

# Sheffield Hallam University

*Emerging values and implications for consumer decision-making: China's study abroad students*

HAYWARD, Robert

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**Emerging Values And Implications For  
Consumer Decision making:  
China's Study Abroad Students**

**Robert Hayward**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration**

**August 2020**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 50,527.

Name	<i>Robert William Hayward</i>
Date	<i>August 2020</i>
Award	<i>Doctor of Business Administration</i>
Faculty	<i>Sheffield Business School</i>
Director(s) of Studies	<i>Dr Wei Chen</i>

## Abstract

From the initial catalyst of the cultural awareness trip the researcher was a part of and the subsequent observations made during further business trips to China questions arose around the validity of the established culture literature in contemporary China and how Chinese culture impacts on the decision of where to study abroad.

The overarching aim of this research programme is to develop and test a conceptual framework that could help better understand the decision making process of Chinese students applying to study at a university in the United Kingdom. The intension is to identify differences and similarities in decision making in relation to the established cultural norms and if there are significant subcultures geographically across China.

A digital card sort was deployed that consisted of 75 variables, from which participants were asked to firstly identify which variables were part of their decision making process. Those that were part of the process were then ordered into three levels of significance – contributed to, were important and were essential. The results having a confidence level of 95%, the following variables are considered as essential:

- I wanted to study overseas.
- I want an international career.
- I wanted to study in English (language).
- I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects.
- I can achieve a world-recognised qualification.
- By studying overseas, I will be able to make my own decisions.

Further analysis and discussion determined that:

- A middle class exists in China, but is based on social capital.
- A cultural shift has been detected in the younger generation moving towards a more individualistic view of life.
- There are differences between genders in the decision making process.
- There are differences in exposure to international trade and global brands across China and this influences which variables are considered to be more significant within the decision making process.
- There is a need for a differentiated marketing message to be developed by organisations for optimal market penetration.

The thesis therefore makes several contributions to both knowledge and to practice.

Contributions to knowledge include:

- Recognising the premise on which the Chinese middle class is formed.
- Demonstrating a cultural shift in the millennial generation, moving towards a more individualist view of life.
- Identifying gender differences in the decision making process.
- Identifying how geographic location influences the significance of different decision making variables.
- Creation of a research instrument that enables cultural values to be recognised in the decision making process.

Contributions to practice include:

- The deeper understanding of the concept of middle class in China will assist organisations in their strategic marketing planning activities, as well as informing them on the focus of targeting communication processes.
- By having a new understanding of how millennial Chinese are moving towards a more individualistic life style, when compared to previous Chinese generations organisations will be able to develop products and services that are more aligned to this market segment.
- Higher education institutions will be better informed regarding curriculum design and the importance of including cultural experience within the overall student experience package.

Further research projects have been identified that will enhance the findings from this thesis and make further contributions to knowledge and practice:

- To extend the data collection from a mainly business base to encompass more subject disciplines such as computing, engineering, medicine.
- To adapt the context of the decision from higher education to other major purchases such as housing and travel.
- The research instrument can be repeated to establish a multi-generational perspective of Chinese decision making, degrees of power within the family context and further explore differences in gender.
- A more complete geographical picture could be developed, not just of China, but to include more collectivist societies around the world including Japan and India.

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to investigate what are the under-lying drivers that influence an international student as they decide where to study. Given that the international student market is a key business stream for many universities, there is a clear business case for understanding this to maximise the efficiency of marketing activities and subsequent revenues. Should marketing teams follow conventional western models of marketing communications treating all countries as a homogenous population, or should marketing activities be customised and tailored to suit different regions? Clearly, if identical marketing communication strategies are followed, the whole system is more efficient, but would this approach stimulate the appropriate decision making variables?

### **1.1 Background to the research journey**

This research journey started following a cultural awareness trip the researcher was a member of in May 2011. A group of academics and administrative staff from Sheffield Hallam University travelled to Beijing and Shanghai to experience and get a better understanding of Chinese culture, values and customs. In November of that year, the researcher returned to China on a recruitment trip which incorporated 10 cities across China. This is when the real learning took place and was the catalyst for the questioning of almost everything that had been said about Chinese culture and behaviour in the previous trip. It also began the process of exploring conventional 'western' literature on Chinese culture and how applicable it is to the China of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Returning from that recruitment trip the researcher had noted a number of very tangible differences. For example, some regions the population were taller and slimmer than in others, other regions had a darker skin complexion and rounder faces, the food was very different, the number of non-Chinese people observed differed, and the attitude towards a 'westerner' was different too. Some regions had a more developed infrastructure, some had more international businesses operating in the cities, some shops and restaurants had English translations / signage, some spoke much better English than others, and so on. The sheer size of the country resulted in temperature and climate differences, this was expected, but when in Beijing on a Monday and there is ice and bitterly cold winds and travelling to Guangzhou by the Friday and it's hot and humid these expectations suddenly become real lived experiences. As a result, the researcher

now likened China to Europe and not just one country as before. It would be like saying that all of Europe behaved the same; the Norwegians, the Spanish, the Irish, the Poles, the Germans, the Swiss, and the Greeks! Add to the geographic and climate differences, there is then the political, economic and social differences between Europe and China and all that that brings with it. There is a huge difference between a country that elects a party political leader, be that with a conservative, socialist or more liberal philosophy to one in which there is only one party. Surely no one would try to make this claim, so why does the literature describe China as a single entity?

The west has experienced a reasonably consistent period of consumer evolution, underpinned by a capitalist outlook over the last 100 plus years, where consumerism and individuality are the norm. The mainstream literature around marketing, consumer behaviour and consumer decision making has in general used this western capitalist philosophy on which to develop the theories and conceptual frameworks regularly applied in academia and industry today.

Whereas China has experienced more turbulent changes in that same period, from a feudal system, to state controlled communist state post World War II and now since the 1980s becoming a major player in the global economy and capitalist ventures. It is this condensed timeframe of social and business change that the researcher finds fascinating, especially given that there will be different generations (children, parents, grandparents, etc.) alive today that will have experienced these different phases of Chinese political, economic and social change.

Previous research on Chinas study abroad students suggests that the decision making process differs from Western processes due to the significance of numerous socio-cultural and intergenerational influences (Liu X. , 2014; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Chen, Lau, & Mair, 2011; Fan, 2002). This research falls into three broad areas of study;

1. Focuses on globalisation of higher education and the size of the Chinese market (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Knight, 2012; Wit, 2011).
2. Focuses upon socio-cultural and intergenerational influences (Tran T. T., 2013; Lee & Morrish, 2012; Tran P. , 2012; Chen, Lau, & Mair, 2011; Fan, 2002).
3. Focuses upon the decision making process itself (Wu, 2014; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazarrol & Soutar, 2002).

It is areas two and three that are of great interest to the author. The research undertaken previously has argued the significance of the social structure of China and the influence that cultural values, beliefs and norms play in daily life, especially in the role of social networks, piety,

and respect for knowledge. What this research has not explored to date is the strength of the socio-cultural influences on the decision making process itself, and if the phased internationalisation and economic reforms deployed by the Chinese Communist Party from the early 1980's has had any impact upon those influences.

## **1.2 Research aim and objectives**

The overarching aim of this research programme is to develop a framework in the context of the Chinese student applying to study at a UK university so that differences and similarities in the decision making process can be identified in relation to the established cultural norms and to identify if there are significant subcultures or habitas across China. The result of which will enable a more accurate understanding of and consideration of implications in relation to the purchase decision making process. Therefore, one should be able to identify the attributes of a product or service that are important to the whole population and attributes that need to be customised to appropriate sub-cultures providing a more sophisticated understanding of consumer decision making priorities.

The research programme objectives are:

1. decision makingTo confirm the appropriateness and completeness of the conceptual framework design.
2. To determine if there is a correlation between the exposure to international brands and a change in cultural values within the young generation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China.
3. To demonstrate that the conceptual framework enables differences and similarities of a specific population to be identified and prioritised.
4. To examine the implications of those differences and similarities on the decision making process.
5. To reflect upon the ability of the research method to engage with and extract meaningful data in a cross-cultural study.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Having identified a number of decision making stimuli a card sort was developed – in English and in Mandarin Chinese. The card sort was digitised to improve efficiency of completion and data analysis. A pilot study was carried out to check for logical ordering of the activities, clarification of communication and completeness of decision making stimuli.

The principles of fuzzy cognitive mapping were utilised to assist in the analysis of the data created from the digital card sorts. These identified the hierarchy of decision stimuli and any inter-dependent relationships between those stimuli. In addition, variables of age, gender and home location were analysed.

This research approach was important to administer carefully to maintain ‘face’ with the participants, and elicit meaningful data not just, what the participant thought the researcher would like to hear.

### **1.4 Overview of thesis**

Following the introduction to the research programme and the rationale for it, this thesis is structured into three main sections. First is the review of literature, next is the methodology and finally the findings of the research.

#### **1.4.1 Section 1 – Review of literature**

Having focused the thesis on exploring the decision making process of young Chinese as they apply to study overseas, one has to review the established literature around the variables of the topic. This section therefore synthesises literature into four chapters, each chapter being distinctly focused and extracting key issues to be considered when one designs the research mechanisms found in section two.

**Chapter 2 – The Higher Education Market Place** – Higher Education in the UK has undergone significant change following the changes to funding in the late 1990s and the dawn of the marketisation of higher education. This chapter explores what these changes have meant to UK universities and why the international student market is now so important for financial stability. The size of the international student market is reviewed and then specifically the Chinese market, highlighting aspects of higher education that are considered key to Chinese families.

**Chapter 3 – The Evolution Of Modern Day China** – Having explored why higher education is important to Chinese families, it is important to understand why this is so. This chapter explores how China has evolved into the major global economy it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The chapter begins with summarising the key phases of social development post World War II as China became a communist country, including the ‘Great Leap Forward’ and the ‘Cultural Revolution’, together with policies that organised and managed society.

**Chapter 4 – Culture, Values and Society** – By discovering how modern day China managed its population and evolved into the global power it is today, one also needs to understand how these social and economic strategies have impacted on the values and behaviour of Chinese society. This chapter reviews the study of culture and focuses on traditional Chinese values, Confucianism, and concepts including ‘face’ and ‘guānxi’. The chapter ends with a review of social stratification of modern day China and establishes that a middle class does exist, but with a different underpinning philosophy to the middle class of the West.

**Chapter 5 – Consumer Decision Making** – The established western literature on consumer decision making is reviewed, with attention being given to the Grand Models and the five phases often associated to these models. There is a deeper analysis of the decision making process but from a Chinese perspective, and therefore incorporates the findings from the previous chapters to establish an understanding of what are the key factors that influence the decision making process.

#### **1.4.2 Section 2 – Development of conceptual framework and methodology**

The review of literature has established that when studying what influences the decision for a Chinese student to study abroad, one should not simply transpose western capitalist business models over a population that is significantly different in its cultural, social and political structures. This section provides an overview of how the conceptual framework has been established in order to effectively study and identify the stimuli that have the greatest impact on the decision making process and therefore identify where a university should focus its strategic and operational activities.

**Chapter 6 – Development of the Conceptual Framework** – Having established that one needs to consider the decision making process in a different way when studying the Chinese international student, this chapter explains how the conceptual framework has been developed. Starting with the proposal that the decisions are made by considering factors that are firstly

intrinsic to the individual – about self-identity, and those that are more concerned with environmental influences and social structures. The result is a four-quadrant model that incorporates perspectives of:

1. Internal context specific,
2. Internal generic,
3. External context specific,
4. External general.

Each of the perspectives is then broken down into influencing factors developed from the literature review and subsequently a set of influencing factors are established that are related specifically to the Chinese student and what might influence the decision on where to study abroad.

**Chapter 7 – Methodology** – It is essential that one understands what kind of researcher you are and what it is the researcher is endeavouring to discover, this so that an appropriate research mechanism can be designed and mitigate against factors that might influence the outcomes. This chapter explores the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions the researcher holds and how these have contributed to the design and deployment of the research instrument. Ethical considerations for the research have been considered and comply with the research policies of Sheffield Hallam University and with GDPR regulations. A digitalised card sort was developed in Microsoft Forms, which enabled participants to prioritise decision making stimuli established in the previous chapter. Given that the decision making process is not a binary process in relation to the stimuli but has degrees of significance; fuzzy logic has been adopted to allow for variance. Fuzzy logic is an established technique that helps to identify any causal relationship between a set of variables and establish if a degree of influence exists between them. The responses from participants were collated automatically via Microsoft Forms and then exported in Microsoft Excel for sorting and analysis.

### 1.4.3 Section 3 – Analysis and discussion of results

**Chapter 8 - Findings** – Having collected the data via the digital card sort, it is necessary for that data to be organised so that meaning can be attributed to the outcomes. A basic statistical analysis of the data is carried out to assess the reliability of the data set, establishing a confidence level of 95%, further analysis is carried out to establish a hierarchy of factors that

influence the decision on where to study abroad for Chinese students. With the inclusion of some demographic data, the stimuli can be ordered initially into a general hierarchy and then then manipulated by specific demographics to determine which factors are consistent with the established literature predictions and which have evolved through China's economic reform strategies. In addition, the factors can be analysed to determine if there are any differences in the hierarchy of stimuli between geographic regions, gender and type of study.

**Chapter 9 - Discussion** – The generation of results needs to be explained in order to provide context and meaning. This chapter takes the findings and discusses their significance in relation to the chapters of the literature review, in other words in relation to decision making, cultural values and higher education. The findings are examined to determine if there are any shifts from the established literature. The key findings are then exposed in the chapter summary.

**Chapter 10 - Conclusions** –The drawing together of all stages of this research project is essential so that the findings can be understood within the context of the not only sample population studied, but also to generalise and demonstrate contributions to both knowledge and practice. Firstly a review of the extent to which the research aim and objectives have been fulfilled is considered. This is followed by identifying the implications for the UK higher education sector as a result of the research findings and also any wider implications are reflected upon. This is followed by consideration of the limitations of the research, which impact upon the reliability and credibility of the findings. Finally, the contributions to knowledge and practice are articulated.

## **1.5 Boundaries of the research**

This thesis sets out to establish a conceptual framework that enables the researcher to identify which stimuli are consistent across different regions of China and which, if any, have regional significance as Chinese students decide on which university to study abroad. Given that the established western literature does not easily transpose across to Chinese cultural values, a new conceptual framework has been developed. The intension of the research is not to develop a definitive list of marketing stimuli that under-pin the decision to study abroad, nor is it to establish a new cultural understanding of the young middle class of China, but is to focus on the hierarchy of stimuli in the decision making process and if there is any evidence of variation across China.

There is no intention to discuss the appropriateness of the marketization of Higher Education, but to acknowledge its existence and the impact this has on the decision making process. The same is true of the social and political policies of China, they are reviewed but the intention is to gain an understanding of their implications not to critique or make a value judgement.

## **1.6 Distinctiveness and contributions**

The results from this programme of research have established that several contributions can be made to knowledge and to practice. Contributions to knowledge include:

- A better understanding of the concept of middle class in China and how social capital underpins this which is a different premise to that of western societies.
- There is a cultural shift away from the traditional Chinese values of a collectivist society to more individualistic preferences in the millennial generation.
- A different set of priorities exist in the decision making process when focusing on gender preferences.
- The economic reform policy has influenced how different geographic regions perceive the significance of decision making variables.
- This study has developed a research instrument that enables cultural values to be recognised in the decision making process and allow for objective, generalisable knowledge. This is a contribution specifically to research methods literature.

In terms of practice, this research contributes:

- A deeper understanding of the concept of middle class in China which will assist organisations in their strategic marketing planning activities, as well as informing them on the focus of targeting communication processes.
- A new understanding of how millennial Chinese are moving towards a more individualistic life style, when compared to previous Chinese generations. Organisations will be able to develop products and services that are more aligned to this market segment.
- Higher education institutions will be better informed regarding recruitment strategies of Chinese students. In addition, they will be better able to design a curriculum that reflects the aspirations of Chinese students more appropriately and ensure that extra-curricular activities are enhanced with cultural experiences as a key part of the overall student

experience package. This is even more significant as universities mitigate against some of the potential risks created as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2. The Higher Education Market Place

### 2.1 Education as a business

With the fundamental changes to the funding of higher education since September 1998, universities have had to find alternative sources of revenue and taking a more market focused strategy than in previous decades (Van de Wende, 2001; Knight, 2004). Competition with an increasing range of providers and significant changes in student demographics has also contributed to a shift toward the market orientation of higher education (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012; Knight, 2004). Many higher education institutions have for some time now operated in a similar way to commercial businesses, using business terminology, referring to students as customers and conducting marketing activities (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Additionally, many attempt to create some form of differentiation between themselves and their competitors with the creation of a strong brand image or identity (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012).

Over the 20 years following the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 in England a body of research has explored the perception of the student as a consumer of education (Rodgers, et al, 2011; Freeman & Thomas, 2005). The marketisation of higher education now appears to be a feature of higher education systems (Barnett, 2011) and is embodied by the introduction of sector-wide performance indicators. Examples of this include the use of league tables and student satisfaction surveys and are intended to facilitate easier comparison between providers and inform choice (Brown, 2011). Within the universities, marketing departments have been developed and with this came the language of consumerism; target markets, brand development, brand values and image, positioning statements, advertising messages, customer relationship marketing, and so on (Svensson & Wood, 2007).

The UK Government regards this notion as empowering students and putting them at “the heart of the system” (BIS, 2011). The intention here being to strengthen the relationship between students and universities and encourage a partnership between the students and the academics. The learning partnership between students and academics has always been a feature of higher education (Woodall et al, 2012). However, university senior management now have a greater focus on taking more care of their students’ needs (Maringe, 2011) and view the educational experience as a contract that is supported by a ‘student’s charter’ (BIS, 2011). It is therefore natural if students are referred to as customers that they begin to act like customers and has encouraged a complaints culture to develop (Jones, 2010). What is clear is that universities have for some time demonstrated a managerialist style of governance, viewing their students as a

resource for marketing their services which has contributed to the evolution of the market orientated university (Luescher-Mamashela, 2010).

This market orientated approach is demonstrated by the application of the five phases of consumer decision making suggested by Armstrong & Kotler (2013) and Solomon et al (2010), there is clearly now a need or a desire for the population to hold a university degree in order to improve their chances of a career (phase one, recognition of the problem). This is followed by the collection of university information – interactive web pages, social media, open days, virtual tours, KIS statements, Teaching Excellence Framework, league positions via the Guardian or Times Higher Education for example, accreditations to professional bodies and awards, ranking, etc (phase two, information search). Phase three (alternative evaluation) then takes place via the UCAS application process as students narrow the options to a maximum of six universities and later further narrow this down to a preferred and insurance university (phase four, option choice). Finally as the students complete their studies they undertake a post purchase evaluation (phase five) by completing module review surveys, contributing to Student Voice activities and the National Students Survey.

## **2.2 Internationalisation of higher education**

The marketisation of higher education is something that is not limited to the UK higher education sector (Currie, 2004). Just as many industries have followed a strategy of globalisation, higher education is no different (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). With a focus of three dimensions in the way universities operate; developing international collaborations, intercultural literacy and global perspectives (Knight, 2004). Rizvi & Lingard (2010) argue that universities find themselves trying to satisfy two conflicting approaches to internationalisation. On one hand, universities are free to choose whomever they work with and establish geographic diversity. However, at the same time they are trying to form partnerships with universities that are of a similar status or prestige to enhance reputation and image. In addition to this paradox, is added the complexity of national politics and the relationships, partnerships and tensions of trade between different countries (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) or as Knight (2004) puts it the dynamic relationship between the bottom-up approach to internationalisation (the university) vs the top-down approach to internationalisation by national government / the sector.

The internationalisation of higher education manifests itself in more ways than just the strategy of internationalisation. Knight (2004) explains that the process is established by a number of activities including research collaboration between universities, conference attendance, study

exchanges, placements and internships. The British Council (2004) adds to this list the development of trans-national education partnerships, and the increasing use of online technology to support learning experiences and improved access to company information and personnel, bringing the workplace into the classroom.

A further aspect that has had a significant impact on the international higher education sector is what Macfarlane (2014) describes as a conflict of dualism; neo-liberalism vs vocationalism. The neo-liberalism of what are often referred to as the traditional universities delivering a broad based education that is not necessarily linked to the workplace, whereas the more modern universities have a much more career focused or vocational pedagogic philosophy. Macfarlane (2014) and Rizvi & Lingard (2010) argue that the development of a more vocationalist philosophy to higher education is found to be establishing itself in all nations, not just in the five major English speaking destination countries (MESDCs) of UK, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand but also across Europe and in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS nations).

Brooks & Waters (2015) add to this by arguing that the internationalisation of education is a vehicle to develop 'global capital' within students which helps to enhance personal competitive advantage within the labour market. As such international mobility has been seen as key to strategising education of young people from the national to the global arena.

### **2.3 International student recruitment**

International student recruitment is now an essential income stream for universities, with the (HESA, 2019) reporting that between the ten year period between the academic years 2006/07 and 2016/17 the number of international students studying in the UK increased by 41.8%, with the largest proportion of students coming from China and other East Asian countries (see Figure 1).

