19	Southampton University	79	2.10	427	714.00
20	Loughborough University	85	2.30	390	710.00
21	University of Buckingham	88	n/a	273	708.00
22	University of Glasgow	83	2.30	408	705.00
23	School of Oriental and African Studies, London	74	2.00	423	703.00
24	King's College London	77	2.20	447	700.00
25	Newcastle University	80	2.00	410	695.00
26	University of Birmingham	79	2.20	421	693.00
27	University of East Anglia	83	2.00	386	686.00
28	Royal Holloway, University of London	77	2.60	381	665.00
29	University of Surrey	77	1.90	388	663.00
30	University of Leeds	78	2.10	408	660.00
31	University of Liverpool	77	1.90	401	658.00
32	University of Manchester	73	2.60	422	652.00
33	University of Reading	79	2.10	370	649.00
34	University of Strathclyde	78	1.60	394	640.00

35	Cardiff University	78	1.90	406	638.00
36	Aston University	77	1.30	370	630.00
37	Queen Mary, University of London	78	2.10	387	628.00
38	Queen's University, Belfast	77	1.80	362	619.00
39	University of Kent	79	1.60	329	613.00
40	University of Dundee	81	1.50	353	610.00
41	University of Essex	78	2.10	307	607.00
42	University of Aberdeen	81	1.90	332	606.00
43	Aberystwyth University	84	1.90	298	604.00
44	Heriot-Watt University	76	1.70	335	594.00
45	Keele University	80	1.20	310	589.00
46	University of Stirling	79	1.30	305	576.00
47	City University London	73	1.40	361	571.00
48	Oxford Brookes University	79	0.60	314	557.00
49	Swansea University	77	1.50	314	555.00
50	Goldsmiths, University of London	74	2.30	327	549.00

Source: The Good University Guide (2011)

Appendix 2: Questionnaire in English

Dear respondents,

My name is Muyunshan Zhuang. I am a Masters student from Lancaster University and am interested in finding out the attitudes and beliefs held towards UK University selection by Chinese students. Before you start completing the questionnaire I would like to inform you that all answers are confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. Please answer all questions sincerely. Your participation is entirely voluntarily and will be warmly appreciated. Thank you!

Kind regards,

Muyunshan zhuang (mobile number: 07579679033)

Questionnaire

University: _____

Course: _____

*Please put a tick inside the corresponding bracket

Section A: General questions on students' opinion in decision making process

1. As a Chinese student, which of the following countries did you consider an overseas study destination? (please tick all that apply)
 - a. UK ()
 - b. USA ()
 - c. Australia ()
 - d. Canada ()
 - e. Japan ()
 - f. Other ()

2. Why did you choose a UK university over other options? (please tick all that apply)
 - a. World educational reputation ()
 - b. Short duration (only one year for a master degree) ()
 - c. Original country of English language
 - d. Favorable student visa policy (PSW before April 2012) ()
 - e. The historical 'British empire on which the sun never sets' ()

f. Other ()

If you choose 'other', please specify here:

3. In your answer(s) in Q2, which do you think is the most important influence?

- a. World educational reputation ()
- b. Short duration (only one year for a master degree) ()
- c. Original country of English language ()
- d. Favorable student visa policy (PSW before April 2012) ()
- e. The historical 'British empire on which the sun never sets' ()
- f. Other ()

If you choose 'other', please specify here:

4. Who chose the UK university for you? (please tick all that apply)

- a. Myself ()
- b. Parent ()
- c. Ex-teacher ()
- d. Friend ()
- e. Educational agencies ()
- f. Other ()

5. Which of the following sources of information did you seek out to help make your choice of university? (please tick all that apply)

- a. Internet ()
- b. TV ()
- c. Newspapers ()
- d. Agencies ()
- e. Word of mouth from previous students ()
- f. Education fair ()
- g. Other ()

6. How long did it take you to collect the information about your preferred university?

- a. 1-3 days ()
- b. about 1 week ()
- c. 2 to 3 weeks ()
- d. 1 month ()
- e. Over 1 month ()

7. Do you think your answer in Q6 is quite a long time?

- a. Yes, a long time. ()
- b. It's about right. ()
- c. No, it is a short period of time. ()

8. Which of the following information sources do you think is the most informative?
(please tick all that apply)

- a. Internet ()
- b. TV ()
- c. Newspapers ()
- d. Agencies ()
- e. Word of mouth from previous students ()
- f. Education fair ()
- g. Other ()

If you choose 'other', please specify here:

9. Which university was your first option when you made your choice?

10. Is this the university you are attending?

- a. Yes ()
- b. No ()

11. What was your priority in choosing a UK HE institution? (please tick all that apply)

- a. University ranking ()
- b. Location ()
- c. Accommodation ()
- d. Graduate prospect ()
- e. Tuition fees ()
- f. Funding (Providing scholarship and bursary) ()
- g. Teaching facilities ()
- h. Career support ()
- i. Other

If you choose 'other', Please specify here:

