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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND MOTIVATION TO STUDY AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL – SOME EVIDENCE FROM CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

Every year substantial numbers of students make their decision to study in higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide. Some of them decide to study in their home country, some decide to study abroad. There is huge global competition among institutions offering higher education services and it is still increasing. Seeing a growing potential, some higher education providers decide not only to recruit students globally but also get involved in mobility of people, programmes, and institutions [Dale and Robertson 2002, Schofer and Meyer 2005, Marginson 2006, de Wit 2008, Altbach et al. 2009, Salmi 2012, Chien 2013].

The dynamics of students' mobility is changing. Nowadays students have a number of options to study abroad. They can select an overseas institution, participate in a student exchange programme, for example Erasmus Mundus, or take courses from two or more institutions if they have a partnership, for example joint or dual degree programme.

"A joint degree programme awards one joint qualification upon completion of the collaborative programme requirements established by the partner institutions. A double degree programme awards two individual qualifications at equivalent levels upon completion of the collaborative programme requirements established by the two partner institutions" [Knight 2008, 15–16].

There is also a possibility to experience "transnational education" (TNE), which initially was introduced by Australia and the UK. Transnational education involves offering course content or an entire programme to students located in a country different from that of the institution that makes the award to which the content or programme belongs

[Altbach 2004, Bodycott 2009, Fang 2012, Fang and Wang 2014]. From the domestic students' perspective, transnational education refers to higher education in which students receive foreign, or partly foreign, education without having to move abroad, whilst recognising that some international students may move abroad to study a programme offered by a university not based in the country in which the study is being undertaken. There are a number of possibilities as to how such programmes may be delivered. For instance, some institutions offer distance learning, or combinations of onsite and distance learning. One of the attractions from the students' perspective is that, without travelling abroad, they have the opportunity to study for a degree at an international branch campus of a foreign HEI that operates in students' home countries [Chien 2013]. In the recent years a number of institutions have decided to develop branch campuses abroad and cross-border collaborative arrangements giving students the possibility to obtain, for instance, a dual degree or joint institutional awards.

A country of great significance in relation to international student mobility is China. Although China is one of the largest exporters of international students to English-speaking countries as well as nearby Asian countries [Lee 2017] it also attracts a lot of students from European and non-European countries and foreign HEIs. Despite this importance, there is very little research on international students' motivation to study at a postgraduate level in China, and no research, to our knowledge, when it comes to investigating the students who selected to study just a part of their programme at a Chinese branch of their home institution. To date there is only one piece of research that investigates students studying at international branches but the research looks at Arabic context [Wilkins et al. 2012]. Our paper investigates the factors that have determined students' choice of a Master's programme that is delivered by a European HEI that has a campus in Shanghai.

CHINA – EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The unprecedented scale and pace of China's development since the "opening up" policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 has been reflected in the advances made in respect of education. The Third Plenary Session of the Communist Party of China 11th Central Committee held at the end of 1978 represented one of the defining turning points of the last 100 years. Since then, China has pursued a policy of reform and opening to the outside world. This was given further impetus on 11 December 2001, after 15 years of effort and negotiation, when China formally became the 143rd member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This represented a strategic decision by China as a response to, and to help shape, the economic globalization that was taking place and marked a key point in China's evolution, economically and politically. The period since 1979 has witnessed historic rates of social development and economic growth, averaging over 10% for over 20 years. Although, today, there is a deliberate intention to create a "new normal" [Green and Stern 2015] in terms of growth rates reduced to nearer, and a more sustainable, 6.5%, that is still a rate of growth that would be envied in most economies.

With regards to the education sector in China, please note: "Measuring numbers of tertiary, or post-secondary, or higher education institutions and their students, particularly for the purpose of international comparisons, is difficult. Tertiary, post-secondary, further,

and higher education – with counterpart terms in other languages – all reference institutions and their students after completion of secondary education. Such institutions differ in the length of study, in academic rigor, and in the focus of study – particularly in the mix of general, vocational or professional teaching and learning – and in the granting of degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other attestations of learning. The term higher education most often refers to colleges or universities – publically or privately owned, awarding of degrees (bachelor's, master's, or doctorates), diplomas, or certificates – the last two generally awarded by institutions featuring shorter and more vocationally-oriented learning" [Shen et al. 2016, 1].