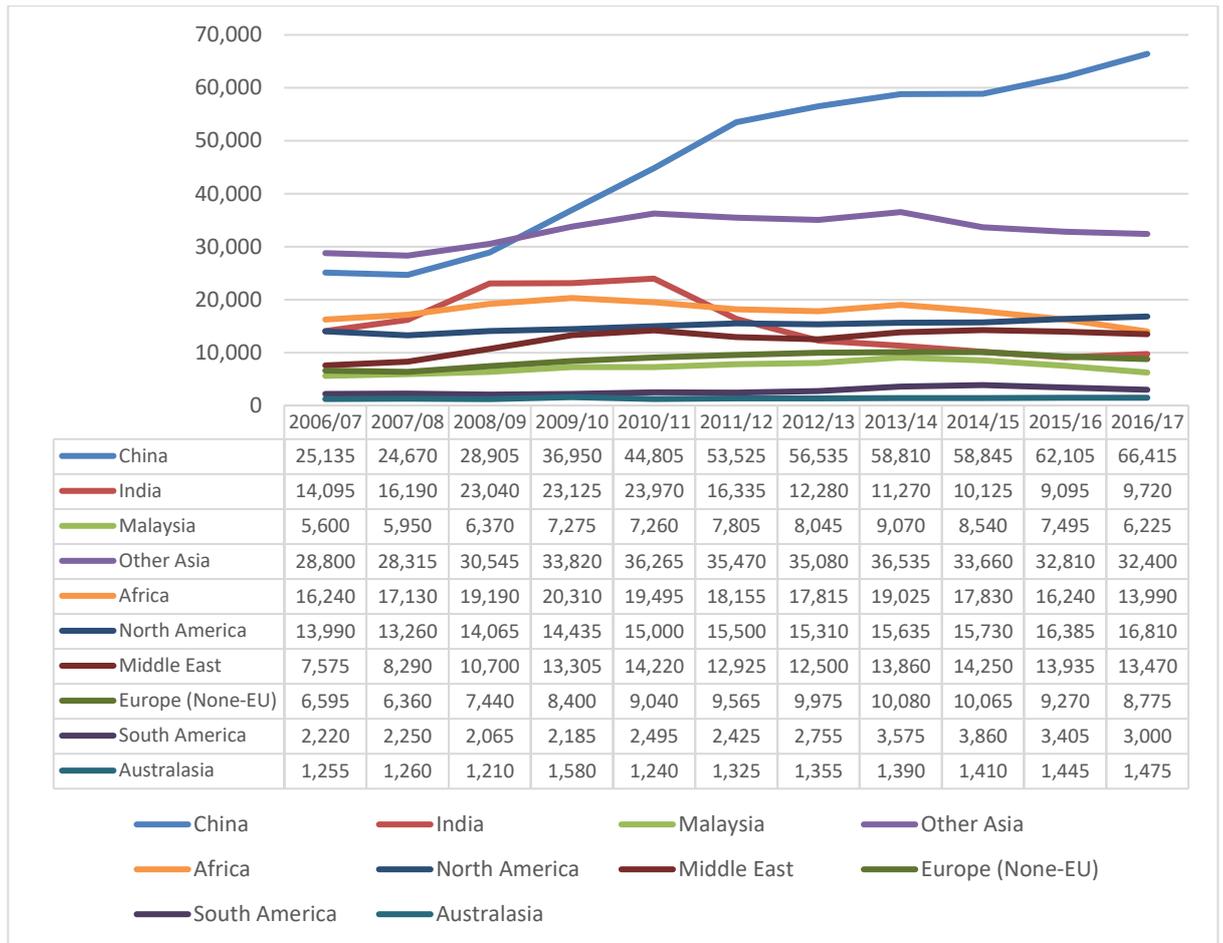


Figure 1: Non-UK students by country of domicile

(Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019)

International students are present in most UK universities, accounting for a considerable proportion of their student intake, and that they now represent an important part of UK university success (Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008; Knight, 2004). The 1980s and 1990s saw significant growth in international student mobility from within the European Union and from Asian countries, especially China. This growth in international student recruitment has continued into the 21st century despite changes to immigration policy, visa requirements and periods of economic turmoil across the globe. The decision made by international students of where to study abroad has resulted in enrolling to universities in the UK, USA, and Australia who have traditionally dominated the global market (Chadee & Naidoo, 2009; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Cummings, 1984). In 2016 the OECD reported that the top three countries for international student mobility were the USA enrolling 971,000 international students, the UK 432,000 international students and Australia 336,000 out of a total of 3.5 million students

(OECD, 2018). The OECD report goes on to highlight that Asia formed the largest group of international students with 1.9 million, and over 860,000 coming from China alone (OECD, 2018).

Since measuring the quality of education is difficult, reputation is a key aspect of marketing to students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012; Ivy, 2001). Mazzarol & Soutar (2012) and Suter & Jandl (2008) argue that traditionally the value of a university degree is often measured more by the university's reputation than by the content of its courses. Image is frequently viewed as an important component of quality and links directly to reputation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Böhm, et al., 2004), with Lee (2008) suggesting that the academic reputation of an institution may be even more significant when the student is committing to study abroad. To add complexity to this dynamic, the reputation of the host country (often influenced by government international policy) will also impact upon the decision of where an international student will decide to study (Grayet al, 2003) with general country campaigns designed to promote the host country and complement the marketing activities of individual universities (Gray, et al, 2003; Marginson, 2002). The OECD add to the importance of image and reputation by highlighting that often the local supply of quality higher education institutions is usually exceeded by the number of applicants (OECD, 2018).

## **2.4 The Chinese market**

As seen from Figure 1: Non-UK students by country of domicile the number of Chinese students enrolling to a UK university has consistently risen for over ten years and is by far the largest proportion of international students that study in the UK. Liu (2013) explains that after a decade of disruption to Chinese higher education during the Cultural Revolution, the National College Entrance Exam (the Gaokao) was reintroduced in 1977. The National Bureau of Statistics of China (2018) report that in 1978 8,560,000 students enrolled on an undergraduate programme of study in China, by 2017 that number had risen to 275,360,000 enrolling to study. The Chinese education system, especially the Gaokao, places an emphasis on high scores and rote learning and a focus on science and mathematics rather than on developing the individual in a more holistic way, with formal assessments often by examination. This arguably puts additional pressure on the Chinese student (and on his or her family) sitting the Gaokao to gain a place in the highly competitive Chinese university system (Yan, 2018; Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015).

Yan (2018) highlights that education has been seen as a priority by Chinese families for thousands of years and that with the one child policy and the economic reforms leading to

increased wealth has fuelled this dramatic growth. Hansen & Thøgersen (2015) argue that this rapid increase in provision has added both competition within the Chinese universities for the top performing students, and has contributed to Chinese student mobility seeking an international education as an “object of desire”. This desire includes much more than the technical and subject specific knowledge and skills, but also includes new ways of thinking and acting in the chosen field of study (critical thinking), improved (English) language abilities, a more practice-orientated / specialised education, a broader world view, intercultural networks and improved career prospects (Yan, 2018; Mok, 2016; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Wu, 2014; Henze & Zhu, 2012; Russell et al, 2010).

Bright Futures (2018) reports that the perceived quality of education is very important in deciding where to study. This refers to not only the ranking of the subject area and the university, but also the history of the university and the careers profiles of the alumni are important (Collins, 2012; Findlay et al, 2012; Sauder & Lancaster, 2006). HESA (2019) report that 41.6% of Chinese students study a business related subject, 21.3% engineering and science, 18.4% in the humanities, 12% arts and architecture and 6.7% other subjects including medicine.

## 2.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the process of marketization experienced in Higher Education since the late 1990s and why the international student market is so important for the financial stability of a modern university. In addition, the chapter identifies the growth and size of the international student market and focuses on the Chinese market which represents around a quarter of all international students.

Higher education availability in China is discussed, and the importance of education to Chinese society is acknowledged given the social and economic reforms introduced post World War II. It is also identified how competitive it is to secure a place at a top Chinese university and the perceived benefits of studying abroad. The benefits including:

- Critical thinking,
- Improved English language,
- Specialised / vocational education,
- Broader global perspectives,
- Broader intercultural networks, and
- Improved career prospects.

The question that arises here is, as higher education is becoming more business-like and is such a highly competitive sector; are traditional (western) marketing activities appropriate for the Chinese student market? To explore this, a deeper understanding of modern day China is required, in particular how its political structures influences behaviour.

### **3. The Evolution of Modern Day China**

#### **3.1 The establishment of Communist China**

The timeline of political and social transformation in China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw tremendous upheaval. The Wuchang Uprising in October 1911 was the revolutionary military uprising that forced the abdication of the last Emperor of China and the end of over 2,000 years of dynastic rule. From this point through until 1949 China experienced almost continuous internal power struggles and civil unrest caused by power vacuums filled by provincial warlords; the effects of both World Wars and their subsequent Treaties; and the struggles between the Communist Party of China and the Nationalist Party. In 1949, the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong forced the Nationalist Party out of mainland China to Taiwan. Relative political stability was about to be established and China was known as the Peoples Republic of China.

##### **3.1.1 The Great Leap Forward**

From the 1950s through to the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party's central government led by Mao Zedong, exercised its authoritative power and all policies were supported by a command economy and controlled by strict planning guidelines. In 1958-60, the Party carried out the 'Great Leap Forward', a radical campaign aimed at fast-forwarding to an egalitarian society (Wasserstrom, 2010) and full-blown Communism, combined with a determination to achieve economic parity with the West.

One of the strategies deployed was to abolish private ownership and established a new social structure (Wasserstrom, 2010; Walder, 1989). This strategy established collective facilities such as dining rooms, nurseries, public baths, health facilities, public transport and so on, with family sleeping accommodation separate to this. In addition, property and land previously in private hands was confiscated and evenly distributed among every Chinese person, thus in principle establishing an egalitarian society. The driving force behind this was to capitalise on the number of farmers across China and produce a surplus harvest, which in turn would help to drive the speed of industrialisation. Two of the most fundamental features of Maoist China were the hùkǒu and dānwèi systems, both of which continue in modified form to this day (Lu & Parry, 2015).

### **3.1.1.1 The hùkǒu system**

The hùkǒu is a nationwide system of household registration set up under the 1958 Regulations and issued by the National People's Congress. Its purpose was to safeguard progress towards a higher level of collectivism in rural areas, control food shortages in urban areas and to control internal population migration. The hùkǒu system, classifies the entire population into two categories: agricultural registrants who are domiciled in rural areas and non-agricultural (i.e. urban) registrants in metropolitan areas (Lu & Parry, 2015). The hùkǒu is issued per household and usually includes details of births, deaths, marriages, divorces and movement of all members in the family. It created a legal domicile for every person and tied each person (as part of their wider family group) permanently to that domicile. The hùkǒu therefore identifies a person or household by its administrative category, i.e. rural or urban and restricts the geographical mobility of the population (Lu & Parry, 2015).

### **3.1.1.2 The dānwèi system**

The dānwèi system refers to the place of employment, or work unit. The work unit had great influence on the life of an individual, as workers (individuals and families) were bound to their work units for life (Lu & Parry, 2015). The work unit provided an individual with the infrastructure for living, such as housing, type of employment, the level of healthcare and education. The same system also monitored the behaviour of each individual for compliance with Party policy for example; individuals had to obtain permission from their work units for activities like travel, marriage, or having children (Lu & Parry, 2015; Walder, 1989). The dānwèi was the first step and principal mechanism for implementing Party policy in Maoist China. Non-compliance to Party policy would be dealt with by actions including individuals having their pay docked, having incentives withheld, or having their housing downgraded.

### **3.1.1.3 Controlling the systems**

As discussed, the hùkǒu and dānwèi were the two prominent features of Maoist China and a key mechanism to implement and monitor Party policy implementation and compliance. The implementation and monitoring was overseen by the Party members located in each of the communes (Wang S. S., 1981) and formed a network of officials known as cadres. The cadres, who had the greatest access to political capital or power became the prominent and dominant class enjoying higher status in society (Wang S. S., 1981) and so long as they were adhering to

Party policy they had job security for life. In essence, the cadres would become the starting point for the new middle class in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.1.2 The Cultural Revolution**

The Great Leap Forward and its attempt to fast forward to a stronger and more egalitarian society was a failure (Wasserstrom, 2010), leading to famine and the death of between twenty and thirty million peasants. From 1966 to 1976, the Party under the leadership of Mao deployed a new strategy, the Cultural Revolution (Wasserstrom, 2010; Meisner, 1999). This was an even more radical campaign to reset the entire Chinese society on the road to a “socialist structured utopia” and purge the country of any remnants of capitalist and traditional Chinese feudal elements from society known as the “four olds” – old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas. Schools, universities and research institutions were closed and many of the academics, intellectuals and “political subversives”, who Mao regarded as the “modern bourgeoisie trying to restore capitalist thought” (Mitter, 2008), were sent to rural areas “to learn from the peasants” and “purify themselves” by working the land (Wasserstrom, 2010; Wang S. S., 1981).

In addition to the strict control of education, especially higher education, passionate loyalist youths, known as Red Guards presided over mass rallies to reinforce the teachings of Mao Zedong (Wasserstrom, 2010), ensuring compliance and respect by fear and force.

## **3.2 China’s economic reform**

Following Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, and under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China experienced further reform as it became a member of the World Trade Organisation in 2001. and Since then, China has firmly established itself as a major player in the global economy currently lying second to the USA. Initially, a pragmatic focus to the economy was instigated with the so-called open-door policy and economic reforms of 1978 effectively putting modernisation and economic progress to the forefront of national policy. Deng’s dictum “economics in command” had effectively replaced Mao’s dictum “politics in command” (Tsang, 2014).

The economic development strategies were focused on three geographic / regional zones of China; the east, the west and the central regions (Zheng & Chen, 2007). The initial focus was on the eastern coastal region, creating an environment that that would attract foreign investment next was the west and finally the industrial central region (Wang & Lin, 2009). The strategy of

economic decentralisation, including deliberately allowing “some people and some regions to become rich first”, resulted in rapid (Van de Wende, 2001) and significant regional disparities (Zheng & Chen, 2007). In 1978 at the beginning of the reforms, the per capita GDP was very similar across all provinces across China, by 2003 the regional income distribution were clearly unequal with the richest. Shanghai on the east coast, increasing to ten times the level of the poorest; Guizhou in the central region (Zheng & Chen, 2007).

Within these special economic zones, joint ventures with foreign businesses were set up to accelerate economic modernisation (Park & Shen, 2003; Kung & Lin, 2007). In addition to western business practices being introduced, western cultural products including films, music, and sport were also introduced and have become popular with the younger Chinese generations (Xiao & Kim, 2009). Consequently there is evidence of a growing middle class (Bian, 2002; Rastall, 2006; Wang & Lin, 2009; Xiao & Kim, 2009), with traits of a willingness to purchase luxury, branded items, and a growing trend of purchasing western branded goods more frequently (Xiao & Kim, 2009). This is particularly noticeable in the eastern hub cities of Beijing, Qiandao, Shanghai and Guangzhou (Wang & Lin, 2009). The growing affluence has begun to exert visible changes to China’s cultural and value systems (Xiao & Kim, 2009) particularly in the young generation, introducing a more individualistic and materialistic mentality (Leung, 2008; Oyserman et al, 2001; Sun, 2000; Ralston et al, 1999). A further example of how attitudes are changing is how success in education in general and access to higher qualifications in particular, is seen by the young generation to help with career advancement and in turn personal economic benefits (Wang, C., 2009; Tamkin, 1997).

### **3.3 One child policy**

In 1979 it was estimated that two thirds of the Chinese population were under 30 and therefore in their most reproductive years (Hesketh et al, 2005). Deng Xiaoping argued that unless birth rate was under control, the economic reform strategy would be at risk (Miller & Fang, 2012; Potts, 2006; Hesketh, et al, 2005). The solution was the introduction of the one child per couple policy, the idea being that a short-term intervention would establish a small family culture that in turn would help to improve living standards for all (Hesketh, et al, 2005).

As with the *hùkǒu* and *dānwèi* systems, the one child policy was overseen by local government officials, who issued rewards for compliance or fines and penalties for noncompliance. How strict the policy was enforced varied according to geographic location (Wang, C. 2009; Hesketh, et al, 2005), with the more densely populated areas experiencing very strict control while the

more rural communities had variable control influenced by the gender of the first born or any disability at birth.

Wang, C. (2009) argues that the unintended outcome of the one child policy is an extended nuclear family structure that typically has four grandparents, two parents and one child, often referred to as the Little Emperor / Emperess generation . The two parents and both sets of grandparents focus their attention and resources on their only child, in an attempt to provide the very best education (both formal education and in extra-curricular) and enhanced life opportunities possible (Miller & Fang, 2012; Wang, C., 2009). Chung, et al (2009) argue that the level of undivided attention, together with heightened financial and emotional support has resulted in many children being self-centred, over-indulged, egocentric and lacking in the values of persistence and co-operation.

With the soaring birth rate of the 1970s under control, the Chinese Communist Party now under the leadership of Xi Jinping relaxed the one child per couple policy in 2016 allowing two children per couple (Feng, et al, 2016). This was an attempt to rebalance the age profile of the population and ensure that as the population aged there would be sufficient younger members of working age to maintain productivity levels and standards of living.

### **3.4 Summary**

China has experienced huge political change post World War II with the establishment of a one party political system that functions under the philosophy of communism. As a result of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution strategies during the leadership of Mao Zedong, the hùkǒu and dānwèi systems were introduced which in effect locked the population to geographic regions and to a career. An egalitarian society had been established with the distribution of wealth being fairly equal across the country.

Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China changed its policy towards economic reforms rather than the cultural reforms of Mao. Deng divided the country into three economic zones and began the process of internationalisation with the eastern coastal zone benefitting first. The egalitarian society quickly saw disparity of wealth across the economic zones and the growth of a new middle class, who were beginning to exhibit a more individualistic and materialistic mentality rather than the collective and more frugal mentality of Mao's egalitarian society. In addition, Deng's introduction of the one-child policy which has changed the structure of the family unit and as a result the relationship and expectations of the younger generation. One

further aspect that is evident is that the drive for educational opportunities for the child, and how this might provide improved life opportunities is core to the values of the extended nuclear family structure.

What is interesting to note at this point is that there will be different generations of the population alive today that have experienced all of these phases of China's evolution and arguably will hold different beliefs and values. With this in mind, it is necessary to explore the literature around culture, values and beliefs.

## **4. Culture, Values and Society**

Despite the fact that academics acknowledge the importance of understanding culture, there is no one single definition or agreed common understanding of the term (Tayeb, 2001; Ajiferuke & Boddewyn, 1970). However, there are common features that are present in the marketing and management literature, these features are based around 'assumptions', 'beliefs' and 'values' as the core or essence of a culture (Schein, 2010).

### **4.1 Culture, values and beliefs**

Hofstede (1983) argues that culture is programmed or learnt by a specific group of people or a society and that it resides continuously in the subconscious. These fundamental assumptions, beliefs and values of society manifest themselves in common behavioural traits or norms. Geertz (1993) adds to this definition by arguing that culture serves two functions; firstly a framework that explains how we act or behave (assumptions and beliefs) as a cultural group or society, and secondly as an interpretive framework that structures or give a 'pattern' to that groups behaviour (values)... patterns of thinking, feeling, acting and reacting.

Hofstede et al (2010) presents his framework of culture as four layers or concentric rings, or an onion as he describes it [see Figure 2] with the central core representing the values of the particular culture, which he describes as the 'broad tendencies and preferences'. Radiating from this core are three more layers that are the more descriptive aspects of that culture; the rituals layer (behaviours); the hero's layer (people who epitomise that behaviour); and the symbols layer (words, colours and artefacts). Hofstede et al (2010) argues that these layers are all dependent upon, and influenced by its lower level or inner ring. All of these layers manifest themselves into what Hofstede describes as the explicit practices of culture – or what is observable of a culture.

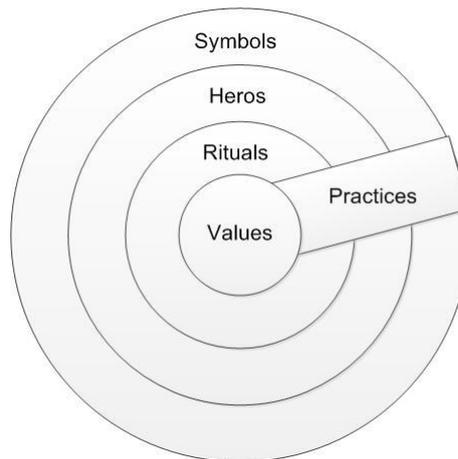


Figure 2: The cultural onion (Hofstede et al, 2010, p8)

Schein (2010) also represents culture in levels, but in a slightly different way [see Figure 3]. He argues that there is a 'shallow outer level' which represents the visible or explicit aspects of a culture, the artefacts of culture. These artefacts include the signs and symbols of a culture, food and drink, clothing, literature, architecture, legislation and so on. This visible level is the result of the second level of espoused beliefs and values. Schein, (2010) puts forward that the beliefs and values of a culture are invisible or implicit and guide the explicit aspects of culture. The beliefs or norms of behaviour are the expectations of how people should behave in different situations (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012), which stem from the cultural values. These constitute what is 'important' or 'good and bad' in life (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Underpinning all of this is the third level; the assumptions (Schein, 2010). The assumptions are the core beliefs that are enshrined or embedded in the subconscious or as Hofstede puts it, the programming. Schein (2010) argues that these assumptions are automatic and natural; people of a given culture don't know why they act in a particular way, they just do.

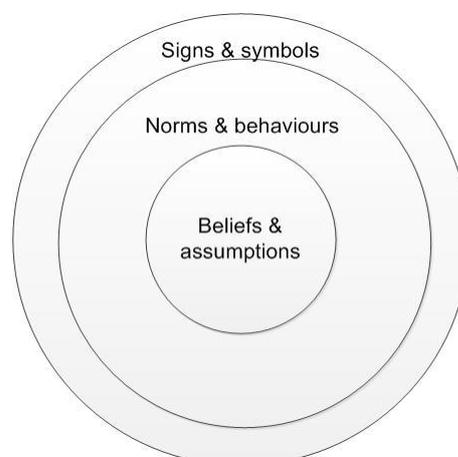


Figure 3: Schein's layers of culture (adapted, Schein, 2010)

Although these two conceptual frameworks of culture are different, what is common is the description of culture being made up of implicit aspects with assumptions, beliefs and values forming the 'essence' of a given culture resulting in explicit practices (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; Hofstede, et al, 2010; Schein, 2010; Taras, et al, 2009).

