



THE BEHAVIORS OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN CHOOSING ABROAD STUDIES

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Abstract: *In the context of a high development of economic globalization, international education is becoming increasingly popular. A large number of Chinese students are choosing every year to study abroad, making China one of the largest countries that provide international outgoing students. The research on the behaviors of Chinese university students studying abroad helps to uncover the underlying rules and mechanisms of international education, as well as reveal effective strategies to attract more Chinese outgoing students. Additionally, marketing strategies for Chinese university students studying abroad are proposed in the conclusion.*

JEL classification: I23, M31, M37

Key words: marketing strategy, outgoing students, Chinese universities, quantitative research, educational marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of outgoing students from Chinese universities has shown a rapid growth and diversification trend. With the continuous development of China's economy and the promotion of globalization, more and more students choose to continue their studies overseas. This trend is reflected in the increasing number of students studying abroad, the variety of study destinations, the complexity of motivations for studying abroad, the diversity of study abroad forms, and the broad employment prospects.



As the domestic education level improves and family economic conditions rise, more students have the opportunity and means to study overseas. The demand for talents with an international perspective and cross-cultural competence is also growing.

In the same time, study abroad destinations are becoming more diversified. Alongside traditional popular destinations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, emerging destinations such as Canada, New Zealand, and Germany are gaining popularity among Chinese students. Each country's unique education system, cultural atmosphere, and employment opportunities attract students from various backgrounds and interests.

Motivations for studying abroad are becoming increasingly diverse. In addition to seeking better educational resources and language skills, students are placing greater importance on experiencing different cultures, expanding their international horizons, and enhancing personal growth and development. These varied motivations influence students' study abroad decisions.

The forms of studying abroad are also becoming more varied. In addition to traditional undergraduate and graduate programs, students are favouring short-term exchange programs, summer programs, internships, and visits. These different study abroad options not only enhance students' experiences but also provide more opportunities to engage with international standards.

The employment prospects for international students after completing their studies are a major concern. Some students choose to work or pursue further studies abroad, gaining international work experience and expanding their network for career development. Others choose to return to China, leveraging their overseas study experience for favorable positions in the domestic job market and broader career opportunities.

The study about of outgoing Chinese university students is of great significance for the internationalization of Chinese education. Firstly, studying abroad allows students to access international cutting-edge educational resources and advanced teaching methods, enhancing their academic level and innovation abilities, and contributing to the enhancement of domestic education quality. Secondly, students returning from overseas studies bring back valuable international experiences and multicultural perspectives, which promote the internationalization of teaching and research in domestic universities, fostering academic exchanges and cooperation between China and foreign countries. Additionally, studying



abroad has bolstered the international influence and competitiveness of Chinese universities, attracting more international students to study in China, thus further advancing the globalization of Chinese education. Therefore, investigating this phenomenon is crucial for gaining a better understanding of and formulating strategies for China's education internationalization, ultimately advancing overall educational progress. The main research objectives were: (1) To identify the countries and universities preferred by outgoing Chinese students; (2) To find out the main study cycle preferred by outgoing students; (O3) To identify the main financing ways used by outgoing students; (O4) To rank the main reasons for choosing to study abroad.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is widely accepted that internationalization of higher education is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education institutions and systems” (Knight,2004). De Wit et al. (2015) define internationalization as "the intentional process of incorporating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of higher education, with the aim of enhancing the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and making a meaningful contribution to society". The internationalization of higher education encompasses a wide range of goals, the primary objectives include diversifying financial income through the attraction of international students, sending domestic students and teaching staff abroad to enhance global perspectives, and fostering educational cooperation with foreign HEIs to enrich the resources of domestic universities (Sharipov,2020).