With the above caveats in mind, the expansion, size and shape of the sector can be illustrated by figures acquired from the National Bureau (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2016/indexeh.htm) – Tables 1 and 2. China has the largest higher education sector in the world, with 2,560 regular higher education institutions – HEIs (Table 1) enrolling over 26.5 million and 1.9 million undergraduate and postgraduate students respectively in 2015 (Table 2). In addition, in 2015 there are over 6.3 million students enrolled in tertiary vocational institutions – adult HEIs (Table 2).

TABLE 1. Chinese higher education in 1978 and 2015: illustrative statistics

Specification	1978	2015
Regular HEIs	598	2560
Number of full time academics	206 000	1 573 000
Number of undergraduate entrants in regular HEIs	402 000	7 378 495
Number of students studying abroad	860	523 700
Number of returned students	248	409 100

Source: National Bureau of Statistics China 2016.

TABLE 2. Chinese higher education students in 2015

Specification	Headcount		
	graduates	entrants	enrolments
Postgraduates			
Doctors	53 778	74 416	326 687
Masters	497 744	570 639	1 584 719
Total	551 522	645 055	1 911 406
Undergraduate in regular HEIs			
Normal courses	3 585 940	3 894 184	15 766 848
Short-cycle courses	3 222 926	3 484 311	10 486 120
Total	6 808 866	7 378 495	26 252 968
Undergraduate in adult HEIs			
Normal courses	962 495	1 014 675	2 793 354
Short-cycle courses	1 400 098	1 352 780	3 565 998
Total	2 362 593	2 367 455	6 359 352

Source: National Bureau of Statistics China 2016.

The need for, and intention to achieve, more sustainable growth is reflected in China's most recent strategic plan, the 13th China Five Year Plan covering the period 2016–2020. With regards to education, the Plan stresses the importance of the quality of provision, i.e. quality in all respects including campus facilities, social environment, international cooperation and teacher quality. It also commits to increasing the number of students in higher education. In 2015, the number of students receiving higher education, nine-year compulsory education, and pre-school education reached 36.5 million, 140 million, and 42.7 million, respectively. Those numbers will be increased to 38.5 million, 150 million, and 45 million by 2020.

In part this will be achieved by strengthening the reputation of Chinese universities and the Government has launched a new initiative called World Class 2.0 (also referred to as the Double World Class Project) to this effect. Announced in August 2015, the programme aims to strengthen the research performance of China's nine top-ranked universities, with the goal of having six of those institutions ranked within the world's top 15 universities by 2030. This initiative supplements the previous "211 and 985" initiatives.

"In order to build the world-class university and world-class disciplines, the Chinese government has been taking drastic measures in recent decades, including the '211 Project' (whose name refers to 100 universities in the 21st century), the '985 Project' (whose title refers to the month and year in which it was announced), an innovation platform for advantageous disciplines, development programs for key disciplines, the plan for enhancing the innovation ability of higher education institutions, etc. All these programs are for the purpose of funding and supporting the world-class universities and disciplines, improving the educational quality and innovation ability, furthering global academic cooperation, and attracting and retaining first-rate scholars and faculty. Moreover, the central government takes the responsibility in allocating the special funds to support the targeted universities and disciplines by means of a more centralized budget and finance system. And it also urges local governments to offer assistance for the 'world-class' initiative in terms of finance, policy, and resources" [Shen et al. 2016, 8].

With regards to international students, and consistent with the Chinese Government [2009] higher education policy document, there is an intention to increase student numbers from circa 380,000 in 2014 (15% increase from 2012) to 500,000 by 2020 (Tables 3, 4).

Table 3 illustrates the increasing numbers of students choosing to study in China, both formally registered for awards and those who study in China for short-term periods, e.g. to spend some time learning the language and/or to experience the culture. The total number of international students has increased from 377,054 in 2014 to 442,773 in 2016, an increase of 17.4%. Of those students, and over the same period, there has been a 28% increase in students choosing to register for a formal award (from 164,394 to 209,966) and, of those, there has been a 33% increase in the numbers registered for Masters degrees or Doctor of Philosophy degrees (increase from 47,900 to 63,867). With regards to destinations, the top two locations are Beijing and Shanghai.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the countries of origin and illustrates the continued importance of Korea, the USA and Thailand but also shows the relative increased importance of countries such as Pakistan and India.