Hofstede went on to develop a framework of national cultures, which has been the most influential and utilised in marketing and management literature (Steenkamp, 2001). The cultural framework was developed following a large scale study examining similarities and differences across 70 different countries. From this study, Hofstede (1983) identified different dimensions of culture that epitomise the fundamental dilemmas that human society face, furthermore he was able to identify that different societies would react differently to those dilemmas.

The original model comprised of four fundamental bi-polar value orientations or dimensions that could be used to distinguish between national cultures; those dimensions being uncertainty avoidance; power distance; collectivism vs individualism; and masculinity vs femininity (Hofstede, 1983). Later, a fifth dimension, long-term vs short-term orientation was included as the framework was extended to Asia and was based upon Chinese / Confucian values (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). More recently, a sixth dimension, indulgence vs restraint was added (Hofstede, et al, 2010) [ see Figure 4].

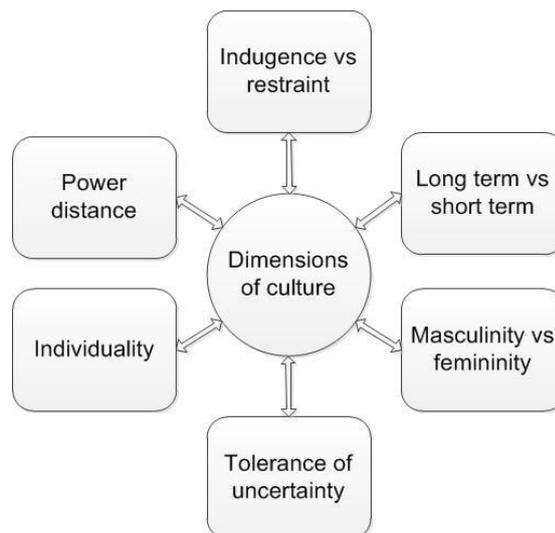


Figure 4: Hofstede's dimensions of national culture (adapted, Hofstede et al, 2010)

Using this framework and comparing China to UK highlights the following preferences for each country, see Figure 5 below.

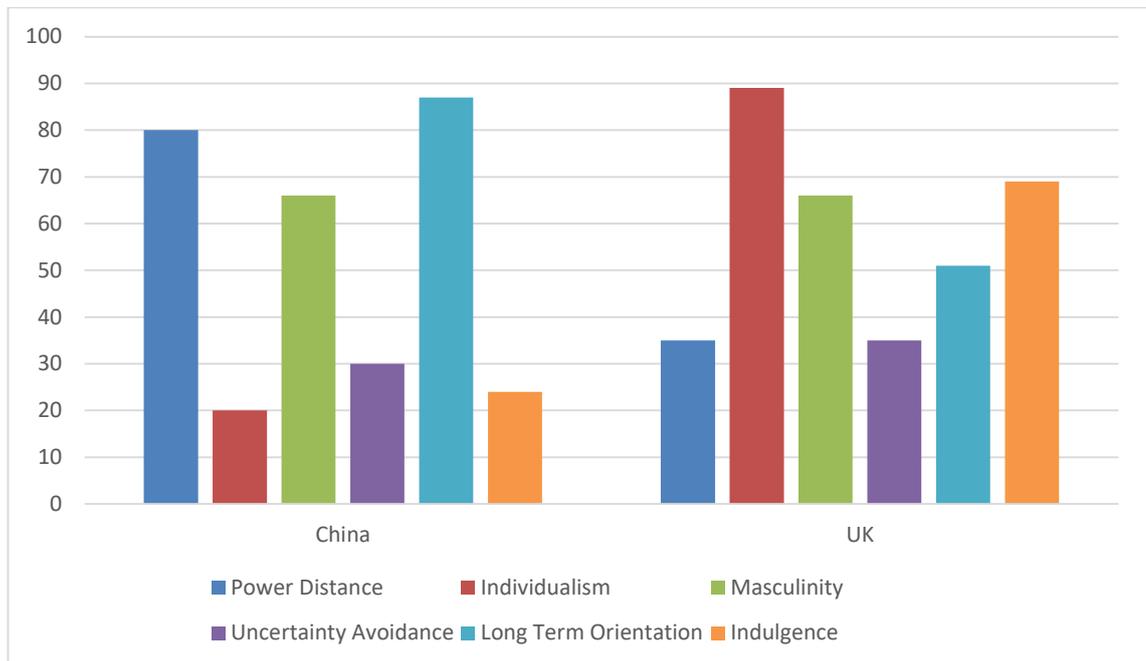


Figure 5: Six Dimension Model Comparing China to UK (Source Hofstede Insights, 2019)

Hofstede Insights (2019) enables one to compare different countries according to their six-dimension model. When comparing China to UK the following characteristics are identified as an overview of the cultural drivers for each country.

**Power Distance** – explained as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede Insights, 2019). China scores highly on this dimension at 80 points, suggesting that the Chinese have respect for formal authority and leaders and that people should not have aspirations beyond their ‘rank’ in society. The UK has a score of 35 suggesting that there is less deference to power, a sense of fair play for all and that one can have aspirations to be whatever one wants.

**Individualism** – addressing the issue of “the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members” (Hofstede Insights, 2019). This dimension reflects if people’s self-image is defined in terms of individualistic (a high score) or collectivist (a low score). China has a score of 20, suggesting a highly collectivist society where the population acts in the interest of the group and not necessarily themselves. In addition, loyalty and personal relationships are very

important. The UK has a score of 89 for this dimension, very different to China and is therefore very individualistic. Personal fulfilment, consumerism and a 'me' culture is often observed.

**Masculinity** – examining “what motivates people, wanting to be the best (a high score or masculine society) or liking what you do (a low score or feminine society)” (Hofstede Insights, 2019). Both countries have a score of 66, suggesting that both are masculine societies. This is exemplified by work being considered more important than family and leisure time and that success or high performance is essential.

**Uncertainty Avoidance** – reflecting how societies “feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede Insights, 2019), the higher the score, the more society seeks certainty. With both China and UK having scores of 30 and 35 respectively, the populations are comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty and is reflected in the entrepreneurial and very adaptable attitudes seen in both countries.

**Long Term Orientation** – a view of how society “maintains links with its past whilst dealing with the challenges of the present (Hofstede Insights, 2019). A low score in this dimension suggests that tradition is important and societal change is viewed with suspicion, whereas a higher score would indicate a more pragmatic society that is adaptable but encourages thriftiness and knowledge to prepare for the future. China has a high score of 87 indicating a pragmatic culture that can adapt depending upon the situation and context, have a strong propensity to save and invest for the future. The UK has a score of 51, suggesting that there is not a dominant preference within this dimension.

**Indulgence** – considers the “extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses” (Hofstede Insights, 2019), a high score indicating that a society has a relatively weak control over indulgence and a low score suggesting that society is restrained and in control of their desires. China scores 24 in this dimension and indicates that actions are constrained by social norms and that indulgence is somewhat wrong. The UK scores somewhat higher in this dimension at 69, which suggests that there is an attitude to spend money as they wish and are willing to exhibit their desires as they wish.

#### **4.1.1 Critique of Hofstede's model**

Hofstede's model has not been exempt from criticism. Williamson (2002) discusses the simplification of national cultures to a footprint of different dimensions, to which Papamarcos, et al, (2007) adds that Hofstede ignores the significance and variation of community (regional /

ethnic communities) in determining national culture. This suggests that Hofstede's framework is a kind of DNA approach to understanding culture and in many ways whilst identifying the DNA components it ignores the complexities when they are combined.

McSweeney (2002) also critiques the logic of the methodology and measurement instruments used, arguing that it is limited in scope. McSweeney (2002) argues that the original research was undertaken in one American company (IBM) across different countries, resulting in an inherent flaw due to the internal organisational culture of IBM being representative of a nation. This builds on the assertions from Steenkamp (2001) that differences in interpretation of meaning associated with symbols, artefacts and language are ignored. Hofstede, et al (2010) points out that the use of a single organisation helps to eliminate organisational culture as a variable, and therefore when this is removed what is left must be national culture.

Holden (2002) highlights how old the data collection is for Hofstede's framework, asserting that the world in which that data was collected does not exist any longer. As such, many countries have become more multi-national in their population and in their outlook, and that people's knowledge and experiences of different cultures has expanded (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Holden, 2002). The recent emergence of countries onto the global economic platform including the BRIC economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China and the MINT countries of Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey results in exposure to global brands and consumerism in general to the populations of these countries (Leung, 2008; Oyserman, et al, 2001).

This may begin to change some of the visible signs and symbols of society as a personal wealth develops and a 'middle class' develops (Rastall, 2006; Bian, 2002; Ralston, et al, 1999). Therefore, the homogenous use of the nation or country as a the unit by which one defines a culture is no longer totally appropriate (Soares, et al, 2007). Rather the focus should be more towards the regional sub-culture or even towards the social / generational level is more appropriate (Patterson & Mattila, 2008; Keillor, et al, 2004; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Triandis, et al, 1988) and would result in a more appropriate predictor of behaviour (Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001). Ralston, et al (1993) goes further and argues that in order to fully understand a national culture, one needs to understand within-culture differences.

Despite the criticisms, Hofstede's model of national culture, is one of the most popular frameworks used in cross-cultural research (Steenkamp, 2001; Sondergaard, 1994). Its popularity being credited to the simplicity and intuitive appeal of the different dimensions (Williamson, 2002) and has contributed to a much better understanding of cultural similarities and differences. This is demonstrated by Taras, et al, (2009) who identified 121 different

instruments for measuring culture, of which 97.5% of them contained at least one of Hofstede's dimensions.

## 4.2 Chinese values

### 4.2.1 Traditional value system

It is widely accepted that China is primarily a collectivist society in which the population maintains deep rooted and strong emotional connections to family, society and the country, stressing a harmonious way of life in both commerce and in their private lives (Lin & Wang, 2010; Xiao & Kim, 2009; Lowe & Corkindale, 1988; Yau, 1988). This is consistent with how Hofstede describes China using the six dimension model.

The basic pillar of Chinese culture is attributed predominantly to the work of Confucius (Yau, 1988), whose doctrine emphasises people should be living in harmony with nature, be respecting the past and traditions, have modesty and self-effacement, order and interdependence, moderation, and moral self-control. In addition to the teaching of Confucius there are influences from Buddhism and Taoism, resulting in very complex and deep rooted set of values that form a highly conscious principle that has been practiced throughout Chinese society for over two thousand years (Fan, 2000). These practices are enshrined within the 'five cardinal relationships of Confucianism', the 'five virtues of Confucianism' and the 'Confucian work ethic' (Rarick, 2007) forming a comprehensive set of pragmatic rules and guiding principles for daily life (Fan, 2000) and reinforcing the label of being a collectivist society.

### 4.2.2 Confucianism

The five cardinal relationships of Confucianism focuses on the harmonious relationships and bonds between different parts of society and is often referred to as *guānxi* or the strength of the connections / bonds (Rarick, 2007). These bonds form the structural backbone of society and of behaviour and are demonstrated by the roles and expectations between ruler and citizen, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and between friends. The bonds identify your place in society, they are deep rooted and last a life time; extending much further than western societies will expect or tolerate (Yau, 1988), with family bonds being central and pivotal (Fan, 2000). The stability of Chinese society is attributed to the maintenance of these

inequalities (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), with juniors paying respect to seniors and seniors being obliged to provide guidance to juniors.

The harmonious relationships outlined above are underpinned and maintained by the five virtues of Confucian life – benevolence; righteousness; propriety; wisdom; and trustworthiness (Yau, et al, 1999). The five virtues in turn lead to a work ethic that values hard work, thrift, loyalty, dedication, valuing education and wisdom and a concern for public property (Fang, 2003; Rarick, 2007). China has a long history of placing a high emphasis on education (Hallinger, 1998; Yau, 1988) as a vehicle to forming the backbone to a harmonious society (Murphy & Johnson, 2009), the education being both formal within schools and also extra-curricular including music, art, and sports.

#### **4.2.3 The concepts of 'Face' and 'Guānxi'**

The manifestation of these five virtues is frequently observed to be alive in the concept of 'face'. The concept of face, and saving face is of utmost importance to the Chinese in both social and business perspectives (Fang, 2003; Yau, et al, 1999). Face falls into two classifications and applies to everyone. '*Mien-tsu*', represents the reputation of an individual and is linked to very much to social status. Yau, et al (1999) explain that the amount of mien-tsu a person has, is based upon the individual's behaviour or performance and therefore can be gained or lost. The second type of face is '*lien*', relating to one's morality and integrity. Lien is an entitlement of everyone in society, but can only be lost through misconduct – it cannot be added to. When lost, an individual is said to not have a sense of shame, not only to themselves but to their whole family (Yau, et al, 1999).

Alongside the idea of face is another concept known as *guānxi*, a set of interconnecting relationships built up by gift-giving, wining and dining, collective memories, traditional Chinese values and the need for self-improvement... a form of social capital (Bian, 2002). The relationship-oriented nature of Chinese society encourages *guānxi* networks to develop and is considered to be the thing that 'oils the cogs of bureaucracy' (Lin N. , 1999; Pye, 1999).

### 4.3 China's social class structure

The established literature on class and social stratification has evolved from the work of Marx and Webber. Marx argues that class is formed upon the premise of ownership of the means of production and that there are two opposing classes; the Bourgeoisie (the haves) and the Proletariat (the have-nots) (Saunders, 1990). Marx therefore does not recognise a separate middle or intermediate class in society. Webber argues that class is not purely built upon the polarised view of the ownership of wealth (Lietchy, 2003; Wallace & Wolf, 1999), instead that it is a combination of status and power. It follows that with a multi-dimensional approach to class there will be groups of people who lie between the polar extremes of the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, in other words, a middle class. Webber suggests that these are made up of those with small businesses / property ownership but little education; the Petty Bourgeoisie, and those with little property but command power due to their education; the Intelligentsia (Saunders, 1990). Webber adds to this the concept of 'Party'; a group of like-minded people that have influence over others irrespective of their status / class (Zhang, 2007). This idea relates to the political systems and creates a further layer of complexity to the multi-dimensional structure argued by Webber.

Bourdieu develops Webbers work further, focusing upon the concepts of Cultural Capital and Habitus. Cultural capital being the accumulation of knowledge (via experience and / or by education) and the status that this gives an individual. Bourdieu explains that the level of education influences cultural practice and in turn social status (Bourdieu & Nice, 1986). As such the level of education itself is not the key driver, but what is more significant is what that education can do socially for the individual via the social networks established as part of the education process.

Habitus or social capital is a form of intangible structure / hierarchy underpinned by economic standing and cultural capital (Sassatelli, 2007) and is further influenced by consumption and lifestyle of individuals. Chan & Goldthorpe (2007) add to this discussion by suggesting that consumption and lifestyle enhance social capital, which has more significance than cultural capital. All of this supports the argument of Webber, that social class is indeed a multi-dimension value system with several layers and not simply a polarised society as described by Marx.

Maoist China, following the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, had no culture of consumption and no landholdings or private property, and up until 2014 all urban land was state owned (Wong, 2019). In other words China had been a wholly egalitarian, relatively classless

society made up of the working class and the Communist Party (in effect the ruling class), which arguably fits the class concept from Marx. Taking this view, the concept of a middle class would not exist as the Communist Party had brought an end to own the means of wealth creation with the introduction of the *hùkǒu* and *dānwèi* policies.

However, this is too simplistic a view of social stratification in China. Instead of transitioning into a pure communist state, China evolved into something between socialism and capitalism or socialism with Chinese characteristics as the Chinese Leadership describe it. The political system of a single party administration created a structure from which societal status and resource allocation is determined, an example of this is the use of Cadres to regulate political determinism throughout society. This suggests that modern day China is located more towards the views of Webber with several layers to society, and Bourdieu's view of status linked to Cultural Capital and Habitus (social capital).

The economic reforms post 1978 have brought a greater degree of prosperity for many in China which has been accelerated by foreign investment, especially in the Eastern Coastal Economic Zone (Qinglian, 2002). This economic strategy has resulted in internal migration from rural areas to the urban cities in search of greater family security, with many individuals and families experiencing improvements in *guānxi* networks that operate on shared backgrounds, lifestyles and consumption habits – or increased social and cultural capital (Granger, 2006; Bain, et al, 2005; Bian, 2002). This evolution of social networks has in many ways established a Chinese middle class, not in the traditional western perspective of level of skilled work, managerial status and salary (economic status) but more towards social and cultural capital established via *guānxi* networks and Confucian values as well as shared life styles and consumption habits.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Cultural values of a society will differ country by country as a result of its political, economic and social structures. China, according to Hofstede is a collectivist society whose actions are in the interests of the group rather than the individual. A society that has respect for authority and formal leaders / knowledge and is pragmatic in how it faces challenges it is confronted with. It considers that success in work / education is more important than engaging in personal gratification and that restraint from indulging in personal desires and thriftiness are important personal characteristics. These cultural dimensions are on the whole in alignment with traditional Confucian virtues and two key concepts of face and *guānxi*.

As a society, the egalitarian nature of Mao's China indicated a more Marxist structure with the owners of society and the workers, but as policies have evolved and China has become a major global economic player, arguably a middle class has started to establish itself but not in the same way as the West would see it (power and status) but via the social networks formed.

Having considered how China has evolved politically, economically and socially and then comparing this to Western societies such as the UK and the USA, the question arises is it therefore appropriate to simply transpose theoretical concepts such as consumer behaviour and marketing from the West and apply them directly to China? It is the researchers view that as a result of the different structures that are in place politically and socially that it is inappropriate to directly apply theory established in the West to China and that some adaptation is necessary.

The context of this thesis focusing on identifying the key drivers that influence the choice of an overseas university, suggests that models of consumer decision making will need to be adapted to reflect the cultural values bound within China.

## 5. Consumer Decision making

As an academic discipline, the study of consumer behaviour can be traced back to the very early 1900s and to the universities of California, Illinois and Michigan (Bartels, 1951). These universities developed modules that focused on 'how to sell goods' and were based upon an observation of how organisations sold their products (Tadajewski, 2009) fundamentally they were an applied analysis of economic exchange transactions. Tadajewski (2009) highlighted that the perspective of the early pioneers of marketing practices was to view the marketplace as a homogenous mass and that there was a need to understand how purchase decisions were made. The academics focused upon descriptions of practice, explaining and justifying the approaches used (Bartels, 1951); there was no attempt at this point to develop what we accept today as theoretical concepts of marketing or consumer behaviour.

Organisations began to 'revolutionise' (Keith, 1960) the way they sold their goods to their customers, moving from businesses 'pushing' their goods to customers, to one where customers were the centre of business activities. This coincided with demands from the Ford and the Carnegie Foundations (Bartels, 1962) to make marketing research more professional and rigorous, making funds available to sponsor PhDs in marketing and establishing a marketing research journal. The study of marketing and consumer behaviour become more objective and scientific in its nature (Bartels, 1962), with a growing interest in the purchase actions of consumers or buyer behaviour (Solomon, et al, 2010).

Since then, especially through the 1960s and 1970s, a range of conceptual models were developed aimed at explaining the cognitive processes of consumer decision making (Wagner, 1997). Examples include the Nicosia Model (Nicosia, 1966), the Howard-Sheth Model (Howard & Sheth, 1969) and one of the most frequently cited models of this type, the Engel, Kollatt and Blackwell (EKB) model (Engel, et al, 1993). These are categorised as black box models (Solomon, et al, 2010), seeking to explore the impact on sales/purchase behaviour by manipulating/changing one or more variables at the input stage. Payne et al, (1993) argues that purchase decisions are rational processes and that the strategy that drives the decision is influenced by:

- The task and context variables – what are you wanting to purchase and why?
- The person – cognitive ability and prior knowledge / previous experience.
- Social context – accountability to the wider group (family) and image within the group.

The black box models depicted that the purchaser typically progresses through a series of five phases; starting with recognition of the problem; moving to information search; alternative evaluation; option choice; and finally post-purchase evaluation / outcome (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Solomon, et al, 2010), [see figure 6]. Alternatively, for repeat or simple purchase decisions, a more simplified and very generic three phase process can be observed, made up of pre-purchase, consumption and post-purchase evaluation (Hoffman, et al, 2009).



Figure 6: Five phases of purchase decision making, (Armstrong and Kotler, 2013, p170)

The phases (five or three phases) are contained within a conceptual black box (Solomon, et al, 2010), and it is the manipulation of the external environment and marketing stimuli that influences the decision making outcome. The resultant outcomes are normally the focus of interrogation which Moorman (cited in Tadajewski & Brownlie (2008) argues has reduced the study of consumer behaviour to a technique that is results focused. Moorman (2008) goes on to argue that there is not a focus on understanding why the decision was made, simply what is the actual process of decision making ‘the cognitive psychological aspects’ is and therefore the ‘black box’ (the buyer) remains a mystery (Solomon et al, 2010).

### 5.1 Grand Models

These models of consumer behaviour are aligned to logical positivist traditions, being based primarily on an economic model and have been developed in an environment of maturing and ever more sophisticated western/capitalist countries... fundamentally the USA. There is also the assumption in these models that buyers make rational decisions, made with a full understanding of all of their options (Schiffman, et al, 2008). What it does not take into account is the impulse or non-rational purchase decision (Bettman, et al, 1998) nor that the buyer often makes the ‘optimum choice’ and therefore not the ‘perfect decision’ (Schiffman, et al, 2008).