Attracting international students is a crucial goal for universities, as they bring economic, cultural, and academic benefits to both the universities and the countries (Abu-Rumman & Qawasmeh, 2021). Institutional engagement has facilitated career services development to enhance students' chances of entering the job market, and universities with specialized support services attract more students (Rickmann, et. et, 2020). Employability and employment prospects may attract international students, while they are not necessarily the primary driving force behind institutional internationalization efforts (Santa & Haj,2020).



Students choose to study abroad for various reasons, such as enhancing self-confidence in a foreign environment, broadening their cultural awareness, acquiring language skills, and gaining global perspectives on education (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Dantas, 2007). Chevalier (2022) points out that the number of international students is strongly influenced by proximity to the host country and a shared language. Ryan (2005) regards that universities should both open doors to international students and ensure curriculum is accessible. The reputation of the course and location of the institution are the most important factors in the students' decision-making process (Russell, 2005). The most effective methods used by universities to attract international students are their English website, word of mouth, International Education Fairs, promotion portals, videos, and international partnerships (Fit, 2020).

In order to attract the interest of potential students, higher education institutions engage in various intensive promotional activities to capture the attention of the public, particularly prospective students (Onsardi et al., 2021). University decision-makers must consider cultural diversity's impact on international students' expectations (Polat, 2015). Addressing needs, offering high-quality educational services, improving service delivery, and fostering long-term relationships should be more responsive to students for modern universities (Zervina & Stukalina, 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate the behaviors of outgoing students, a quantitative research based on survey was conducted. A questionnaire was used for data collection, which contained various types of questions and measurement scales. The questionnaire design was revised multiple times in order to include suitable questions meant to achieve the research objectives. The Chinese students that have studied abroad were established as researched population. The data was collected online, by sending the questionnaire on various communication platforms popular in China, like WECHAT and QQ. More than 2000 survey questionnaires were distributed and only data from students who completed entirely the survey were included in analysis. During the survey, it was noted that many students with international experience opted not to participate for various reasons. Finally a number of 303 students were included in the research sample.



Additionally, outgoing Chinese students displayed a higher level of concern for information security, only responding to survey questionnaires received from their coordinators, teachers, friends, acquaintances, or individuals with whom they had a relationship. Unsolicited contacts typically led to refusals. Data analysis and statistical methods were applied to the valuable data, leading to the presentation of scientific research results and discussions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey among the 303 outgoing student leaving China reveal that the main abroad study destinations are 24 countries or districts (see Fig. 1), which are USA, Germany, Japan, UK, South Korea, Romania, Australia, Finland, Russia, New Zealand, Italy, France. Other countries mentioned by the sample members are Belgium, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong (China), Thailand, Belarus, Ukraine, Switzerland, Malaysia, Philippines, Denmark, Vietnam. The top five abroad study destinations are USA, Germany, Japan, UK, and South Korea. The diversified abroad study country makes the study respondents represent more country education and culture. It is also found out that some students have studied in more than one country or district, and data statistics choose their first abroad study country as the study case.