12. What did you value the most in choosing a course from a UK university?

- a. Course ranking ()
- b. Academic achievements ()
- c. Professional staff and well recognized lecturers ()
- d. Graduate prospect ()
- e. Tuition fees ()
- f. Funding (Providing scholarship and bursary) ()
- g. Teaching facilities ()
- h. Ways of assessment ()
- i. Other ()

If you choose 'other', Please specify here:

-
13. Would the current Chinese alumni base be an important consideration for you?
a. Yes () b. No()
14. Whose opinion was the most important for you to make a final decision which university to go?
a. Opinion of myself ()
b. Parents' opinion ()
c. Friends' or relatives' opinion ()
d. Suggestions from ex-teachers ()
e. Suggestions from previous UK Chinese students ()
f. Advice from educational agencies ()
15. Since you successfully got an offer from at least one British university, how many HE institutions would you suggest that Chinese students should apply for at one time?
a. 1-5 universities ()
b. 6-10 universities ()
c. 11-15 universities ()
d. 16+ universities ()
16. What are you going to do after you have got your current degree?
a. Go back to China and find a job ()
b. Go job hunting in the UK ()
c. Pursue further studies ()
d. Other ()
17. What do you think is the main advantage of studying in the UK?
a. English language advantage ()
b. International experience ()
c. An overseas degree ()
d. Broadened your horizons ()
e. Other ()
- If you choose 'other', Please specify here:
-

Section B: General views on students' evaluation of UK higher education

18. Were the admission staff helpful when you applied for your course?
a. Strongly agree ()
b. Agree ()
c. Neutral ()
d. Disagree ()

e. Sharply disagree ()

19. Did you become fully integrated into the British teaching style?

a. Strongly agree ()

b. Agree ()

c. Neutral ()

d. Disagree ()

e. Sharply disagree ()

20. Does your university live up to your expectation?

a. Strongly agree ()

b. Agree ()

c. Neutral ()

d. Disagree ()

e. Sharply disagree ()

21. Has the chosen course met your learning needs?

a. Strongly agree ()

b. Agree ()

c. Neutral ()

d. Disagree ()

e. Sharply disagree ()

22. What is the best part about being a British university student?

a. High quality education ()

b. International learning environment ()

c. Helped to improve my English ()

d. Helped to experience the unique British culture ()

e. Other

If you choose 'other', Please specify here:

23. Based on your experience, is it cost-effective to study in the UK?

a. Strongly agree ()

b. Agree ()

c. Neutral ()

d. Disagree ()

e. Sharply disagree ()

24. Given another chance, would you still choose a British university over others?

a. Yes b. No

Section C: Personal details

25. What is your gender?

- a. Male () b. Female ()

26. Which is your age group?

- a. 18 and under 18 ()
b. 19-23 ()
c. 24-29 ()
d. 30 and above ()

27. Do you have any work experience?

- a. Yes () b. No ()

If your answer is 'yes', please state what type of work experience you gained:

28. Please indicate which of the following applies to your course of study?

- Undergraduate () b. Graduate ()

29. How did you apply for British Higher Education (HE) institutions?

- a. By myself() b. by an educational agency ()

30. When did you come to the UK to pursue higher education?

- a. Before 2010 ()
b. Year 2010 ()
c. Year 2011()
d. Year 2012()

31. Is this your first time you have studied in Great Britain?

- a. Yes () b. No()

If your answer is 'no', please state where did you study previously:

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3: Bivariate Pearson Correlation Tests

Correlations

		Time spent collecttig the infomation about your preferred university	Does your university live up to your expectation?
Time spent collecttig the infomation about your preferred university	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 100	.238* .017 100
Does your university live up to your expectation?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.238* .017 100	1 100

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

Correlations

		Time spent collecting the infomation about your preferred university	Has the chosen course met your learning needs?
Time spent collecting the infomation about your preferred university	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 100	.067 .507 100
Has the chosen course met your learning needs?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.067 .507 100	1 100

Correlations

	Time spent collecttig the information about your preferred university	Based on your experience, is it cost-effective to study in the UK?
Time spent collecttig the information about your preferred university	1	.137
		.174
	100	100
Based on your experience, is it cost-effective to study in the UK?	.137	1
	.174	
	100	100

Appendix 4: Cross Tabulations

Gender * Priority in choosing a UK HE institution Crosstabulation

Count

		Priority in choosing a UK HE institution						Total	
		Funding	Graduate prospect	Location	Other (please specify)	Teaching facilities	Tuition fees		University ranking
Gender	Male	2	6	7	1	1	1	43	61
	Female	0	4	5	0	0	3	27	39
Total		2	10	12	1	1	4	70	100

Gender * Priority in choosing a course Crosstabulation

Count

		Priority in choosing a course							Total	
		Academic achievements	Course ranking	Funding	Graduate prospect	Other (please specify)	Professional staff and well recognized lecturers	Teaching facilities		Tuition fees
Gender	Male	6	36	1	11	1	4	1	1	61
	Female	3	20	0	7	1	6	0	2	39
Total		9	56	1	18	2	10	1	3	100