This style of consumer decision making framework has been labelled as the ‘grand models’ (Kaas, 1982) and underpins the established literature within this discipline. They provide a clear identification of which variables to manipulate in order that actual purchases are increased/decreased, however they are more descriptive of the process of consumer decision making process rather than allowing for predictions of individual behaviour (Solomon, et al, 2010) and are therefore better suited to analysing how major purchases (expensive or one off)

are made. Examples of major purchases would include buying a house, a car, a holiday or paying university tuition fees.

### **5.1.1 Phases of the Grand Models**

Using the example of the five-phase model in figure 6, it is possible to break the process down into logical phases of the purchase decision.

#### **Problem recognition**

The starting point for all purchase decisions is that the customer has the realisation that there is a gap between their current status and that which they aspire to be (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Schiffman, et al, 2008; Bruner & Pomazal, 1988). Blackwell (2001) suggests that the problem recognition is derived from an individuals' awareness of their personal environment and internal growth factors. In other words, something has triggered a need. In the case of the Chinese study abroad student, there is a desire to continue their education in an overseas university – there could be many reasons for this, both personal and cultural.

#### **Information search**

Having stimulated the need, customers now search for a way to satisfy that need, a way to reach their desired status (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Schiffman et al, 2008; Blackwell, 2001). The information consulted comes from a range of sources including traditional marketing activities such as advertising (university fairs), product information (prospectus), third party publications (university league tables), word of mouth from personal networks (friends, family and agents) and from personal experiences (Peterson & Merino, 2003).

#### **Alternative evaluation**

In essence, this is an evaluation of the options available and is the result of the information search (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Schiffman, et al, 2008). Added to this is an evaluation of perceived risk, and is therefore a phase where any risk of uncertainty in the purchase decision and any subsequent negative outcomes are considered (Peterson & Merino, 2003). Jacoby & Kaplan (1972) suggest that the risks fall into the following categories;

- **Financial risk** – the consideration of total costs and affordability. More than just the tuition fees, but also accommodation, living expenses, transport, documentation, and so on.
- **Performance risk** – confidence that the product / service performs as expected. The desire for a traditional, high ranking university over a mid-table modern one.
- **Physical risk** – consideration of physical harm being caused. Not related to the tuition aspect of attending university, but to the location, accommodation, transport and local population.
- **Psychological risk** – the fit between the product / service and your self-image / self-identity. The extent to which a particular country / city / university / degree title enhances your personal brand image.
- **Social risk** – how others will think of you. Particularly important within Confucian societies in maintaining ‘face’ and the enhancement of guānxi networks.
- **Overall perceived risk** – the combination of all of the above, how risky is it to purchase this product / service.

(Bettman, 1973) puts forward that risks are inherent to any product or service that is being purchased and goes on to argue that where any of the product / service is familiar with the purchaser, then the risk becomes handled rather than inherent. This has the effect of mitigating against the risk and therefore reduces the risk. This suggests that where familiarity can be achieved, be that via word of mouth recommendations, someone in your network of contacts has used the product / service before, league tables, social media reviews, etc. confidence in the product / service is established.

### **Choice**

The decision of which product or service is made by the purchaser (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Schiffman et al, 2008; Blackwell, 2001). In the case of university choice the UCAS system will allow a maximum of six courses to be selected initially, narrowing down to a first choice and an insurance choice (subject to any entry conditions).

### **Post-purchase evaluation**

The product / service is ‘consumed’ (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Schiffman, et al, 2008; Blackwell, 2001), or in the case of degree studies takes place. The post-purchase evaluation will be based on the perception the student has of their whole university experience (tuition, facilities,

accommodation, social life, etc.). This will in turn feed the information search activities of others as they review options for university study.

## 5.2 Alternative cognitive approaches

Other approaches to understanding consumer behaviour concentrate more on the psychological cognitive aspects (what is inside the ‘black box’) and have been developed from the 1980s onwards, including consumer involvement studies, and consumer inventory profiles (O’Cass & Choy, 2008; Wagner, 1997). Focusing more on the psychological aspects of the consumer decision making process, Kaas (1982) argues that if a buyer is unfamiliar with a product then they will enter a ‘concept forming stage’, in which they will familiarise themselves with the various product attributes and develop their own set of purchase criteria. If they were already familiar with the product and or brands (reputation), then the concept forming stage would be by-passed, moving directly to the option decision/purchase stage immediately. Kotler and Keller (2011) extended the idea of product or brand familiarity to include the level of risk in the purchase, the complexity of the decision, the number of options available and the perceived values between the brands.

Although these approaches tend to focus on the pre-purchase phase of the EKB model, the premise of these models are that values can be determined based upon the degree of involvement in, and response to the different stimuli [see figure 7]. Those stimuli include the 4 Ps of the marketing mix (Solomon, et al, 2010), other environmental factors, and the buyer’s concept of themselves (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013).

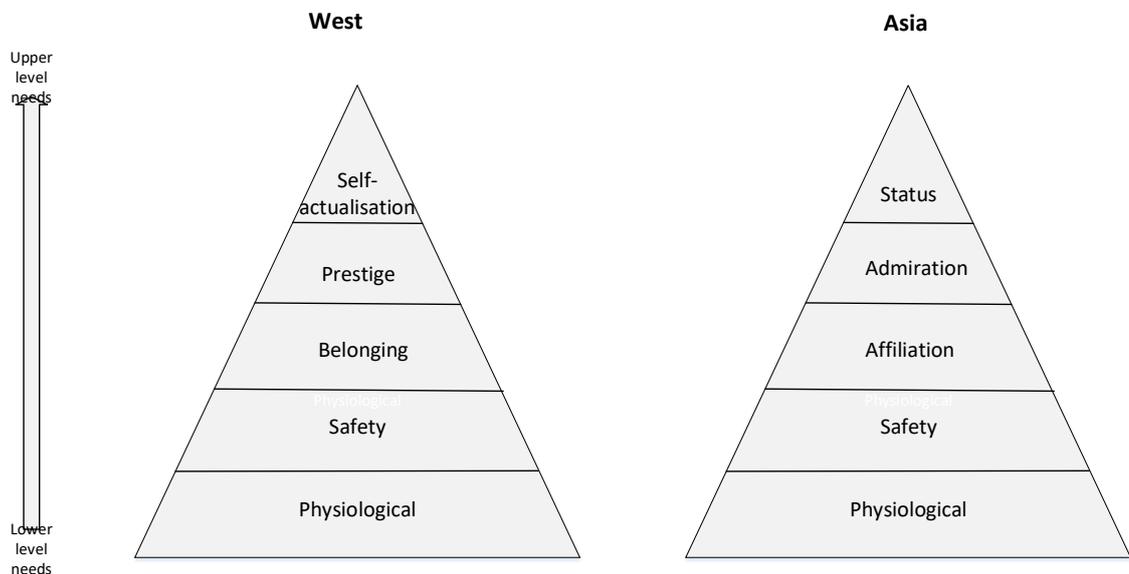
Environmental Factors		Buyers Black Box		Buyers Response
Marketing Stimuli	Other Stimuli	Buyer Characteristics	Decision Process	
Product	Economic	Cultural/subculture	Problem recognition	Purchase preferences
Price	Technological	Social	Information search	Purchase behaviour
Place	Social	Personal/lifestyle	Alternative evaluation	(what, when, where, quantity)
Promotion	Cultural	Psychological	Choice	
			Post-purchase evaluation	Brand relationship

Figure 7: Environmental and psychological aspects of buyer behaviour (Armstrong and Kotler, 2013, p157)

Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) point out that our understanding of consumer decision making has been dominated by cognitive theory (information processing) and that this is inadequate. According to Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005), what is missing are the motivational dimensions of decision making:

- The goals that consumers are pursuing.
- The needs they seek to fulfil.
- The drivers that influence their thoughts.

Sheth, et al (1991) put forward that consumer behaviour is made up of functional values, emotional values and symbolic values. The study of these values will help unlock a society's set of beliefs, attitudes and activities (Lin & Wang, 2010) or as Armstrong & Kotler (2013) refer to it as the culture and subculture of society. Following a similar perspective as Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005), and based upon the work of Wagner (1997), Roll (2006) provides a clear illustration of the impact of cultural values with his adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs from a Western perspective to an Asian perspective, see figure 8. It is the upper levels of need that demonstrate the differences in social and cultural capital, as discussed in the previous chapter.



**Figure 8: Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the Asian equivalent, Roll (2006)**

Lowe and Corkindale (1988) identify that different studies have been undertaken that have compared and created a 'list of values' that influence the purchase decision making process including, the 'Rokeach value survey' (Rokeach, 1973) and 'values and life style' (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986). Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) relate this to the principle of reference points, arguing that there is a 'desired state' or goal because of the purchase. These studies however, due to the logical and rational philosophy that underpins them, continue to make general assumptions about cultural values of different societies and not measure them (Lowe & Corkindale, 1988). In other words, they still create a homogenous view of a society (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

An interpretivist approach to consumer decision making is also prepresented within the consumer decision making literature, categorised as Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Arnould & Thompson (2005) identify that this category of consumer research falls into four different domains:

- Consumer identity – how individuals create a feeling of self-identity and how identity influences purchase decision making.
- Market place culture – how group identity has created a sub-culture or Habitus (an extension of Bourdieu' work on social stratification) and its influence on purchase decision making.
- Mass-mediated identities – how global brands / high profile figures influence behaviour and values and therefore purchase decision making.
- Socio-historic patterning of consumption – how social capital / status influences behaviour and decision making.

Rather than being a unifying theory, Consumer Culture Theory is viewed as an umbrella theory of different approaches which whilst enabling purchase decision making to be analysed through different lenses. Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue that this results in hyper-individualising and impedes the systematic analysis of consumption systems that are in our sub-conscious – the very thing it is supposed to study. Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008) are also critical of Consumer Culture Theory. They argue that despite the approach allowing for the exploration of contextual lived experiences and then apply them to new contexts, the moral responsibilities of a globalised, market-led capitalism (exploitation of resources, environmental waste, carbon footprint, etc) can be ignored by both consumers and researchers to be replaced with a form of co-created identity.

Meyers (2012) utilises similar sets of values or schemas to establish the concept of the self – or the buyer characteristics in Figure 7. By identifying these differing values, cultures and subcultures, it is considered possible to predict a group's value system and how it will normally behave (O'Casey & Choy, 2008). An interesting reflection upon the stimuli is that some are intrinsic to the individual decision maker (the self) - they are internalised. Whereas others are more external to the individual - the environment in which the decision is made (Kotler & Keller, 2011; Askegaard & Linnet, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

### **5.3 Decision making of international students**

How study abroad students make their decision on where to study has seen the application of both the linear 'black box' style frameworks and the psychological cognitive approaches to this context. Focusing on identifying factors that influence the decision making process (linear style) of students wanting to study abroad, Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) identified six key considerations:

- Knowledge of host country.
- Personal recommendations.
- Cost-related issues (including tuition fees, living expenses, etc.).
- Physical climate and lifestyle.
- Geographic proximity to home.
- Social links (friends/family already in host country).

These factors all influencing the second and third phases of the purchase decision making model, namely information search and alternative evaluation. Bodycott (2009) identified similar factors to Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), adding the following factors as significant variables to the decision making process:

- Knowledge and awareness of the institution.
- Positive attitude towards supporting international education in the destination country.
- Environment consideration including climate, lifestyle, security and racial discrimination.
- Social or educational to family, or friends living in destination country.
- Immigration prospects after graduation.
- Perceived higher standards of education and employment.
- Availability of scholarships for study.

Wu (2014) argues that the variables highlighted above are preferences the decision-maker would consider and that they do not drive the decision making process. The intrinsic drive (psychological cognitive style) for study abroad students originates from three core aspirations:

- To experience new cultures.
- To strengthen their English language competence.
- To influence future career desires (Wu, 2014).

The extrinsic variables that Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) and Bodycott (2009) identify clearly link in with the marketization of Higher Education discussed in chapter 2. The more intrinsic variables presented by Wu (2014) demonstrate the significance of culture, values and beliefs discussed in chapter 4. This is where the real differences in the decision making process might be located. The marketing stimuli generated by the universities (extrinsic variables) will provide the information the student needs to cross-reference to their preferences and enable evaluation and choice to be made. However, what drives those preferences is what Wu (2014) argues will make the decision making process different in a range of people and therefore it should hold true with a range of nationalities.

When one considers the Chinese students deciding to study abroad, it is the understanding of cultural values discussed by the likes of Lee & Morrish (2012), P. Tran (2012), T. Tran (2012) and Chen, et al (2011) in chapter 4 that is necessary for the extrinsic variable to be truly effective. Therefore, cultural heritage has to play a significant part of the decision making process.

#### **5.4 Summary**

The overarching linear and logical phases of the grand models of consumer decision making does appear to be appropriate when applied to any country, be that the UK, USA or China. However when one considers each of the phases in more detail, it is the third and fourth phases (alternative evaluation and choice) that adaptations need to be considered based on the purchasers domestic cultural values and beliefs. In the case of China, this will bring into action the views of family members, *guānxi* networks and so on.

When taking into account the work of Roll (2006), consideration must be given to these two phases specifically to make sense of any outcomes due to the differing value systems of different cultures. This supports the researchers' view that whilst the established phases of the purchase

decision process are appropriate to be used to investigate the purchase decision making process of Chinese students deciding where to study, the detail of the phases require significantly different consideration because of social and / or cultural capital.

## **6. Development of the Conceptual Framework**

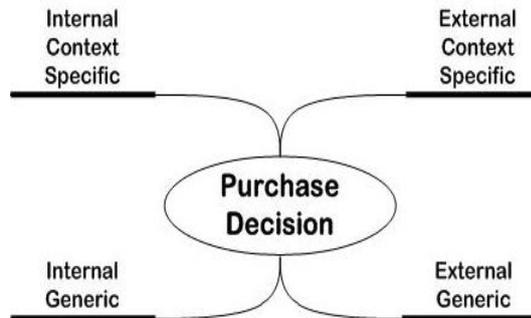
This section draws together the findings from the literature review to create a conceptual framework that will be applied to a sample of Chinese students who have decided to study in the UK at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. The framework identifies a number of stimuli that will influence the decision maker and as a result identify a hierarchy of stimuli based upon context specific and generic cultural values. The framework will focus on the alternative 'evaluation phase' of the purchase decision making grand model as this is where the most difference in cultural and social capital between countries lies.

### **6.1 The framework rationale**

Armstrong & Kotler (2013) present that the purchase decision is, at its most basic level, informed by two sets of influencing triggers – the business environment made up of the marketing stimuli and other environmental stimuli and the buyers individual and interpersonal influences (the self). The marketing and business environment stimuli influence the purchase decision, but are external to the individual... the individual cannot influence these triggers easily, if at all, but they will clearly influence the purchase decision. The second set of influencing factors being associated to the individual are therefore internal values and beliefs that influence what is important to the individual in making the purchase decision. Hence, one can say that the purchase decision is made up of both external and internal stimuli.

Tadajewski & Brownlie (2008) reflect upon the logical positivist traditions that underpin much of consumer behaviour theory; viewing the purchaser as a homogenous being. The influence of cultural beliefs and values further emphasises this homogenous perspective of a society (Hofstede et al, 2010; Schein, 2010; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). However, as Armstrong & Kotler (2013); and Sheth et al. (1991) point out, the value systems of different societies, subcultures and individual psychological motivations will have a major impact on the way in which the marketing stimuli are interpreted or perceived. As such, both the external and internal stimuli can be sub-categorised into generic and context specific groupings. The generic influencers (including cultural values and the individual psychological motivations) impacting upon any decision to purchase irrespective of its context, whereas the context specific influencers will only come into play for that specific purchase.

Having established a basic conceptual framework, it is necessary to develop this further and provide a greater insight to each of the four dimensions of internal and external context specific and internal and external generic stimuli, see figure 9.



**Figure 9: Basic conceptual framework**

The internal context specific dimension relates to the personal beliefs and attitudes of the individual, the level of experience with the specific product or service, the individuals motivations for having that product and how they perceive the value of that product (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013). This also relates to the concept of self and how the individuals relate to reference groups and desired life style (Leung, 2008; Oyserman, et al, 2001; Ralston, et al, 1999), see figure 10. Whereas the external context specific stimuli relates to how an organisation markets their products and services, this embraces the concept of the four P's (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Svensson & Wood, 2007).

The internal generic dimension relates to personal beliefs and values held by the individual (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Sheth, et al, 1991), specifically the cultural, economical, personal and social values – the idea of the self (Myers, 2012). The external generic stimuli continues with the cultural influences, but introduces a greater focus on the market-orientated economic development strategies and the exposure to international business models (Oyserman, et al, 2001), and focuses on the geographic / regional, degree of internationalisation, societal values, and technological infrastructure.

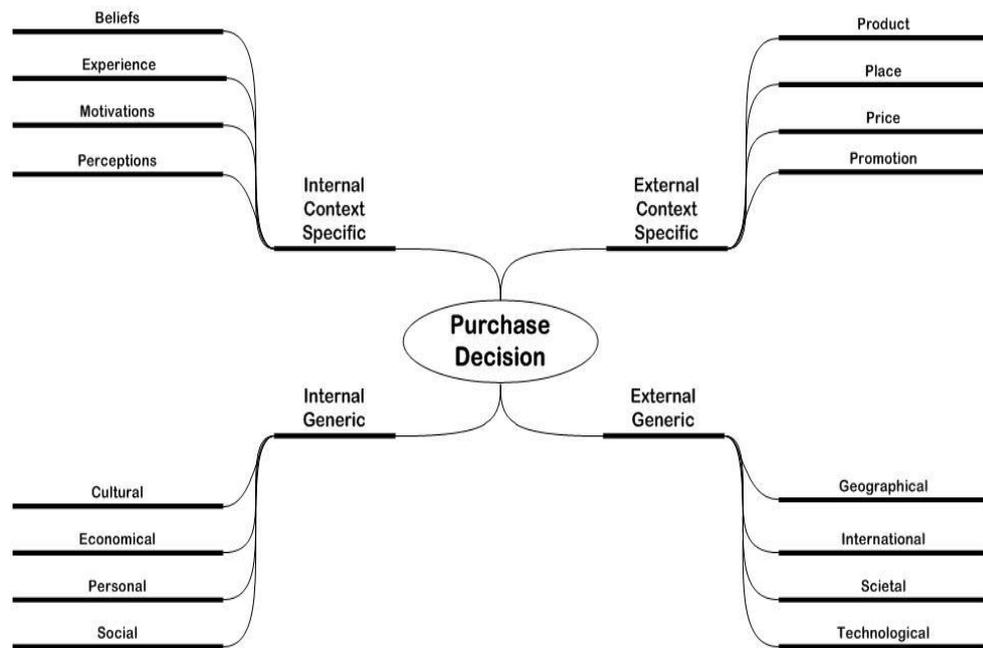


Figure 10: Expanded conceptual framework

## 6.2 Development of statements for each quadrant

The purpose of this model is not to create a new decision making framework, but to focus on which variables influence that decision and therefore the focus is mainly on the alternative evaluation phase. By drawing on the literature review, a series of statements can be developed that are specific to a specific purchase decision, in this case selecting a university to study overseas at. The internal and external generic quadrants were developed from the culture and values literature. The external context specific quadrant from the higher education literature, and the internal context specific quadrant from the cultural and consumer decision making literature. For the full list of statements and how they link to each of the four quadrants, see Appendix 1.

### 6.2.1 Internal generic statements

This quadrant focuses in on the individuals identity, values and the concept of ‘the self’ developed by Meyers (2012). From a Chinese students perspective this would include aspects of why they wanted to study for a degree in the first place and the value that would bring to their (and their family) social status – note, it is not the actual degree itself nor is it the specific knowledge and skills that degree would develop that are important here. The values identified in the Chinese cultural literature of valuing education and knowledge, of respecting the

reputation and ranking of institutions are of significance here, as is the social stratification literature that suggests a new middle class is establishing itself with the desire to boost the individuals guānxi network and therefore build upon their status and social capital. The reaction to statements in this quadrant is predicted to be influenced by the individual's aspirations of how they want to be viewed by society (their individual middle class values) but also by the value system of their family, friends and collective social network.

### **6.2.2 External generic statements**

This quadrant has a different set of influencers and is more about exposure to the internationalisation and economic reforms experienced across China. Awareness of globally branded products, life styles and their consumption will influence responses to these statements. It is predicted that participants from different economic zones will respond differently with the eastern coastal economic zone putting more emphasis here when compared to the central zone. In addition to this, the more traditional cultural values are predicted to influence decisions, suggesting that the respect for elders (parents and grandparents) and those in positions of authority (teachers) will also influence the decision, again according to the economic zone the individual is located.

### **6.2.3 Internal context specific statements**

This quadrant is closely aligned to the internal generic quadrant, the key difference here being the focus on the impact of the degree itself and the university location has on the individuals personal identity and self-image. The type of degree, the career potential, the design of the buildings, the infrastructure of the university town / city, the travel potential, and so on. It is predicted that if an individual perceives themselves as or has aspirations to be viewed as middle class, responses to these statements will show more importance in the evaluation of alternatives.

### **6.2.4 External context specific statements**

The final quadrant is influenced by the marketing activities of the university itself. The inclusion of the marketing four Ps and how they are packaged, interpreted and perceived by the individual (and their family members) should influence reaction to the statements.

## 7. Methodology

### 7.1 Research aim and objectives

The previous chapter has outlined the rationale behind the development of a new conceptual framework that will assist in understanding the influencing factors on consumer decision making processes, particularly in the countries of emerging economies, but not exclusively these. The framework has also been applied the context of Chinese students applying to study at UK universities.