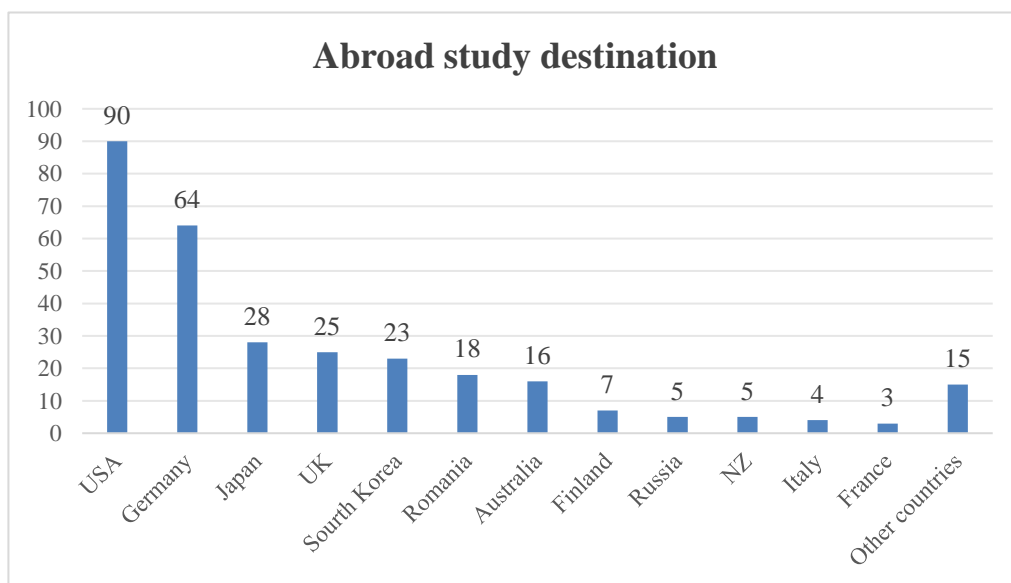


Fig. 1– Abroad study destination of outgoing students leaving China

The analyzed students mentioned a number of 113 overseas universities in which they have studied or are students at (see Fig. 2), with the top five universities being Benedictine University in the US (56 answers), Wismar University in Germany (38 answers), Kumamoto University in Japan (18 answers), Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences in Germany (15 answers), and Transilvania University of Brasov in Romania (14 answers), and most of the rest of universities just have a single respondent. It is found that some students have studied in more than one single university abroad, so that these results include only their first university as the study case.

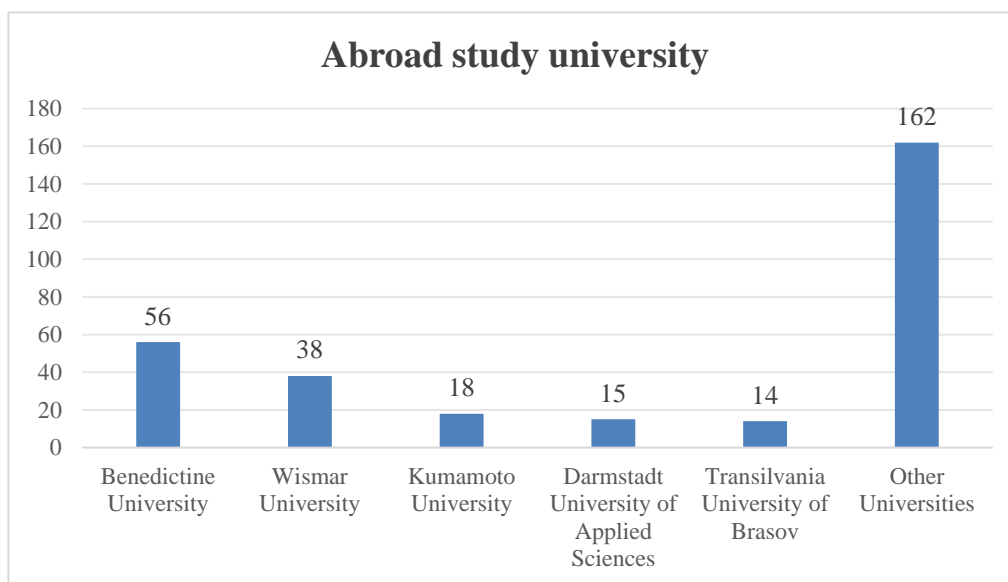


Fig. 2 – Host universities of outgoing students leaving China

The research results revealed that the number of outgoing students leaving China who studied in master programs is the largest one, followed by short studies, doctoral studies, and bachelor, which represents the smallest number (see Fig. 3). Starting from these results, we can conclude that the universities should give more attention to master and short studies as they are the most preferred by students.

It is also well-known that financial support plays a very important role in international education, and it should be carefully considered by both type of universities involved in student exchanges (host universities and sending universities). Thus, one of our research objective (O3) was to identify the main financing ways used by outgoing students.