TABLE 3. International students in China: profile for 2014–2016

Specification	2014		2015		2016	
Total number	377 054		397 635		442 773	
Increase number from previous year	20 555		20 581		45 138	
Increase from previous year (%)	5.7		5.5		11.4	
Share in total number on long-term study seeking formal award (%)	164 394 (44)		184 799 (46)		209 966 (47)	
Share in total number on short-term study (%)	212 660 (56)		212 836 (54)		232 807 (53)	
Total	377 054 (100)		397 635 (100)		442 773 (100)	
Of total number on long--term study, number on Masters/Doctors	47 990 (MSc = 35 876) (PhD = 12 114)		53 572 (MSc = 39 205) (PhD = 14 367)		63 867 (MSc = 45 816) (PhD = 18 051)	
Increase from previous year (%)	18.2		11.6		19.2	
Number of originating countries	203		202		205	
Student origin: continents as procentage of total (%)						
Asia	60		60		60	
Europe	18		17		16	
Africa	11		12		14	
America	9		9		9	
Oceania	2		2		1	
Share of top 10 Chinese destination cities/ /provinces (%)	Beijing	74 342	Beijing	73 779	Beijing	77 234
	Shanghai	55 911	Shanghai	55 218	Shanghai	59 887
	Tianjin	25 270	Zhejiang	25 658	Jiangsu	32 228
	Jiangsu	23 209	Jiangsu	25 489	Zhejiang	30 108
	Zhejiang	22 190	Tianjin	25 411	Tianjin	26 564
	Guangdong	21 298	Guangdong	23 015	Liaoning	25 273
	Liaoning	21 010	Liaoning	22 784	Guangdong	24 605
	Shandong	17 896	Shandong	17 903	Shandong	19 829
	Hubei	15 839	Hubei	17 670	Hubei	19 263
	Heilongjiang	12 056	Heilongjiang	12 085	Yunnan	14 925
Chinese Government scholarship (%)	10		10		11	

Source: WWW 1.

With regards to student mobility and projections, the British Council [2014] has highlighted the continued significance of students outbound from China, alongside other countries including India, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Pakistan, on the basis of projections to 2024. However, it is also important to note the increased significance

TABLE 4. International students in China: top 15 countries of origin in 2014–2016

2014			2015			2016		
Rank	Country	Number	Rank	Country	Number	Rank	Country	Number
1	Republic of Korea	62 923	1	Republic of Korea	66,672	1	Republic of Korea	70 540
2	United States	24 203	2	United States	21 975	2	United States	23 838
3	Thailand	21 296	3	Thailand	19 976	3	Thailand	23 044
4	Russia	17 202	4	India	16 694	4	Pakistan	18 626
5	Japan	15 057	5	Russia	16 197	5	India	18 177
6	Indonesia	13 689	6	Pakistan	15 654	6	Russia	17 971
7	India	13 578	7	Japan	14 085	7	Indonesia	14 714
8	Pakistan	13 360	8	Kazakhstan	13 198	8	Kazakhstan	13 996
9	Kazakhstan	11 764	9	Indonesia	12 694	9	Japan	13 595
10	France	10 729	10	France	10 436	10	Vietnam	10 639
11	Vietnam	10 658	11	Vietnam	10 031	11	France	10 414
12	Germany	8 193	12	Germany	7 536	12	Laos	9 907
13	Mongolia	7 920	13	Mongolia	7 428	13	Mongolia	8 508
14	Malaysia	6 645	14	Laos	6 918	14	Germany	8 145
15	United Kingdom	5 920	15	Malaysia	6 650	15	Malaysia	6 880
...	other	139 917	...	other	151 491	...	other	173 779
		Total			Total			Total
		377 054			397 635			442 773

Source: WWW 2.

of China in terms of inbound students. There are also some interesting trends within the student mobility figures. For instance:

- Note: international trends specifically re Chinese students e.g. more studying in Dubai (304 in 2010, 815 in 2015 – see China Daily 25 May 2015) reflecting increased economic ties between China and Dubai and the fact there are 26 branches of international universities from 11 countries, all built in last 10 years. Dubai is attractive to Chinese students in part because it is multinational. "Eventually, I think we will have some branch universities from China open in Dubai" (Abdulla Al Karam, Director-General of Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority).
- Also note, more Indians now studying in China (13,600 in 2014, up from 765 10 years ago, "China Daily" 25 May 2015). Most popular are medical courses and then Chinese language and culture. This contrasts with around 2,000 Chinese students each year study in India (low fees, low living costs and English-speaking).

Given the significance and scale of student numbers relating to China, inbound and outbound, it is not surprising that higher education institutions have increasingly chosen to establish a presence in China [OBHE 2016].