The overarching aim of this proposed research programme is to test the developed framework in the context of the Chinese student applying to study at a UK university. To identify differences and similarities in decision making in relation to the established cultural norms and if there are significant subcultures geographically across China. The result of which will enable organisations to consider implications in relation to the purchase decision making process. Therefore be able to identify attributes of a product or service that important to the whole population and attributes that need to be customised geographically providing a more sophisticated understanding of consumer decision making priorities.

The research programme objectives are therefore:

1. To confirm the appropriateness and completeness of the conceptual framework design.
2. To determine if there is a correlation between the exposure to international brands and a change in cultural values within the young generation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China.
3. To demonstrate that the conceptual framework enables differences and similarities of a specific population to be identified and prioritised.
4. To examine the implications of those differences and similarities on the decision making process.
5. To reflect upon the ability of the research method to engage with and extract meaningful data in a cross-cultural study.

### 7.2 Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

Ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions reflect the research paradigm and subsequently how the research is investigated (Creswell, 2013). The ontology

relates to the question of 'what is reality', the epistemology relates to the relationship between 'the researcher and the researched' and if neutrality can be maintained between them, axiology extends the idea of neutrality focusing on the value systems of the researcher and the researched and finally the methodology is concerned with 'how' to investigate the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013; Blaikie, 2011; Gill, et al, 2011; Wagner, 1999).

### **7.2.1 Ontological assumptions**

Ontological assumptions are concerned with what is assumed to exist in the world, and if it is independent of humans or socially constructed and interpreted by humans (Blaikie, 2011). From the positivistic perspective, reality does exist 'out there' and is independent of human intervention (Johnson & Duberley, 2011) and that facts constitute reality regardless of the researcher's perspective or belief (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). However, interpretivists use the term constructivism to explain that reality is socially constructed (Johnson & Duberley, 2011) and meaning is given to values identified from the phenomenon of interest.

The literature review and the development of the conceptual framework, have demonstrated that the decision making process is made up of and influenced by multiple variables irrespective of context. The variables are such that they can be identified and observed by using objective research instruments (Carson, et al, 2001) and analysed by using mathematical techniques and that the findings can be used to predict events. Therefore the ontological stance of this research programme is one of positivism and that the methodological assumptions must be empirical by nature and follow deductive reasoning.

### **7.2.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemologically, again there are different 'camps' that researchers feel affinity with. The positivists believe that it is possible for the researcher to remain separate from the researched and as such, observations of the world can remain neutral, value free and objective (Creswell, 2013). In contrast, interpretivists believe that knowledge is created by interaction between the researcher and the researched and that it is important to get as close as possible to those being observed (Creswell, 2013). Given that the researcher is arguing that there are causal relationships between a range of factors or stimuli in the decision making process, it follows that a positivistic epistemology has been adopted. As such neutrality and objectivity are key to the methodological assumptions.

### **7.2.3 Axiological assumptions**

Axiological assumptions focus upon value systems and if the researcher can be totally neutral or free from their own values or moral judgements (Berthrong, 2008; Wagner, 1999) and is informed by the researchers ontological and epistemological stance (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012). As such, researchers following a more positivist philosophy will seek to neutralise value systems and moral judgements, whereas those following a more interpretivist stance will seek to explore the social, cultural and moral environment in which the research is located (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012).

The researcher having a positivist ontology adheres to the view that only factual knowledge gained via observation and measurement is trustworthy. The positivist epistemology held by the researcher determines that the researcher is not attempting to impose his own value system upon the research or emancipate the researched, but is seeking to identify causal relationships between exposure to international business and cultural evolution.

### **7.2.4 Methodological assumptions**

Methodologically, positivists follow an 'experimental' logic imported from the natural sciences and pursue hypothetically deductive methods (Blaikie, 2011). Conceptual frameworks are constructed, hypotheses formed and are then empirically tested (Creswell, 2013). To maintain an objective stance, enable predictability, and be able to generalise their findings, positivist methodologies employ statistical analysis, larger scale empirical surveys and systematic sampling populations (Creswell, 2013). In contrast to this, interpretivists generally pursue more subjective and inductive methodologies (Blaikie, 2011) utilising more emergent approaches. In recent years there has been an increase in the use of mixed methods, using a combination of methods (Creswell, 2013), however there will still be a preference for one perspective or the other... positivist or interpretivist. The researcher is adopting a positivist stance methodologically. A structured and defined sample population is sought and an experimental styled research instrument will be deployed – a card sort. In addition to the card sort a qualitative questionnaire will be distributed to capture some of the reasoning behind the card sort groupings and so aid triangulation of data (Scandura & Williams, 2009). The advantage of including triangulated data, according to Blaikie (2010) and Scandura & Williams (2009) is that the findings presented are more comprehensive and reinforce each other. The three aspects of the triangulation are; the literature review, the card sort and the qualitative questionnaire. This

will support the evaluation of appropriateness and completeness of the developed conceptual framework (Hammersley, 2008).

The dilemmas of reliability and validity when researching into a cross cultural studies are widely expressed, especially when the participants may demonstrate sensitivity to answering questions that may reflect negatively on their own personality constructs (Arksley & Knight, 1999; Kelly, 1963). This is especially relevant given the prominence of nationalities such as the Chinese and the need to 'save face' (Rarick, 2007; Yau, Chan, & Lau, 1999). This may result in participants protecting themselves from embarrassment, presenting themselves in a positive light or simply to please the researcher (Arksley & Knight, 1999). The outcome of this will be to reduce the reliability of the data collected and the ability to interpret it (Gill, et al, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Dalton, et al, 1997). Therefore, it is essential that the researcher utilises techniques that will enable the participants to engage and respond openly without fear of being compromised (Dalton, et al, 1997). The concern now is how to convert the conceptual model into something that can indicate the complexity of the decision making process and integrate the influences of an identified country / national culture.

### **7.3 Research instrument**

Mathematic modelling of cognitive processes has been in existence since the 1970's (Papageorgiou & Iakovidis, 2013) and has been used in many disciplines including business management, engineering, political science and in environmental issues (Bueno & Salmeron, 2009; Stach, et al, 2005; Ozesmi & Ozesmi, 2004). Cognitive modelling introduces the idea that a relationship between two or more factors is either true or false – binary logic. However, not all relationships can have such deterministic values, or are black and white. To account for this so called 'greyness', a fuzzy logic and in particular fuzzy cognitive maps were introduced by Kosko in the mid 1980's (Papageorgiou & Iakovidis, 2013). In fuzzy cognitive maps the causal relationships between stimuli are weighted, or have degrees of influence (Park & Kim, 1995). So using the example of league tables and ranking of a university; does this impact on your choice of university... in binary logic it is either yes or no, 1 or 0. Using fuzzy logic, the answer can be graded – there is still the yes or no at the extremes, but also several degrees of or intervals of influence can now be incorporated. In practice, a negative influence would be given a value of -1 and a positive influence +1 (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010).

The construction of a fuzzy cognitive map see a series of 'nodes' linked together with 'edges' (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Edan, 1992). The nodes are representing the causal concepts (culture, marketing stimuli, etc) and the 'edges' represent the causal power or influence of one node over another (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010). The values assigned to the nodes are the result of the intervals of influence and are determined by the research data itself. As the data is inputted to the fuzzy cognitive map, the values of the nodes is established and then the causal relationships between the nodes can be seen. This will enable the researcher to identify the key determinants in the decision making process across the four perspectives of the conceptual framework [see Figure 10].

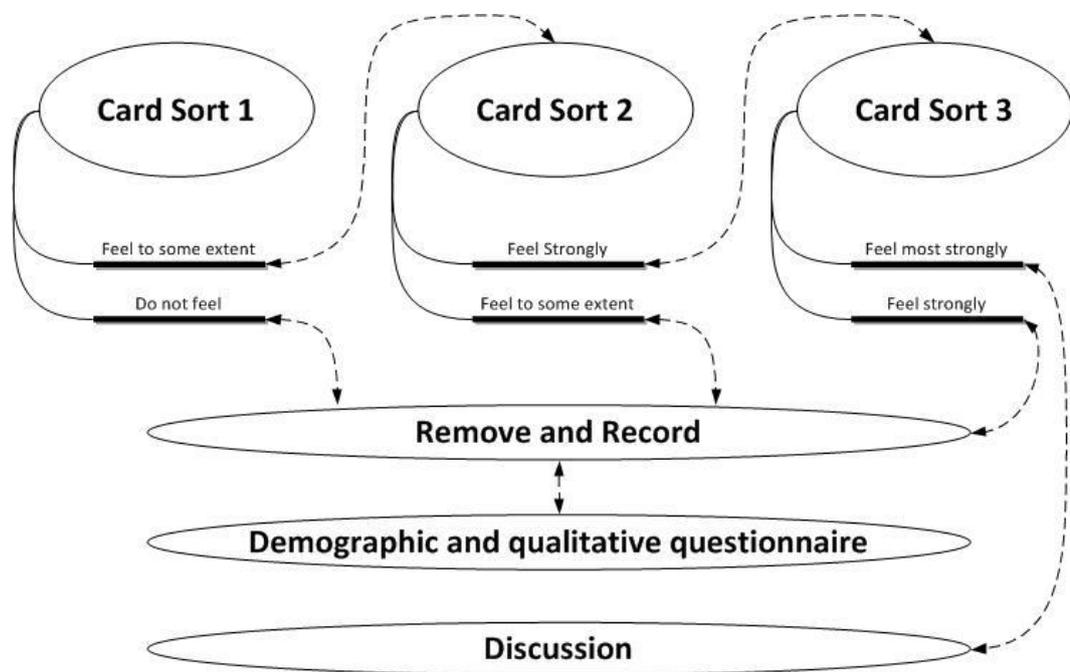
Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping offers various advantages over other participatory research methods such as questionnaire surveys, structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. The visualizations of Fuzzy Cognitive Maps can be used in presentations making relationships between variables clearer for different stakeholders (Ozesmi & Ozesmi, 2004) and in order to simplify maps, or to emphasize one variable or component of the studied system, one can extract only those relationships concerning specific nodes of interest.

Sorting techniques, in which participants sort or organise different items or stimuli into different categories or groups provides a non-confrontational method to elicit agreement and disagreement of a range of stimuli without causing the participant to feel compromised (Whaley & Longoria, 2009). The categories chosen into which the stimuli are grouped can be chosen by the researcher (a 'constrained' card sort), the participant (unconstrained card sort) or both (Rugg & McGeorge, 2005), in addition the data collection process is also simple to administer, is not complicated for the participant to understand and is a relatively quick process to experience (Frincher & Teneberg, 2005).

The items or stimuli for the card sort are selected from the literature and the conceptual framework outlined above. Once identified, the stimuli need to be prepared for physical sorting by participants (Rugg & McGeorge, 2005) by creating a 'card' for each stimuli. Rugg & McGeorge (2005) advise that the cards are all of the same size, words or phrases are typed using the same font type and size, that they are consistent in their grammatical style, i.e. all active voice. Each phrase is associated to one or more of the four perspectives of the conceptual framework (internal and external context specific stimuli and internal and external generic stimuli) and therefore represent the variables within each dimension.

Participants will each be presented with an identical, randomly ordered set of stimuli, asked to look at each card in turn, and to sort the cards into two groups – either 'do not feel' or 'feel to

some extent'. During the card sort participants will be allowed to move cards between each group if they want to change their mind. Following the first card sort, cards grouped as 'do not feel' will be placed in an appropriately labelled envelop and put to one side. Rugg & McGeorge (2005) advise that this first card sort may take the longest to perform, not only because of the number of cards to sort, but also because the participants will be becoming familiar with the phrases (variables) and the sorting process itself. The participants are then asked to refine their strength of feeling for each variable two more times, the result being that all of the cards have been sorted into four groups – do not feel; feel to some extent; feel strongly; and feel most strongly [see Figure 11].



**Figure 11: Card sort process**

Following the card sort, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire containing demographic and other anonymous personal information. This will help in the data analysis phase of the research to determine similar and dissimilar trends according to gender, geographic location, and so on. It will also request the participants to add qualitative information to provide some explanation behind their choice of the variables that they have the strongest feeling with. The purpose of being able to segment the data and explain the sorting rationale will allow the triangulation of data (Scandura & Williams, 2009) confirming and corroborating data. In

addition, this will aid in the complementarity of data (Hammersley, 2008) identifying any additional relationships between the stimuli.

There are a number of cultural issues that need to be considered in designing the research instrument. Arguably, the most influential and potentially most destructive cultural issue to overcome in this research is the etic-emic dilemma (Peng, et al, 1991). The etic side of the dilemma refers to the sets of behaviours that are consistent or transferrable to other cultures, whereas the emic side is more individual to the participants concept of them self (Morris, et al, 1999). The card sort and questionnaire approach facilitates the ability to determine between generic constructs and culturally specific constructs, and will help to highlight any aspects where sub-culture influences the final decision to purchase.

Other cultural issues are more operational in their nature. The first key issue is the translation of the phrases from English into Chinese. The issues being more than accuracy of translation, but also the cultural inferences of terms used (Peng, et al, 1991; Brislin, 1970) as such, a reverse translation approach will be followed where the English phrase is translated into Mandarin Chinese and then translated back to English by a second party. The cards will be written in both English and Chinese to support the needs of the sample population and the researcher.

Prior to deploying the card sort, a pre-test or pilot study will be undertaken with a test population that is as similar to the actual research population as is possible (Hunt, et al, 1982). This will be carried out at the end of September to the new Chinese students as they begin their studies. Any ambiguities or issues that emerge will be addressed and will ensure that instructions are clear, appropriate and comprehensive. The results of this pilot study sample group will also be processed through the fuzzy logic mapping to suggest trends that may occur in the actual research.

#### **7.4 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted with four individuals selected from the Chinese students who have studied at Sheffield Hallam for the past year. These students were targeted as they will have developed an increased level of English competence and confidence, as such would be in a position to discuss more openly how the mapping exercise and variables worked. In the pilot test, a list of 75 predefined variables was used in the card sort and mapping activity. The variables were presented in English and in Mandarin Chinese, all on the same colour card. The

aim of this pilot test was to clarify understanding of the variables and to ensure the completeness of the variable set, therefore to making the card sort easier for the participants and to facilitate the later cognitive-map analysis.

At the start of each session the research objectives were explained to participants and it was emphasized that all the information gathered would only be used for academic purposes. The Participant Information Sheet (see appendix 3) was discussed and confirmation that the participant was happy to continue was sought. Following this, the participants were introduced to the list of identified variables, it was also emphasized that this list was flexible and that additional variables could be added. Next, the card sort activity was described and a complete set of variables distributed to each participant along with 10 blank cards that would be used for additional variables to be added if required. Participants were given approximately 25 minutes to complete the activity and complete the questionnaire detailing gender, age, home location, degree applied for and qualitative questions regarding why they had selected the essential variables (level 3 of the card sort process) in deciding where to study abroad. The session concluded with a short discussion in which each participant was able to voice their opinion on the outcomes of the exercise. In practice the activity took around 50 minutes to complete, so a more efficient tool was required that still did the same sorting function. Some of the response ranges in the questionnaire were extended as a result of the discussion, but it was agreed that all the variables should remain and nothing needed to be added. The other agreement was that the English and Chinese versions of the variables was both accurate and very useful.

The card sort was developed into a digital version using Microsoft Office Forms (see appendix 2); this enabled the sorting process and completing the questionnaire to be disseminated to a wider audience and did not require the researcher to be present for all data collection activities (as originally planned). Testing the digital card sort resulted in the shorter response time, which was thought to improve the chances of submission.

The questionnaire to accompany the card sort was designed to add richness and better understanding of the qualitative data. Some of the questions were closed (age, gender, region of domicile, etc.) which May (2011) explains are easy to pre-code as they will produce a numeric analysis of responses and generate relationships between variables. May (2011) goes on to explain that when coding qualitative responses the researcher must be careful not to inadvertently 'close the open question' as the richness of the response may be lost. Cresswell (2013) explains that coding of qualitative data can use either a 'flat frame' or a 'hierarchical frame'. The flat frame identifying core themes out of the qualitative responses and is

particularly useful when there are a smaller number of themes to analyse, as such as with this research. A hierarchical frame on the other hand requires more in-depth interview / discursive style responses so that more themes can be generated and the relationship between the themes can be analysed to create a rich understanding.

The flat frame approach enables consistent coding due to the limited number of codes generated it is also easy and efficient to administer (Cresswell (2013)). However, the approach can be difficult to capture a wide range of responses, for example where there might be several responses that can be used to describe the same term (May (2011)). An example of this would be when describing one's profession; the researcher will require a good understanding of each code and the range of potential terms that might be used. This is important so as to avoid large 'other' categories (May (2011)).

The open questions used in this research sought to better understand why the respondent answered in the way they did, in other words what influenced the response. This supported the flat frame approach and also followed the deductive nature of the whole research programme. The codes developed were initially extrapolated from the literature review, which as explained earlier facilitated data triangulation. However, as May (2011) explains, it is essential that a degree of flexibility in the coding process is maintained. To do this, the responses were initially analysed quickly to ensure that all codes had been identified; a kind of shortlisting. All the responses were then analysed a second time to increase the accuracy and consistency of the analysis.

## **7.5 Research population**

The research population (Gill, et al, 2011) for this research is Chinese young people deciding to pursue an academic course in an international university. Given that the aim of the research programme is to test the conceptual framework, it is not necessary to collect data from the whole or a significant population size, however a sampling frame needs to be established (Byram, 2012; Gill, et al, 2011). Initially the sample will be framed by Chinese students arriving at Sheffield Hallam University to study the pre-session English programme and those entering directly to an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The sample will then be expanded and developed by using a snowball technique to broaden the geographic spread of participants and to enrich the quality of data provided (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Voicu & Babonea, 2011). The rationale for focusing on these students is that they will only just have arrived in the UK from China. Therefore will still be very aware of their decision-making process and the stimuli that

impacted upon their decision the most and will have had minimal time to adjust their behaviour to a more western style which may be the risk if Chinese students who had studied in the UK for several years were included.

The researcher at the end of a teaching session presented the research aim and objectives to 128 Chinese students (a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled to a pre-session English course) and asked if they were happy to contribute to the research by completing the digital card sort. It was explained that this is completely voluntary and had no connection at all to their studies or their future grades. None of the students objected and it was agreed that the researcher would email the students with the participant information sheet and the link to the digital card sort.

### **7.5.1 Ethical considerations**

All research at Sheffield Hallam University is required to undergo ethical scrutiny to ensure that it is conducted to comply with the research ethics policy and protect the integrity of the research (Sheffield Hallam University, 2019). The research ethics policy is concerned with the quality of the research process itself whilst maintaining the integrity, impartiality and respect for the data collected. Participant interests are a priority and researchers must ensure that participants are fully informed about the research, how data will be collected and that the participants give their consent to be involved in the data collection process.

Ethical approval required the researcher to explain the aim, objectives and intended method of data collection along with a description of who / what will be researched. In addition to this the research instrument (see appendix 2), the participant information sheet (see appendix 3), a risk assessment (see appendix 4) and a data management strategy (see appendix 5) were also developed to ensure the researcher, the participants and the data collected were all safe, informed and comply to GDPR legislation.

## **7.6 Analysis and presentation of results**

Completed digital card sorts submitted via the Microsoft Office Forms function are collated automatically and one is able to see the headline results in a bar graph format. The data was

exported from Microsoft Office Forms to Microsoft Excel for more detailed statistical analysis and conversion into graphs and tables.

Variables were coded with values between -1 and 1 attributed to the strength of influence in the decision making process mentioned by participants (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Ozesmi & Ozesmi, 2003) with -1.0 associated to variables which were not considered a factor in the decision making process; +0.2 to variables that were considered; +0.5 to variables that were considered important; and +1.0 to those variable considered an essential factor in the decision making process.

These variables were then processed in FC Mapper Software Solution (Turney & Bachhofer, 2016), a Microsoft Excel add-on and freely accessible for non-commercial use. The software calculates the number of variables, the number of “transmitter variables” (those with a positive out-degree and no in-degree), the number of “receiver variables” (having a positive in-degree and no out-degree), and the number of “ordinary variables” (having both out-degree and in-degree components). The out-degree of a variable is the cumulative strength of connections emanating from the variable; this demonstrates the effect of the variable on other variables. Conversely, the in-degree is the cumulative strength of connections entering the variable; showing the extent that a variable is affected by other variables (Edan, et al, 1992). If a given variable is considered as a transmitter, this means that it is not affected by any other variable. Conversely, a receiver variable has no influence on any other variable in the map. The larger the number of receivers in a map, the more complex it becomes (Edan, 1992).

In social network analysis, centrality is the more significant indices in terms of map complexity and is represented by the sum of both out-degree and in-degree relationships of a variable. It reflects the connectivity of this variable to other variables in the map showing the cumulative strength of its connections (Edan, 1992). The higher the centrality value, the more important a variable is in the system.

## 8. Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of data collection. Initially a check on the reliability and size of the participant sample is carried out. This is followed by an overview of the participants and then a view of the data from a headline perspective.

The distribution of the digital card sort resulted in 44 responses. Whilst this return is not as large as hoped for, it does however enable the framework to be tested to identify and themes or trends, which is one of the principle objectives of this project. The data will also allow indications to be developed regarding the hierarchy of variables in the decision making process of young Chinese deciding on which university to study abroad at, thus contributing to the conversation about key messages to be included within future marketing materials.