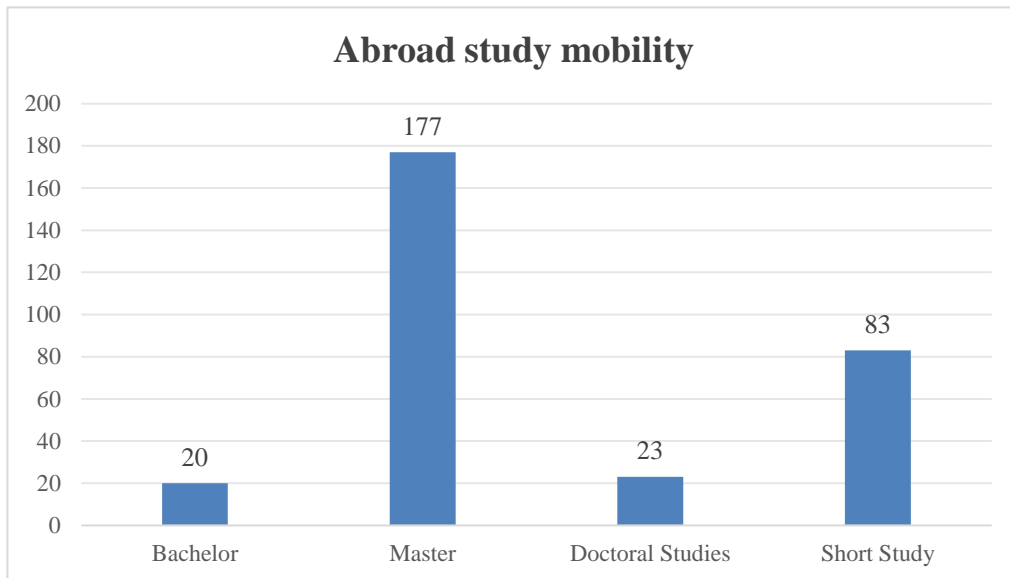


Fig.3 – Types of mobilities chosen by outgoing Chinese students

The participants to this survey mentioned various financial support they received for their international studies. However the self-funding of the abroad studies are the main financing way used by outgoing Chinese students (see Fig.4). After self-funding, the full scholarship either from host institution and host country listed the second and the third, which proves both the host institutions and origin countries are trying the best to develop international education.