FACTORS MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO SELECT HE PROVIDER

Higher education provision is considered a service as it offers a product, which is intangible, cannot be stored, touched and seen in advance [Zeithaml 1981]. Due to these features selecting the right Programme and deciding which higher education provider to choose can be challenging for a prospective student as they would have to rely on other cues such as word-of-mouth recommendation, institution reputation, or level of fee. Usually a literature distinguishes three types of factors students are influenced by when confronting a Programme or Institution choice: push factors, pull factors, and factors attributable to an individual's psychological makeup [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Wilkins 2010, Rembielak 2015].

Push factors are those that push students out of their home country and pull factors are those that are in either host country or host institution, attracting prospective international students.

As push factors you can specified as follows:

- commonality of Language [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Wilkins 2010, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];
- geographical proximity of host country [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Abubakar et al. 2010, Wilkins et al. 2012];
- availability of science or technology based programmes [Mazzarol 2002];
- perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system available in home country [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002];
- GNP growth rate of home country [Agarwal and Winkler 1985, McMahon 1992];
- cost of HE in host country [Agarwal and Winkler 1985];
- priority placed on education by government [McMahon 1992];
- image [Yavas and Shemwell 1996, Landrum et al. 1998, Padlee et al. 2010];
- range of courses [Mazzarol 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Pimpa 2005, Cubillo et al. 2006, Abubakar et al. 2010];
- reputation for quality [Mazzarol 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Cubillo et al. 2006, Padlee et al. 2010, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];
- quality of staff and staff expertise [Lin 1997, Mazzarol 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Padlee et al. 2010];
- accommodation [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Maringe and Carter 2007, Bodycott 2009];
- degree of innovation and use of IT [Mazzarol 1998];
- presence of students from students' home country [Mazzarol et al. 1997, Lin 1997, Bodycott 2009].

As pull factors you can specified as follows:

- economic and cultural links between source and host countries [McMahon 1992];
- availability of scholarships and other assistance at the host institution [McMahon 1992];
- course and career information [Joseph and Joseph 2000];
- reputable degree programme, degree valued in home country, university reputation [Joseph and Joseph 2000, Chen 2008, Padlee et al. 2010, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];

- attractive costs [Joseph and Joseph 2000, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Abubakar et al. 2010];
- host's national political interests in the home country through foreign assistance or cultural links and knowledge about host country [McMahon 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003];
- international recognition of host country and of host institution [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003];
- quality of education and institution and university reputation [Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Binsardi and Ekwuluogo 2003, Pimpa 2005, Li and Bray 2007, Maringe and Carter 2007, Chen 2008, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];
- ease of university admissions and immigration procedures, legal stability [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Maringe and Carter 2007, Chen 2008];
- international education experience [Maringe and Carter 2007];
- use of government promotion agencies [Mazzarol 1998, Maringe and Carter 2007];
- employment during and after study [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Maringe and Carter 2007, Chen 2008, Bodycott 2009, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];
- image [Yavas and Shenwell 1996, Landrum et al. 1998, Padlee et al. 2010];
- accommodation [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Maringe and Carter 2007, Bodycott 2009];
- safety [Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Chen 2008];
- variety of offered coursed [Mazzarol 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Pimpa 2005, Cubillo et al. 2006, Abubakar et al. 2010];
- good facilities at university; library facilities [Pimpa 2005, Abubakar et al. 2010, Padlee et al. 2010];
- recommendation from family, friends, and agents [Gatfield and Chen 2006, Abubakar et al. 2010, Padlee et al. 2010];
- multicultural environment and opportunity to mix with other students [Chen 2008, Abubakar et al. 2010, Wilkins and Husmain 2011];
- academic support [Bodycott 2009];
- quality of staff and staff expertise [Lin 1997, Mazzarol 1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, Padlee et al. 2010];
- rankings [Wilkins and Husmain 2011, Wilkins et al. 2012].

Although the commonly used theoretical framework for researching the patterns of international students' decision making process is the push-pull factor model, it has limitations [Li and Bray 2007]. It has to be acknowledged that apart from the push-pull factors there are also individual preferences and personal characteristics, which influence students' decision making process with regards to the choice of study, for example: personal reasons, personal preferences, academic ability, socioeconomic background.