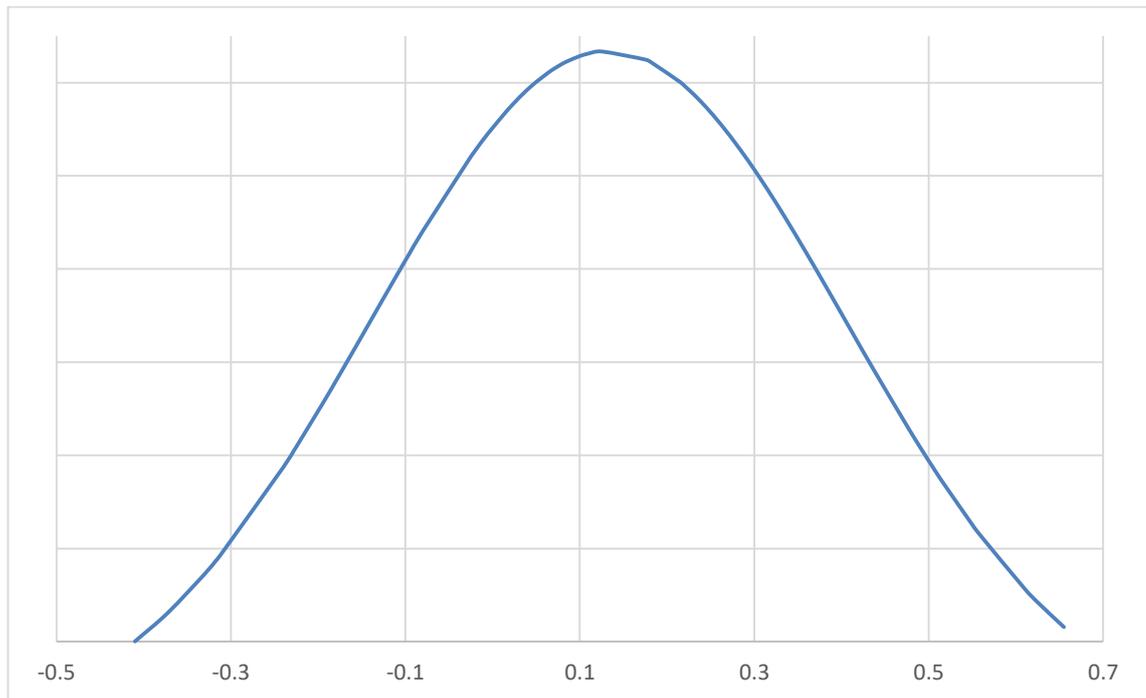
### 8.1 Distribution of responses

The distribution of responses focuses on their standard distribution and confirms if it is a standard distribution curve is present or if it is skewed to one side or the other. This was calculated in Excel using the standard distribution formula using the mean values for all the attitudinal questions asked of the participants. Participant responses were coded as follows,

Response	Code Entered
I did not consider this factor	-1.0
I did consider this factor	0.2
This factor is important to me	0.5
This factor is essential to me	1.0

**Table 1: Participant response coding**

The coding was determined by the fuzzy logic of the cognitive mapping principles established by (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Ozesmi & Ozesmi, 2003). -1.0 was entered for did not consider the factor and +1.0 for the factor was essential in the decision making process. The fuzzy variables were decided to be +0.5 if the participant deemed the factor to be important, but not essential, and +0.2 if the factor was considered but not deemed as important or essential. A standard deviation of 0.272 was calculated from the complete data set and the following distribution curve produced.



**Figure 12: Standard distribution curve**

The distribution curve is symmetrical and demonstrates the bell-shaped curve expected with a normal distribution. It is however positioned a little right of centre. This can be explained by the coding discussed earlier. It should be noted that the +0.2 value was also calculated at +0.1 and as 0.0 values, the resulting distribution curve remained as a normal distribution in all scenarios but with less movement to the right from zero with the smaller values. The value of +.02 was retained as it was felt that this represented the positive impact the factor will have had on the decision making process.

## **8.2 The Participants**

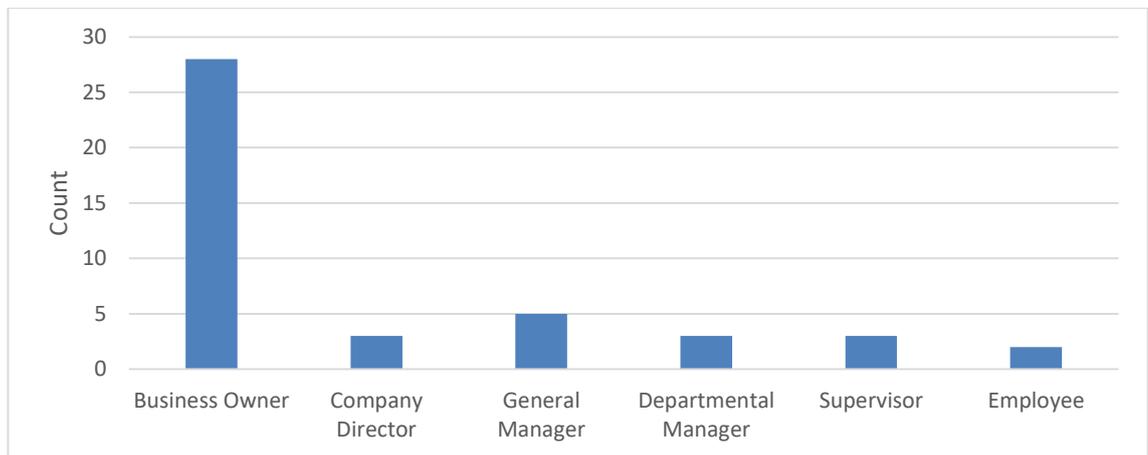
The participants comprise of 23% male and 77% female respondents with age groupings of 30% aged 18-21 (undergraduate study), 68% aged 22-25 (postgraduate study) and 2% aged over 25 (postgraduate study). All participants studied a business related subject, with 59% studying at Sheffield Hallam, 27% at University of Sheffield, 10% at University of Surrey, and 2% each at University of York, University of Warwick and University of Sussex. Although the majority of

responses (59%) are from respondents at Sheffield Hallam University, 41% come from other institutions. The benefit of this is that a more holistic sectoral view of higher education is achieved and reduces the risk of anything specific to Sheffield Hallam unintentionally impacting on the results and therefore reducing the ability to generalise in the discussion.

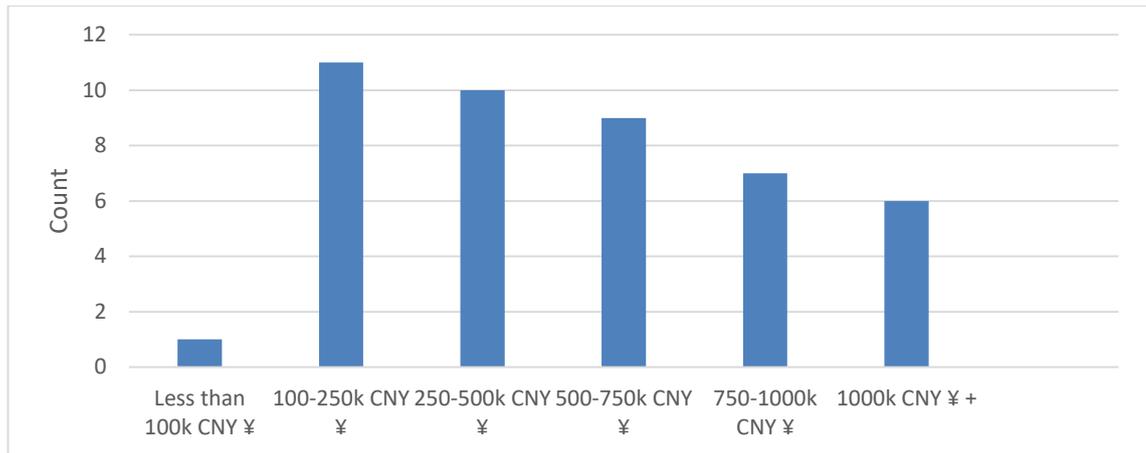
Each of the Chinese economic zones are represented in the data with 18% from the central zone, 14% from the western zone and 68% from the coastal east zone. Focusing in on the geographic regional types of China, 5% participants from the Autonomous Regions, 23% from a municipality, 70% from Provinces and 2% from a Special Administrative Region. However, not all 34 of the designated regions have representation in the data.

The data identified that the majority of participants come from a family background of business ownership (see figure 13), and that over two thirds experienced a household income of 250-500k CNY ¥ or higher (see figure 14).

93% of participants had their fees paid for by their parents, 2% using their own savings (the mature student) and 5% receiving scholarships. This was very similar to the picture of who pays for living expenses, with 91% having their parents pay for living expenses, 7% using their own savings and 2% gaining a scholarship.



**Figure 13: Parental job role**



**Figure 14: Parental household income**

The range of participants has representation of both undergraduate and post graduate study, they are what would be described as from a middle class background and have studied at several universities but all in a business field. As such, the participant group is typical of Chinese recruitment profile at Sheffield Hallam University and can be used to indicate themes and differences to the established literature. The very small proportion of Autonomous Region and Special Administrative Region participants results in this data set not being strong enough to make conclusions for Chinese students from these areas.

### 8.3 The Overarching View

The data generated has been left as a complete set of participant responses with no attempt to investigate any difference by gender, geographic area, age group, etc. The attitudinal statements have been organised by the four quadrants of the conceptual framework (see figure 10) and a simple count function was carried out to look at the distribution of responses for each of the quadrants. The results are then presented in a butterfly / tornado graph with 'I did not consider this factor' and 'I did consider this factor' being to the left of centre and the factor 'is important' and 'is essential' to the decision making process positioned to the right of centre. This representation of the results allows one to see at glance which statements are clearly a significant contributor to the decision making process (dark green) and those which are not significant at all (red).

The first area focuses on the 'internal context specific' quadrant, see figure 15. This quadrant explores the rationale for wanting to study abroad and is linked to personal identity. Some of

the key attitudes identified are around the topics of developing a global mind-set, boosting career prospects, being able to make own decisions and studying for themselves, not primarily for the benefit of their family.

The second quadrant, focuses on the 'external context specific', see figure 16. This quadrant investigates what aspects of the university package are important in the participant's decision making process and links to the marketing activities of the higher education sector. The more significant areas here include the perceived quality of the UK education system, the perceived quality of teaching and research and how important ranking of the subject area is. The aspects that appear to be less important include the role of the study abroad agent, the aesthetic appearance of the university campus and computer resources and extra-curricular activities.

The third quadrant focuses on the internal generic variables, see figure 17. This is again linked to self-identity but more from a cultural perspective rather than the desire to study abroad. The areas of significance in this quadrant include the ability to explore oneself and make one's own decisions, do things for oneself rather than for the family reputation and to develop one's personal identity. The aspects not deemed to be important include not following in the career path of ones parents, not needing to study surrounded by friends or the perceived benefits of the alumni activities.

The final quadrant focuses on the external variables that are linked to culture, see figure 18. The more important areas here are around the topics of the perceived quality of the awards and how it can act as a stepping stone to the next phase of one's career – be that to a higher level qualification, ability to study at a higher ranked university or to boost ones career prospects. The broad areas seen as less important include, following the wishes / direction of one's family, and ability to purchase luxury brands.

From this overview it is clear that this generation of Chinese study abroad students have a desire to establish a personal identity and secure a good career which is influenced by internationalisation, and personal success. What is maybe a surprise is the shift away from some of the traditional values associated with Chinese communities and families – away from some of the established Confucian values and towards the globalised mind-set and career opportunities sought by those typically described as middle class.

The most important variables according to the data collected (variables that have a positive score of 75% or more) are,

- I wanted to study overseas

- I want an international career
- I wanted to study in English (language)
- I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects
- I can achieve a world recognised qualification
- By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions

With the variable considered the most important by the whole data set being 'I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects.