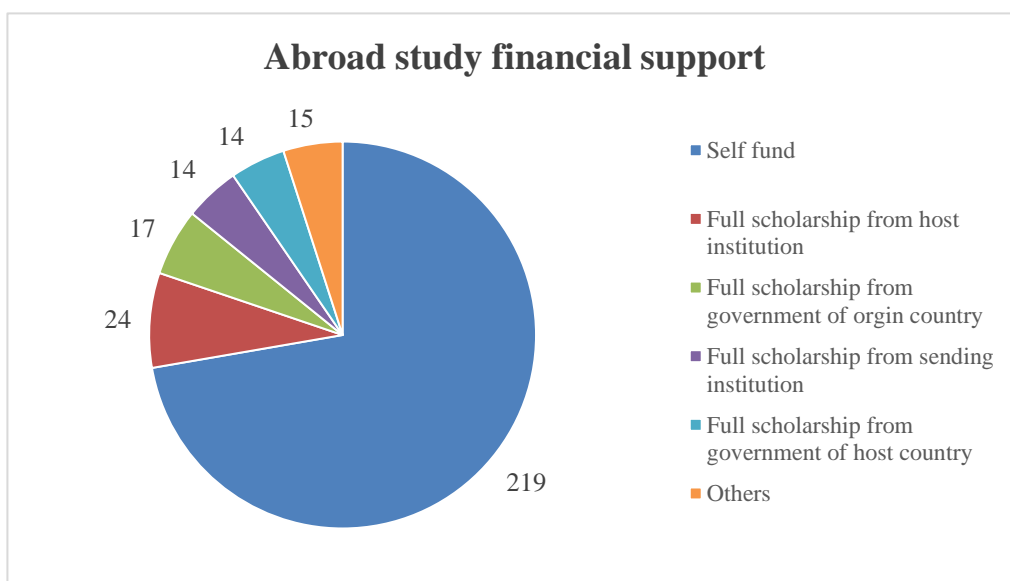


Fig. 4 – Abroad study financial support of outgoing students leaving China



In international education, there is always a question raised among leadership: how can we attract international students? In order to solve this problem, we need to understand the reasons behind their decision to study abroad. In order to rank the abroad study main reasons the following question was used in the survey: “Please rate the attraction of the following incentives that drive you to study abroad”, in which a five-level Likert Scale, with equal distances between consecutive levels was used (5 means very attractive and 1 means not at all attractive). A number of 10 items, which represents reasons to study abroad, were used and the means calculated for each item are presented in Table 1.

Table. 1 – Descriptive statistics for the main reasons to study abroad of outgoing students leaving China

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Study resources	303	4	1	5	4.29	0.858
Program quality	303	4	1	5	4.25	0.864
Professional teachers	303	4	1	5	4.24	0.873
Research facilities	303	4	1	5	4.14	0.954
University ranking	303	4	1	5	4.10	1.008
Campus environment	303	4	1	5	4.01	0.963
Student life	303	4	1	5	4.01	0.977
Student oriented management	303	4	1	5	4.00	1.078
Cultural diversity	303	4	1	5	3.70	1.187
Easiness of graduation	303	4	1	5	3.58	1.228

From the descriptive statistics, it is found that outgoing students leaving China hold positive view about all the measured reasons as all the mean scores are above 3 points. From the ranking of reasons according to the mean value, the most attractive is study resources, followed by study program quality, professional teachers, research facilities, university ranking, campus environment/student life, student oriented management, culture diversity, and easiness of graduation. The ranking of reasons to choose abroad studies will help



universities to better manage their programs and their strategies to attract international students.

5. CONCLUSION

Studying abroad is of great strategic significance for Chinese university students. It broadens their international perspective, promotes cross-cultural communication, and enhances their comprehensive quality and competitiveness. This not only facilitates the internationalization of China's higher education but also fosters international cooperation and exchange, nurturing more talents with a global vision and innovative abilities. In order to meet the diverse needs of Chinese students studying abroad and align with the strategic goals of universities, the development strategy for Chinese college students studying abroad should focus on enhancing the quality of education, expanding the opportunities for overseas education, diversifying study abroad channels, nurturing international talents, improving study abroad services, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and establishing a global network for international cooperation.

Based on the research results the following activities are proposed:

1. Enhancing the quality of education entails improving teaching standards, enhancing the internationalization of curricula, and upgrading teaching methods to cultivate students with global competitiveness.
2. Expanding the scale of overseas education is essential to accommodate the growing number of students interested in studying abroad, providing them with more opportunities for international exposure and academic advancement.
3. Diversifying study abroad channels involves not only strengthening ties with traditional study abroad destinations but also establishing partnerships with other countries to facilitate inter-school exchanges and joint training programs.
4. Nurturing international talents can be achieved through offering a wide range of courses and activities focused on language, culture, international relations, and cross-cultural communication to broaden students' global perspective.

Enhancing study abroad services is crucial in providing comprehensive support to students, including assistance with visa applications, airport pick-up services, accommodation



arrangements, academic support, and guidance on employment opportunities to boost students' confidence and interest in studying abroad.

Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among students studying abroad is vital in fostering a culture of creativity and encouraging them to explore entrepreneurial ventures by providing them with resources and opportunities for entrepreneurial development. Thus, by international cooperation networks could be strengthened the collaborations with overseas universities, research institutions, and businesses, facilitating the exchange of study abroad experiences and resources, and promoting academic exchanges and partnerships.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM: The authors declare no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

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