METHODOLOGY

The research involved students studying one year of their business-related Masters programme of a European university and doing so at a branch campus in Shanghai, China. The quantitative research took place in February 2017. In total 18 students out of

24 took part in a survey via Surveymonkey tool, which gives 75% response rate. This is a very specific group of students as it constitutes of international students, who came from a home institution in Europe to study in Shanghai branch only selected modules for duration of one year, after which they come back to their main institution to complete their five-year degree programme. In terms of the demographics 10 of the respondents (55%) were male and 8 female (45%). All of them were 21–25 years old and represented nationalities of 5 countries: France, Italy, India, Mexico and Australia. With regards to professional experience 7 students (39%) had no working experience prior to their studies, 9 (50%) had one year working experience, 1 (5%) had 1–3 years and 1 (5%) had 4–5 years of working experience, and nobody had more than 5 years of working experience prior to joining the programme.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings show that majority of the students had the study financed by their families – 15 of the respondents, 6 out of 18 respondents used a loan, 3 obtained a scholarship and 3 financed the studies themselves. Only 1 student was supported by the employer. Some of the mentioned students got their funding from two or three sources, for example: family and loan (2), family and scholarship (2), loan combined with family and scholarship (1), loan combined with family and their own funds (1), themselves with family funds (1).

When enquired about the specific branch in Shanghai 9 students responded they found out about it from the university website, 4 from the university print materials, 4 from rankings, 3 from education guides, 2 from the internet and friends, and 1 from the family and social media (LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook). Some of the students found out about this specific branch from more than one source.

In the response to evaluate the influences of various factors on their decision to study in China/Shanghai campus 9 of the respondents (50%) stated that the University recruitment agents were either important or a very important factor, whereas for 6 (33%) it was neutral and for 3 (16%) it was an unimportant factor. The importance of this factor is in line with Gatfield and Chen [2006], Abubakar et al. [2010], Padlee et al. [2010]. For 9 students (50%) their family influence was either very unimportant or unimportant whereas 4 (23%) considered it important or very important, which contradicts with Gatfield and Chen [2006], Abubakar et al. [2010], Padlee et al. [2010]. Seven students (38%) were influenced by perceived level of personal safety in China, which is also agreed with Binsardi and Ekwulugo [2003], Chen [2008]. The influence of their colleagues or friends was perceived as unimportant or very unimportant factor for 11 respondents (61%), which contradicts Gatfield and Chen [2006], Abubakar et al. [2010], Padlee et al. [2010].

Answering an open question, regarding the influences on their decision to study this one year in Shanghai, students mentioned about their own willingness to experience Chinese culture, to investigate new opportunities in China in the future, to visit an Asian country, and influence of a relatively low cost of living in China.

With regards to the evaluation of motivations for students' decision to study in China/ /Shanghai the respondents' answers are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Evaluation of motivations for students decision to study in China/Shanghai (Likert scale 1–5, where: 1 – very unimportant, 2 – unimportant, 3 – neutral, 4 – important, 5 – very important) – the factors with average rate above 4.0

	Very unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral (neither important nor unimportant)	Important	Very important	Weighted Average
To become more employable	0	0	(6%) 1	(33%) 6	(61%) 11	4.5
To experience a different place	0	0	(11%) 2	(11%) 2	(78%) 14	4.7
To have an opportunity to live in China/Shanghai	(6%) 1	(6%) 1	(6%) 1	(17%) 3	(65%) 12	4.3
To have an opportunity to study in China/Shanghai	(6%) 1	0	(6%) 1	(27%) 5	(61%) 11	4.4
To study with people from all over the world	0	(6%) 1	(22%) 4	(33%) 6	(39%) 7	4.0
To get a better study experience than in my country	0	(6%) 1	(6%) 1	(33%) 6	(55%) 10	4.4
To enhance my language skill	(6%) 1	(6%) 1	0	(10%) 2	(78%) 14	4.5
To deepen my knowledge about Chinese culture	0	(6%) 1	(10%) 2	(39%) 7	(45%) 8	4.2
Total responses	(100%) 18					

Source: own research.

Looking at the weighted average (from five-point Likert scale, where: 1 – very unimportant, 2 – unimportant, 3 – neutral, 4 – important, 5 – very important) it can be seen that the most important motivations were: the willingness to experience a different place (scored 4.7), to become more employable (4.5), which is in line with Binsardi and Ekwulugo [2003], Maringe and Carter [2007], Chen [2008], Bodycott [2009], Wilkins and Husmain [2011], to enhance their language skills (4.5), to have an opportunity to study in Shanghai/China (4.4), to get a better study experience than in their country (4.4), to have an opportunity to live in Shanghai/China (4.3), to deepen their knowledge about Chinese culture (4.2), and to study with people from all over the world (4.0), which is in line with Maringe and Carter [2007], Chen [2008], Abubakar et al. [2010], Wilkins and Husmain [2011]. The least important factor pointed by students was to gain status among their peers or friends (2.4).