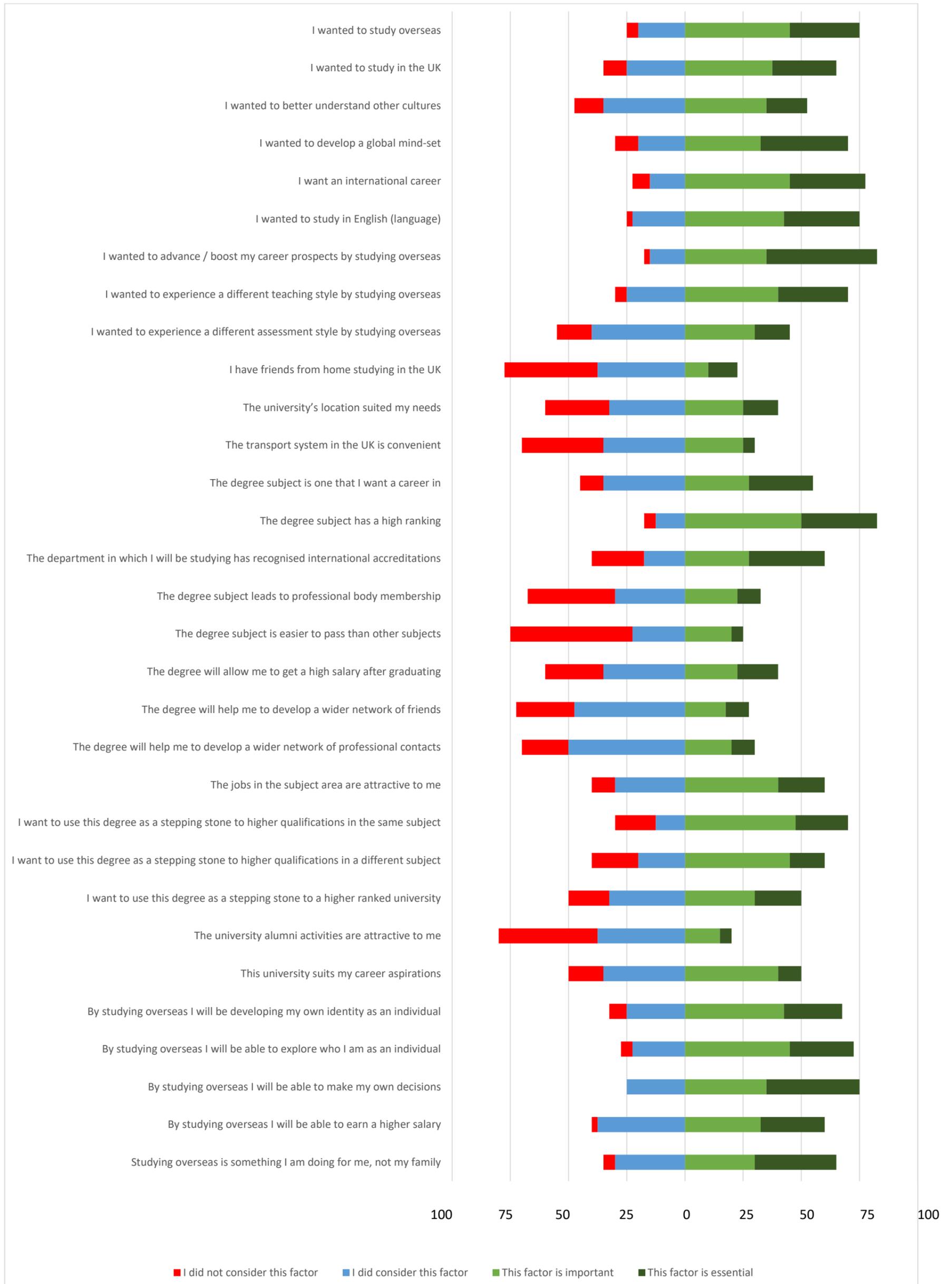


Figure 15: Internal Context Specific Quadrant Variable Significance

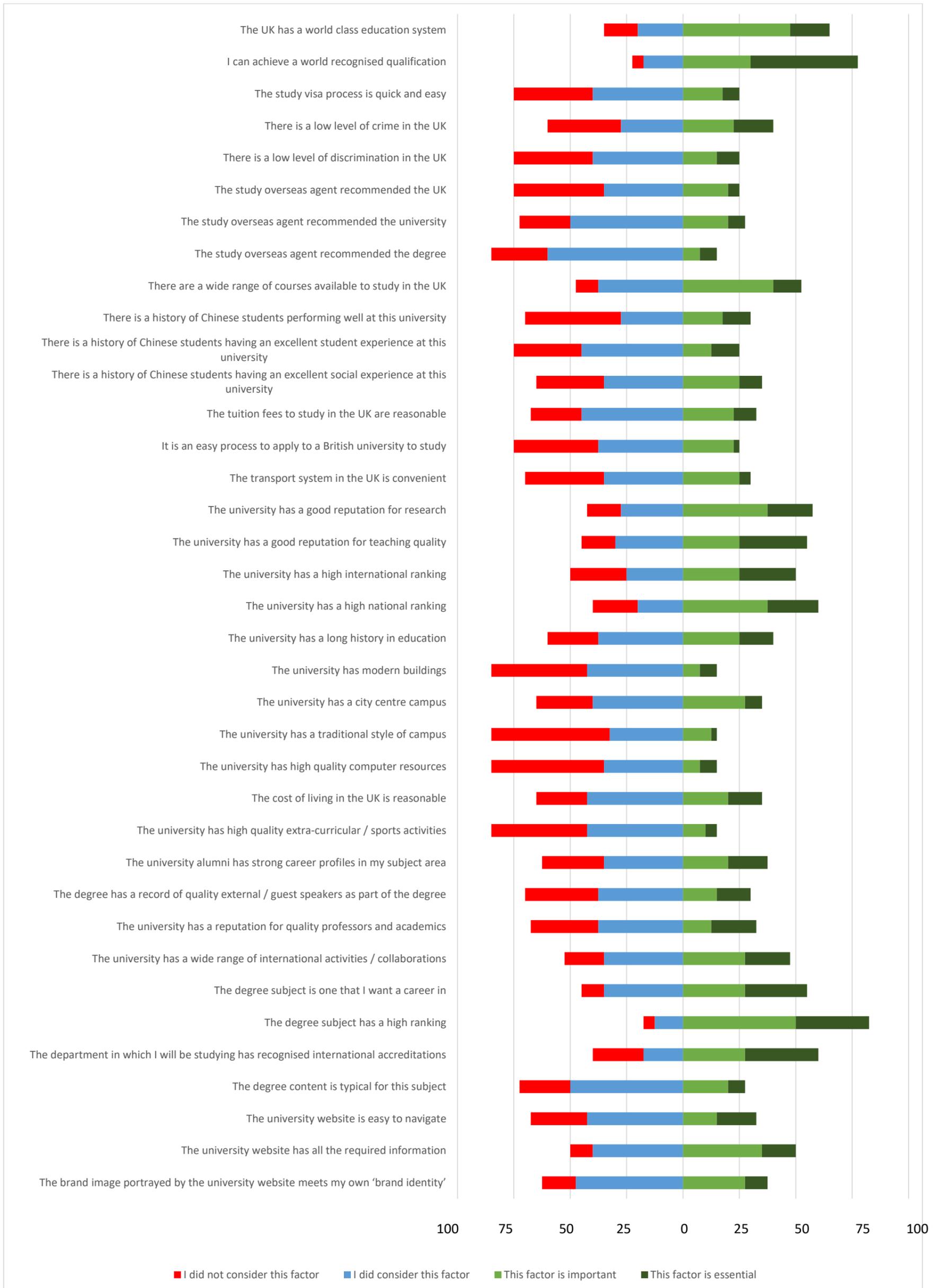


Figure 16: External Context Specific Quadrant Variable Significance

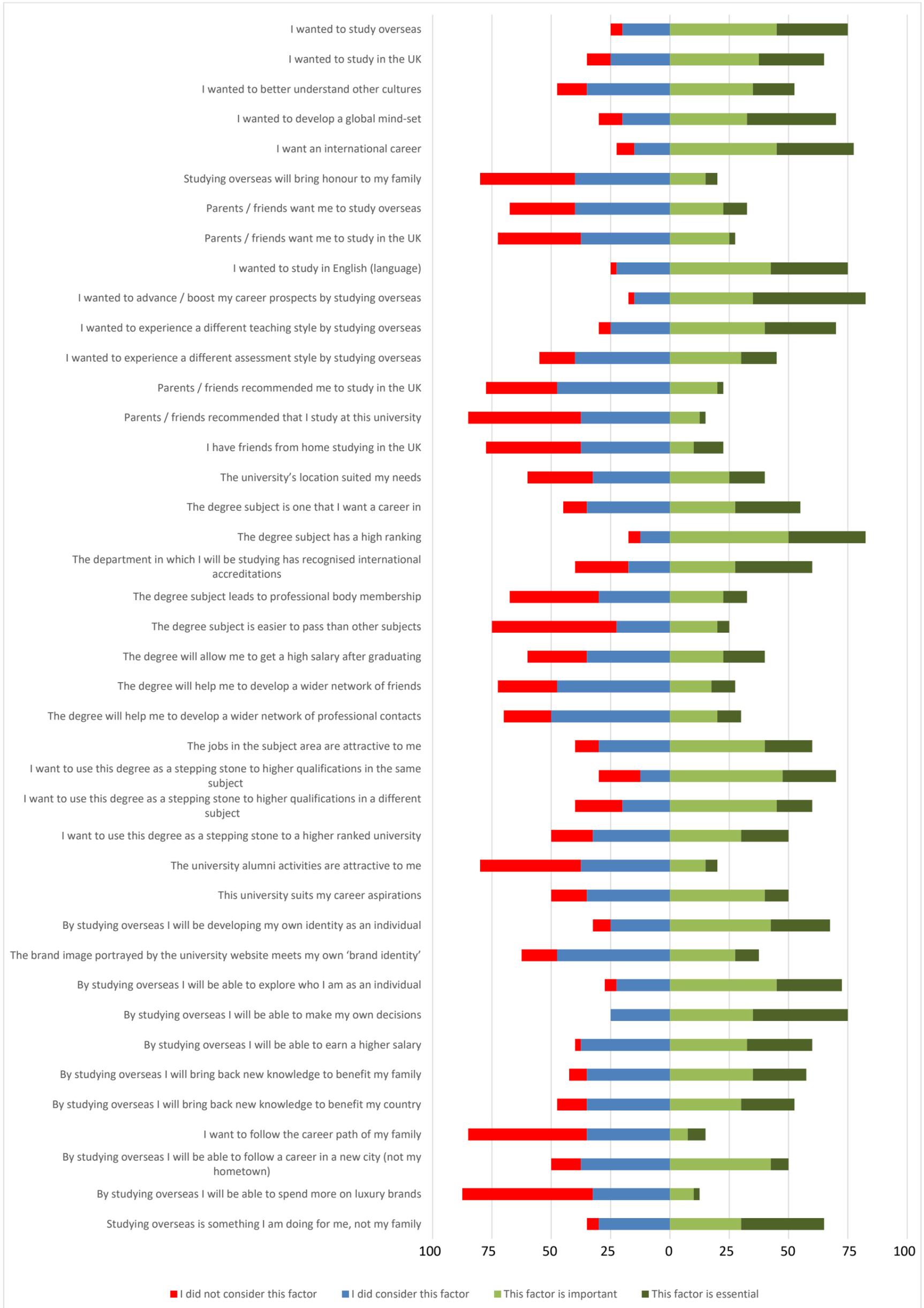


Figure 17: Internal Generic Quadrant Variable Significance

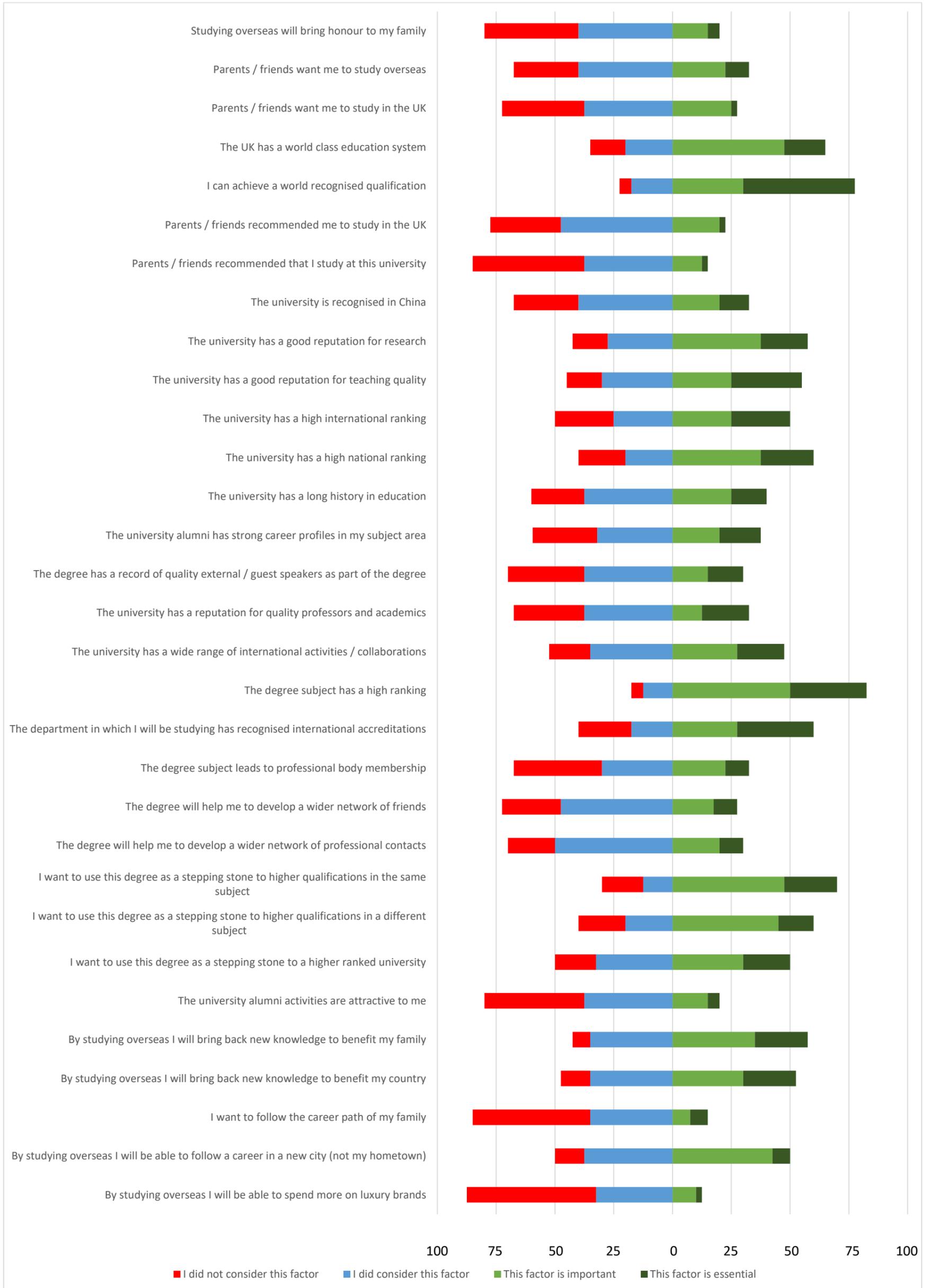


Figure 18: External Generic Quadrant Variable Significance

## 8.4 The adjusted data set

Having reviewed the data at a macro level, variables that received a mean value lower than the overall mean were removed from the data set. This action took the number of variables from 75 down to 35 (see table 2) and enabled the focus of analysis to be on those variables that were more important to the participants as they worked through their decision making process.

	Variable
1	I wanted to study overseas
2	I wanted to study in the UK
3	I wanted to better understand other cultures
4	I wanted to develop a global mind-set
5	I want an international career
6	I wanted to study in English (language)
7	I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects by studying overseas
8	I wanted to experience a different teaching style by studying overseas
9	I wanted to experience a different assessment style by studying overseas
10	The UK has a world class education system
11	I can achieve a world recognised qualification
12	There are a wide range of courses available to study in the UK
13	The university has a good reputation for research
14	The university has a good reputation for teaching quality
15	The university has a high international ranking
16	The university has a high national ranking
17	The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborations
18	The degree subject is one that I want a career in
19	The degree subject has a high ranking
20	The department in which I will be studying has recognised international accreditations
21	The jobs in the subject area are attractive to me
22	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in the same subject
23	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject
24	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to a higher ranked university
25	This university suits my career aspirations
26	By studying overseas I will be developing my own identity as an individual
27	The university website has all the required information

28	The brand image portrayed by the university website meets my own 'brand identity'
29	By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual
30	By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions
31	By studying overseas I will be able to earn a higher salary
32	By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my family
33	By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my country
34	By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown)
35	Studying overseas is something I am doing for me, not my family

**Table 2: List of variables after adjustment**

It is interesting to note at this point that variables that reflect some of the traditional Confucian values have been removed. These include:

- Doing things to bring honour and social standing to ones family / community.
- Respecting the wishes of elders and ones senior family.
- Wanting to follow the career path of ones parents.
- The cost of studying / living in the UK.
- The history / tradition of others studying / living in the UK.
- Design of the campus, location and computer resources.
- University website, ease of navigation.
- Industry specialists as guest speakers.
- Extra-curricular activities and societies.
- The alumni network / network of peers / network of professional contacts.

One should be cautious in the rejection of such variables, in that these results do not indicate that they are no longer important or valid, but they do suggest that to the young Chinese they are becoming less important. This is one of the first indicators that the cultural attitudes of young Chinese is indeed changing from those of previous generations.

The next stage of the analysis is to determine if gender, age or geographic location has any impact on the results or are these aspects consistent throughout the data set.

## 8.5 Additional variables

From the whole data set there were four additional variables entered that participants highlighted as contributing to their decision making process. Although each one was only mentioned once, for completeness they need to be considered, however they will not generate any statistical significance. They might however, contribute to some understanding as to how the decision of where to study has been made.

The first variable is seeking for 'high employment post study'. This factor was the only one from a male (postgraduate) respondent and clearly is related to career prospects. This would be expected to feature in the external context specific quadrant and be part of the marketing materials presented by a university.

The other three variables were included by undergraduate female respondents. One suggested that if a town / city had a Chinatown, there would be a greater influence on the decision of where to study. This was suggested for two reasons. The first being if she was feeling homesick she felt that support could be easier to find here. The second reason is for an increased feeling of personal safety. A further variable centred on the 'ease to travel to other countries'. One of the characteristics of Chinese students is their desire to travel and visit other towns / cities / countries. The final variable added was so that she could 'study with her boyfriend'. The reason for this was not explained, but could have related to feeling more secure / safe with her boyfriend or it could have been more about them as a couple experiencing international study together and developing further their relationship. What is clear is that these three additional variables contribute to the developing independence of these young females and enhancing the period of time in which they were studying.

## 8.6 Variables analysed by gender

Table 3 explores if there is any difference in the relationship to the remaining variables by gender. The mean value for all participants is used as the control point and then the mean variable values for females and males is calculated. A number of the variables clearly demonstrate that gender has no differentiating factor at all. These include having the perception that careers will be boosted by an international education and that the qualification is well recognised within China. Also the desire to learn in the English language and to experience a different educational philosophy and assessment approach.

To ensure that the difference in view point is significant an ANOVA (multiple variable) test was undertaken, see table 3. With the F value is greater than the F-crit value, and the P value being less than 0.05, there is statistical evidence to support the claim that gender does have an impact on the decision making priorities.

ANOVA: Multiple Variable						
SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
<b>Overall Mean</b>	35	13.195	0.377	0.018882		
<b>Female Mean</b>	35	14.48182	0.413766	0.013623		
<b>Male Mean</b>	35	7.128571	0.203673	0.082897		
ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
<b>Between Groups</b>	0.881216	2	0.440608	11.45402	0.00003255	3.085465
<b>Within Groups</b>	3.923688	102	0.038468			
<b>Total</b>	4.804904	104				

Table 3: ANOVA - Variables analysed by gender

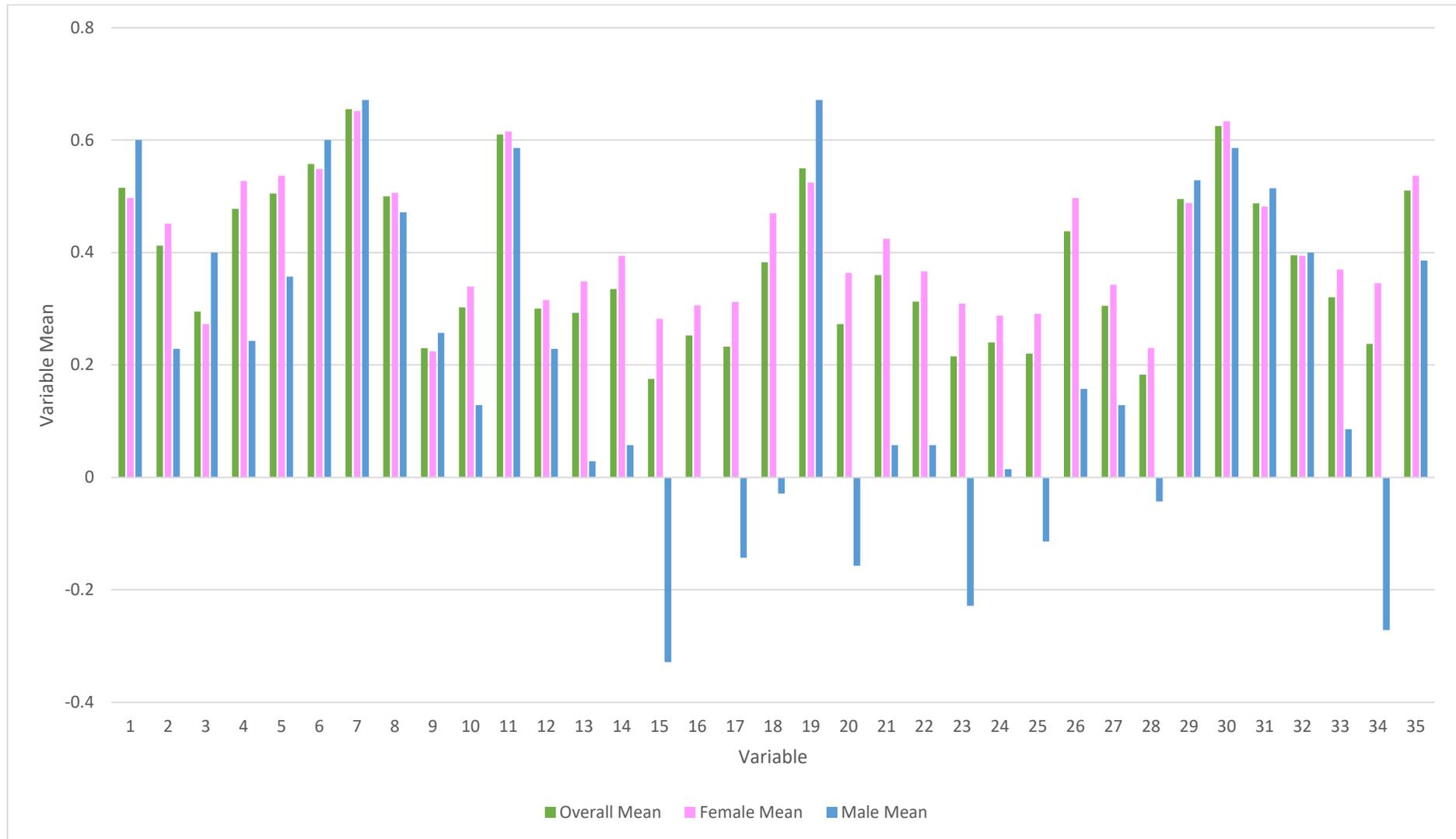


Figure 19: Variables analysed by gender

The clear areas of difference when one focuses in on gender responses are the eight variables below, table 4. In each of these cases the male participants responded by suggesting that these variable were not as important to them in their decision making process, but to the female respondents they were.

15	The university has a high international ranking
17	The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborations
18	The degree subject is one that I want a career in
20	The department in which I will be studying has recognised international accreditations
23	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject
25	This university suits my career aspirations
29	By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual
34	By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown)

**Table 4: Key variable by gender**

What is surprising from these variables is that some of the more traditional and more tangible factors of international ranking, international collaborations and international accreditations are considered less important by the male respondents. When one considers some of the other variables that gender analysis exposes differences of opinion, it is the area of self-awareness and career planning that is highlighted. The female respondents indicating that studying the degree in the same subject as the career one wants to pursue and have aspirations in, and in exploring self-identity is more important and perhaps a more mature reflection of one’s life goals.

### **8.7 Variables analysed by age group**

With gender producing some interesting results and potential cultural values shift, the next aspect to be considered is does the age of the participant make a difference? Again the overall mean values are used as the control measure and the participants and the participant results sorted by age group. The 18-21 age group is labelled as undergraduate and the 22-25 and 25+ age groups have been merged as they were all studying at a postgraduate level. This group was labelled as postgraduate.

The results exposed two stages of education career and were clearly split by whether the participant was beginning their undergraduate or postgraduate career phase, see table 5. The

undergraduate participants were more keen on aspects like wanting to study overseas / in the UK; study in English; developing a global mind-set, etc, whereas this was not as important to the postgraduates as they had already passed through that phase. The postgraduate participants were much more interested in the career focused variables such as entering a career that is interesting for them (not necessarily their family's career path); making decisions for themselves and completing postgraduate studies for themselves as a vehicle to boost their own career aspirations.

What is clear, is that the differences expressed by focusing upon age group reveal the stage of the participant's academic journey and not necessarily something that is specifically a cultural shift.

ANOVA: Multiple Variable						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Overall Mean	35	13.195	0.377	0.018882		
Undergraduate Mean	35	14.97692	0.427912	0.027818		
Postgraduate Mean	35	12.46154	0.356044	0.02345		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.095623	2	0.047811	2.044681	0.134693	3.085465
Within Groups	2.385093	102	0.023383			
Total	2.480716	104				

Table 5: ANOVA - Variables analysed by age group

Again, to check if the identified differences had any statistical impact an ANOVA (single factor) test was carried, see table 5. On this occasion with the F value being less than the F-crit value, and the P value being greater than 0.05, there is no statistical evidence to support the claim that age group has an impact on the decision making priorities.

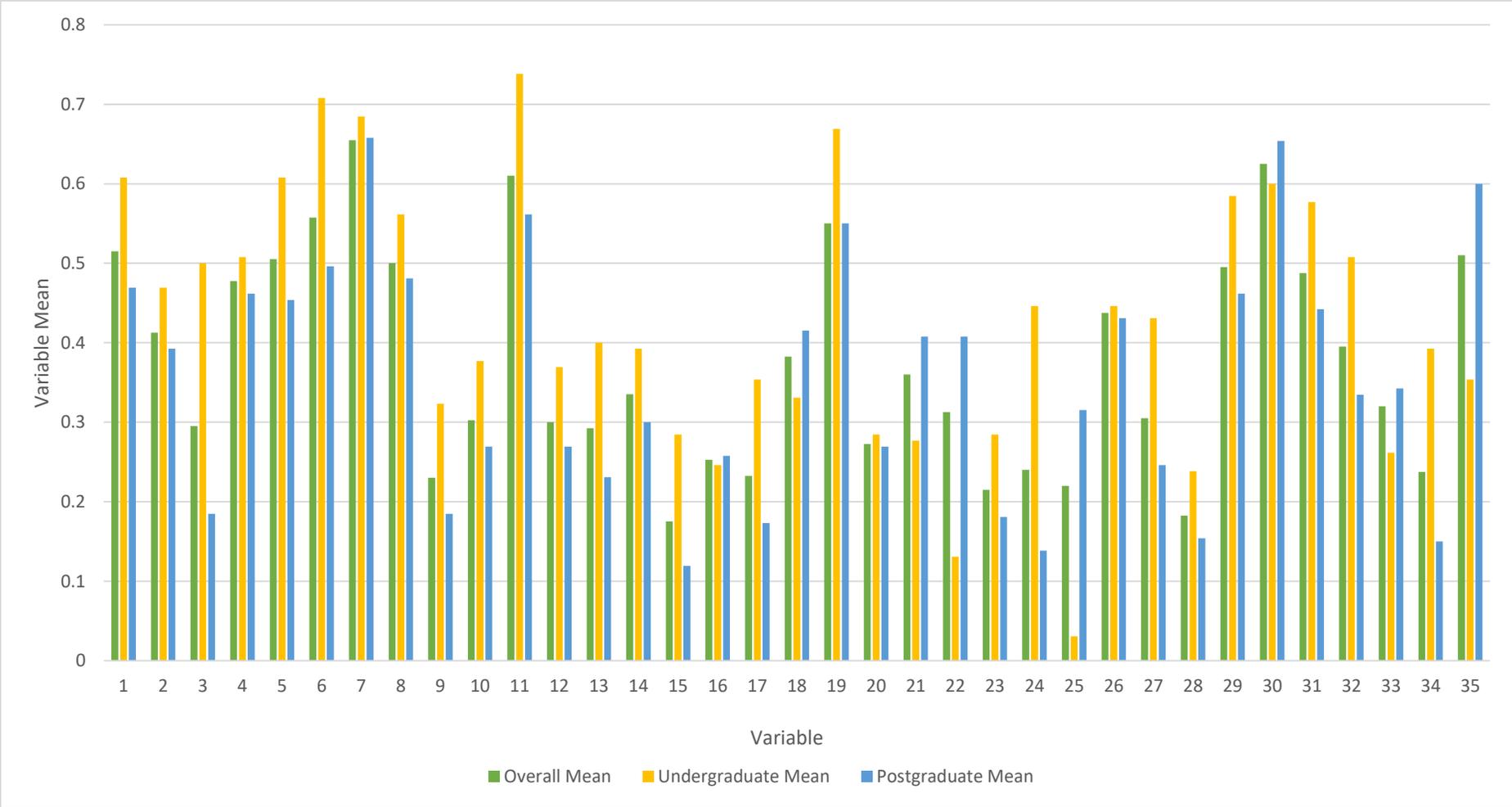


Figure 20: Variables analysed by age group

## 8.8 Home town location type

The remaining key variables centre on geographic location of the participants home town. Firstly the focus is on how the location of the home town is categorised; Autonomous Region, Municipality, Province or Specific Administrative Region. With the results yielding very small numbers of participants from both the Autonomous Region and Specific Administrative Region, these groups were not included in the analysis. The analysis focuses now only on are there any significant differences from the participants originating from a municipality and a province.

The overall mean value was included as a benchmark and then sorted by the two variables mean value, see table 6.

From the graphical representation there appears to be a clear differences expressed by those from municipalities and those from provinces. The areas that they all agreed on and were seen as being important to them was the area of personal development, personal identity and the opportunity to explore who they are as individuals. This may be influenced by the split in gender, as identified earlier the female respondents indicated a higher importance of self-awareness and self-identity.

Those that were located in a province tended to express a level of importance for aspects such as ranking of university, subject area and the quality of the teaching. For those located in municipalities, the results are quite different and fundamentally express a desire for a more international outlook on learning and on their career and can be explained by the greater exposure to international business, travellers and global brands. Variables that are significantly different include language development, having a global mind-set, international collaborations and activities within the degree programme, using the qualifications as a strategic stepping stone to preferred career aspirations and increased mobility.

The graphical observations were once again tested for statistical validity with the ANOVA (single factor) test, see table 3. The F value is greater than the F-crit value, and the P value is less than 0.05, there is therefore statistical evidence to support the claim that home town location type does have an impact on the decision making priorities.