With regards specifically to the choice of this particular programme, taking into account the five-point Likert scale, the most important factor was the delivery of this programme in English (rated average 4.6). This is in line with research of Mazzarol and Soutar [2002], Wilkins and Husmain [2011]; however, this does not mean that we have a proper commonality of language as would be for example English at an English speaking country but this refers more to the language in which the programme is delivered.

Perception of the programme, as generally attractive, balance in the syllabus between theoretical and practical issues, accreditations of the programme and information on the programme on the website, and the accreditations of the programme, and ease of the application process were considered as quite important factors scored above 3 points on average, which is supported by Binsardi and Ekwulugo [2003], Maringe and Carter [2007], Chen [2008]. The Open Day, the programme timetable and the programme fee were considered very unimportant factors (less than 2 points average).

Surprisingly, contrary to Mazzarol and Soutar [2002], Abubakar et al. [2010], Wilkins et al. [2012], geographical proximity of host country was not considered an important factor, as students preferred to select a branch which was situated far from their European main campus. Also presence of students from students' home country contradicted Mazzarol et al. [1997], Lin [1997], Bodycott [2009], as it was not considered a motivator to select this branch.

With regards to the motivators to select the particular programme students highlighted the following factors: to become more employable (4.6 average in five-point Likert scale), for their personal development (4.4 average), to increase their professional network (3.9), and to obtain a higher status (3.6).

They appreciated the possibility to have an opportunity to study for a year in another campus and treated it as an added value, which made this programme unique and attractive. Thanks to this the students had an opportunity to experience study abroad and at the same time they did not have to study the entire programme there, which to those of them who studied in their home place meant cutting their cost of travel and accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study shows that there are a number of factors that play a very important role in students' selection of a the programme and their place to study. The context of this research is unique in that the sample was taken at a European university's branch located in China and the surveyed students studied there for one year only. The research focused exclusively on the factors that influenced these students' choice of this particular Chinese branch and the programme (modules) delivered there, purposefully ignoring the initial reasons to select the host institution and their main programme of study though it is possible that the actual initial choice was itself influenced by the opportunity to study at a branch campus in another country, including China.

It is worth pointing out that China is not simply just another country students decide to study in. It is now an extremely significant world player, it is projected to overtake the USA as the largest economy, students will enhance their long-term career prospects by experiencing Chinese culture and if possible learning Mandarin or at least establishing some level of proficiency. These factors all make China very attractive as a place to study and experience.

The findings reported here indicate that, within the specific context of this survey, contrary to some published research findings, it is not push but pull factors that were most influential in the decision to study in an international branch campus. Much of the research on student mobility investigates the motivation of international students to study

abroad but, in this case, the students have selected a five-year programme in their home European institution, one which gave them an opportunity to study for a year in one of its international branches abroad. This means that they were not pushed away from their home country but rather given a chance to experience study abroad so the motivation would reflect pull factors, including respondents' perception of China as a safe and economical place to live. Its distance from the students' host institution is not a discouraging factor, indeed it may be the opposite for students of this age group as, perhaps, geographical distance might reinforce the sense of experiencing something quite different. The survey also highlights the importance of the university and its agents for the students' decision making This finding is of a crucial value to the university and its management to assure they have appropriate members of staff in place to help students make their choices and to provide them with the best service.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study looks at only one group of students at the European university branch in China so the sample is small and the results cannot be generalized. Further investigation could be made with a bigger sample at this branch. Another possibility is to perform a qualitative research, which would provide a more profound analysis.

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Summary. This paper investigates reasons why students decide to study abroad, taking into consideration push, pull and individual psychological factors. The research took place in China in a European university branch in Shanghai, where international students were surveyed. Although up to date there was a lot of research on international students' motivations to study abroad, testing various push and pull factors models, and there is only one piece of research looking specifically at students motivations with regards to international branch campuses but at Arabic context. The gap created the opportunity for the present investigation. This paper is the first piece of research that examines international students' motivations to select a European university branch in China. The findings indicate that pull factors could be more important in influencing students to study at international branches of European universities.

Key words: international students, international branch campuses, students' decision, influencers, motivators

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