ANOVA: Multiple Variable						
<b>SUMMARY</b>						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
<b>Overall Mean</b>	35	13.195	0.377	0.018882		
<b>Municipality Mean</b>	35	17.6375	0.503929	0.018481		
<b>Province Mean</b>	35	12.12667	0.346476	0.023032		
<b>ANOVA</b>						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
<b>Between Groups</b>	0.488061	2	0.244031	12.1216	0.00001892	3.085465
<b>Within Groups</b>	2.053451	102	0.020132			
<b>Total</b>	2.541512	104				

Table 6: ANOVA - Variables analysed by home town location type

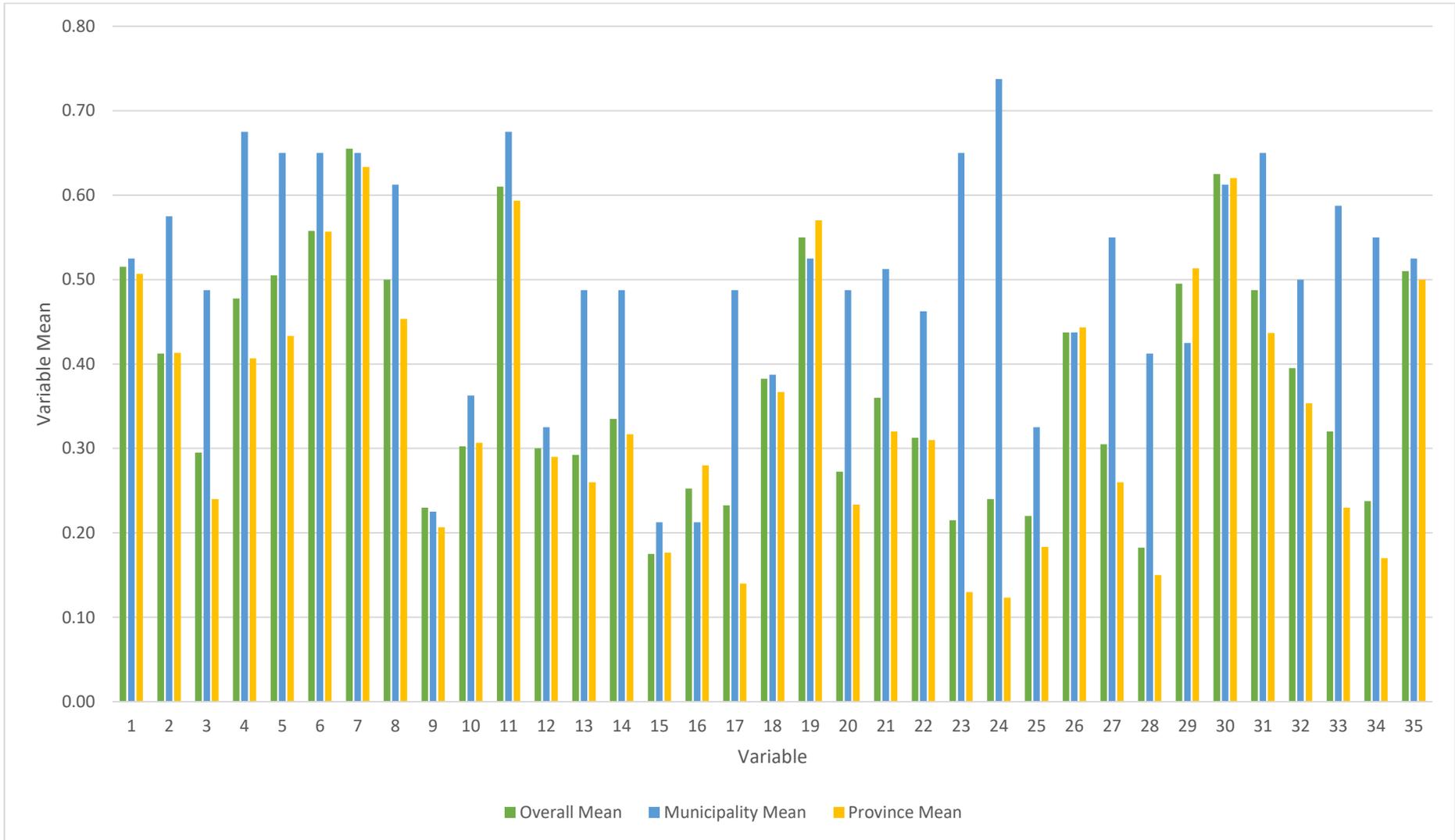


Figure 21: Variables analysed by home town location type

## 8.9 Variables analysed by economic zone

An alternative analysis using geographic location is to organise the results by economic zone; the Eastern coastal zone, Central zone and the Western zone. The overall mean values were included to provide a benchmark and the three economic zones compared to it and to each other. What is very apparent from figure 22 is that there are clear differences between all three economic zones.

The central economic zone maps closely alongside the mean values for each of the variables, suggesting that opinion on each of the variables covers a range of viewpoints and is not as developed as the other two zones.

The Eastern coastal economic zone, the region where the economic reforms of China started and have received greater foreign investment, exposure to global brands and experienced an international style consumerist life style, participants from here have the widest positive differential in variable significance, especially when compared to the Western economic zone.

	Variable
9	I wanted to experience a different assessment style by studying overseas
10	The UK has a world class education system
11	I can achieve a world recognised qualification
13	The university has a good reputation for research
14	The university has a good reputation for teaching quality
15	The university has a high international ranking
16	The university has a high national ranking
17	The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborations
18	The degree subject is one that I want a career in
19	The degree subject has a high ranking
20	The department in which I will be studying has recognised international accreditations
22	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in the same subject
23	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject
24	I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to a higher ranked university
29	By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual
30	By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions

Table 7: Key variables for Eastern economic zone

This greater exposure has arguably expanded their horizons and facilitated them to seek out attributes such as quality of teaching and research, where individuality is sought and where an undergraduate degree is seen as a stepping stone to higher ranked postgraduate degrees. In addition, the areas of self-awareness and self-determinism are most highly sought variables from this economic zone.

As for the Western economic zone, there are two areas of interest here. Firstly the areas of global mind-set, international careers and improving their English language feature as very significant variables, and more so than with the Eastern zone. This can be explained due to the Eastern zone having been exposed to international trade the longest and that respondents from the Eastern zone have transitioned through this desire.

The second aspect relates to the quality of the teaching and research, the university website and the desire to work in a different region. These variables all scored significantly lower than the Eastern zone and suggests that the priority currently of these respondents is to develop the international side of their experience and they are not as concerned about the detail of the quality of the teaching / research.

	Variable	
4	I wanted to develop a global mind-set	+
5	I want an international career	+
6	I wanted to study in English (language)	+
7	I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects by studying overseas	+
10	The UK has a world class education system	-
13	The university has a good reputation for research	-
14	The university has a good reputation for teaching quality	-
27	The university website has all the required information	-
28	The brand image portrayed by the university website meets my own 'brand identity'	-
34	By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown)	-

Table 8: Key variables for Western economic zone

Again it is important to demonstrate that there is statistical significance in these differences. The ANOVA multiple variable test shows that the F value is greater than the F-crit value, and the P value is less than 0.05, there is statistical evidence to support the claim that economic zone does have an impact on the decision making priorities.

ANOVA: Multiple Variable						
SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
<b>Overall Mean</b>	35	13.195	0.377	0.018882		
<b>Eastern Coastal Zone Mean</b>	35	18.18333	0.519524	0.043162		
<b>Central Zone Mean</b>	35	12.67931	0.362266	0.019158		
<b>Western Zone Mean</b>	35	10.2	0.291429	0.08803		
ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
<b>Between Groups</b>	0.959245	3	0.319748	7.557637	0.000103	2.671178
<b>Within Groups</b>	5.753884	136	0.042308			
<b>Total</b>	6.713129	139				

Table 9: ANOVA - Variables analysed by economic zone

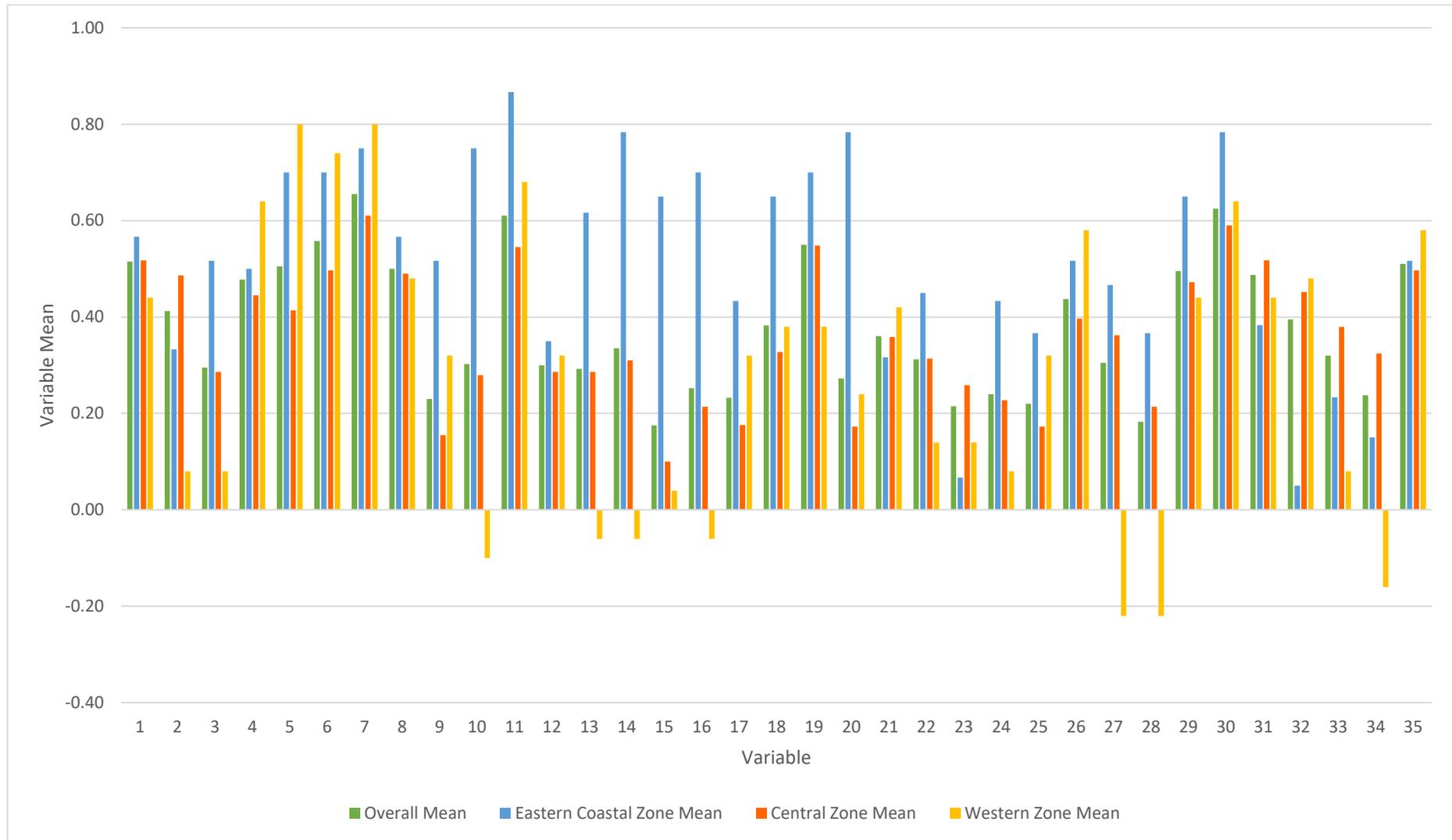


Figure 22: Variables analysed by economic zone

## 8.10 Qualitative comments

Having completed the digital card sort, participants were asked to explain why they had selected certain variables as 'essential' in their decision making process. There were three identifiable groups of comments that emerged; degree subject and associated career; personal safety and security; and finally about personal development and identity.

### 8.10.1 Degree subject and associated career

Those that commented in this area stated that the Gaokao national college entrance test had become very intense and created too much pressure on the student and their family. As such, rather than focusing on the Gaokao attention was transferred to benefitting from an international education. One respondent commented *"Chinese college entrance examination is increasingly difficult than before. Chinese students often under large pressure and competition. Some people clearly understand their competitive situation, therefore decided to study abroad"*.

This was added to by another respondent stating that *"domestic education degree choice is low (lack of specialist qualifications), and only by studying abroad can increase the choice"*. A further respondent added that *"I have more passion to study this which will improve my grades"*. These views were expressed by male respondents only.

Further comments in this area added that being able to see a clear opportunities for career progression was key and being able to link this with salary expectations. One respondent said, *"because it can affect my future career path directly"*, a further respondent expressed a similar view by stating, *"my future work is really essential factor for me to choose the University and courses. Because future work is my main life and major experience, as well as it decides my life quality and what I can expect from life"*. A different respondent commented that, *"if the employment rate of a school is high, it means that the teachers are excellent and of high quality"*.

This was complemented by others stating that they had life expectations (including travel) and a quality of life that they wanted to achieve and that to study overseas would help to achieve this. Comments included, *"This country is easy for me to travel to neighbouring countries and cities"*; and *"it all helps me to have a better and brighter future"*. These viewpoints were from male and female respondents.

### **8.10.2 Personal safety and security**

The safety of a country was considered by several respondents as essential, with the UK being perceived as a safe county. To highlight this, one respondent commented, *“It brings more sense of safety for me to stay in UK”* with a different respondent stating *“the location safety is important to me”* and a third respondent stating that *“studying in UK is one of the most safe country for a study abroad student”*. This perception of safety was further enhanced where cities had a Chinatown (as mentioned earlier) as this provided a cultural and emotional crutch from which a feeling of security and reassurance can be sought if required. One respondent commented, *“when I feel home sick I can go to China town go around.”* Arguably, this could also be a consequence of parental wishes and the parents feeling happier if their child was close by to a Chinatown. These viewpoints were expressed by female respondents only.

### **8.10.3 Personal development and identity**

This final area of qualitative comments came from both male and female respondents, and had by far the most responses. There are two distinct sub-groups. Firstly the male respondents commented upon more tangible variables such as how famous the university is and how that would contribute to their personal identity. One respondent in particular said, *“ranking, and fame are the top reasons I considered. For me I wanna enter into a high ranking university to learn more professional knowledge. The fame of the university equals with the sense of identity”*. In addition to how well known the university is, comes the significance of subject ranking and is identified as a key influencing factor with one male respondent commenting, *“the rank of the course is very important!”*. This could have been attributed to the degree subject and associated career section above, but the word identity clearly gave this a different rationale.

The female respondents (the second sub-group) suggested a different rationale and focused on the more subjective area of personal development, exemplified by the response, *“I pay more attention to personal factors”*. Some commented on their desire to develop independence, for example, *“studying overseas especially in the UK is a good way to explore myself”* and *“the distance between China and UK, I would like to be far away from my family to be independent”*. While others commented on *“studying is my own development; with social progress, and higher education comes better competitiveness”*.

Others commented on wanting to improve themselves and their self-confidence and in the long term improve their quality of life. For example, one respondent commented that *“focus on how to improve myself and have good qualifications which can help to get a great job after*

*graduated*". Whilst other respondents commented on wanting to experience new cultures, for example, one respondent said, *"I love UK's culture, I want to learn more about UK's culture"* another respondent commented *"UK is the special country for me, the reason why I chose to study here is because I love the culture here, the environment and also the people here"*. Other female responses include *"improving my English is important"* and *"to see world from another view"*. What this does suggest is that the female respondents are confronting traditional societal views of roles within societies, highlighted by the statement, *"personal ability, I mean if I am not confident and qualified for a university major, then I have to choose normal job"*.

### **8.11 Fuzzy cognitive mapping values**

When the variable means are inserted into the FC Mapper software, the value of the in-degree, out-degree and centrality is calculated, see appendix 7. Given the complexity of the decision making process it is not a surprise that there are no variables that are purely a transmitter or receiver. As such all of the variables do have an impact on each other to some extent, some more so than others. By sorting the variable by their centrality value (see figure 25) the more significant variables are easily identified. The most significant being that 'the subject area has a high national ranking', 'wanting to advance / boost career prospects' and 'be able to make one's own decisions'.

If one compares the variables identified as scoring over 75% from the mean variable scores when organised into the four conceptual framework quadrants (see figures 16 – 19), those six variables score a centrality value of 14.4 or more, and feature in the most significant variables again confirming the importance of these variables.

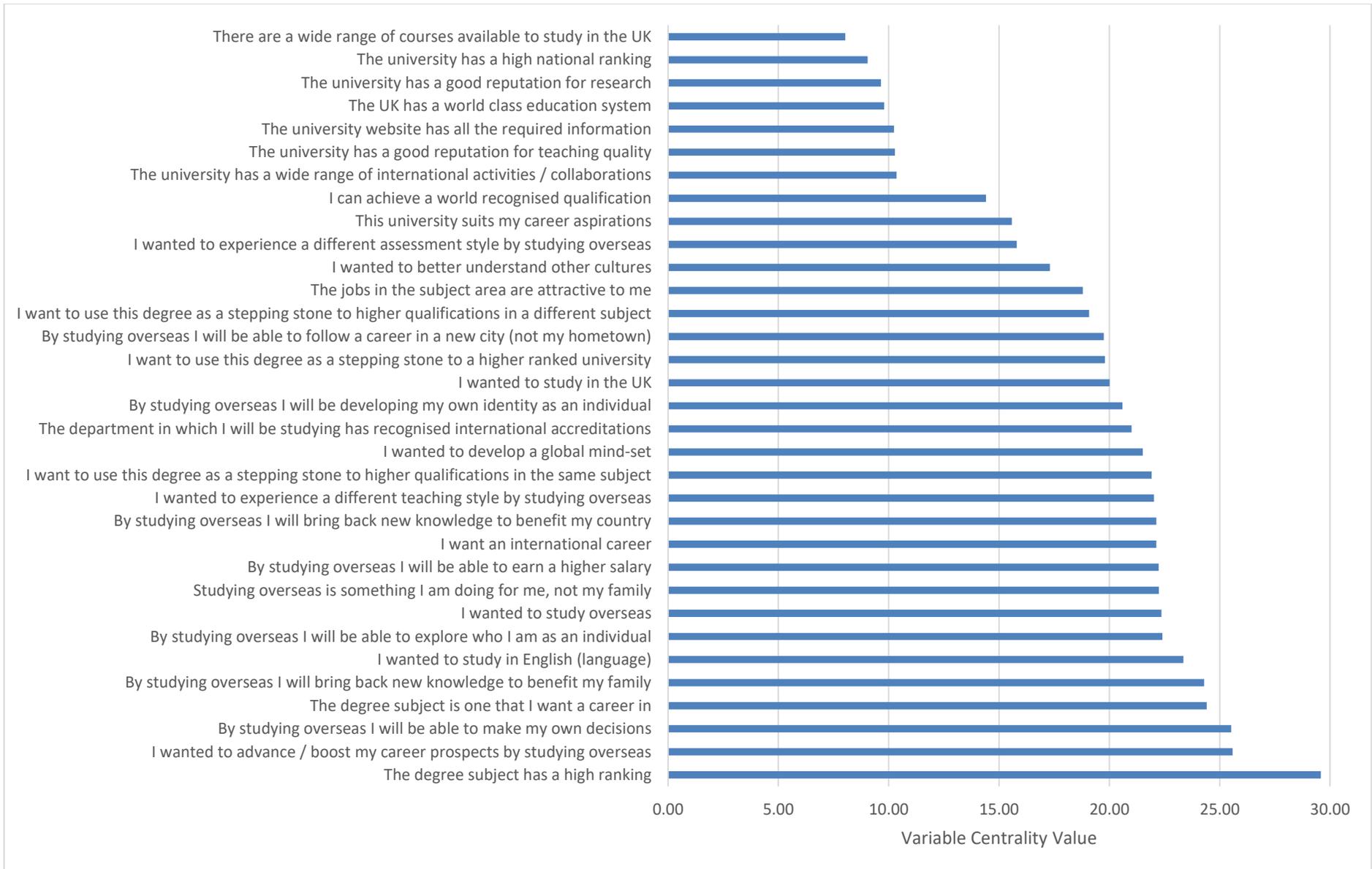


Figure 23: Variable Centrality Value

### **8.11.1 Fuzzy cognitive mapping by framework quadrant**

Having identified that the top six variables identified via the mean scores in figures 16-19 are also reflected as significant in the fuzzy cognitive mapping exercise, it follows that each of the four quadrants are investigated to place variables with high scoring centrality values and therefore identify if all quadrants are equally important or if some quadrants are more significant than others.

#### **8.11.1.1 Internal context specific**

This perspective, as explained earlier focuses on the self, on identity and on the desired life style an individual holds dear to them, see figure 26. All of these variables have scored above the 14.4 mean score for all variables and the majority are considerably higher with variables of exploring who they are as an individual, making their own decisions and having a view on the benefits of an international mind-set, career opportunities and salary expectations all featuring towards the top end of the map. In addition, respondents appear to have a clear plan for their career and the type of industry / organisation they would like to work for.

This all goes to support the assertion that the internal context specific quadrant is the key driver in the decision making process and is equally complemented by the internal generic quadrant.

#### **8.11.1.2 External context specific**

The external context specific relates to the marketing activities of the university (see figure 27). Surprisingly this quadrant is the most sparsely populated quadrant of them all with less than half of the number of variable seen in the two internal quadrants. In addition, the scores associated with these variables are amongst the lowest of all the variables with more than 50% of them scoring below the mean. The variables here to a large extent reflect the tangible criteria a university would put forward in its marketing, including league table ranking, subject accreditations, teaching and research quality and the international opportunities a qualification gained from a certain institution would provide the student.

This is not to say that this quadrant is not significant, but it has more of a short-listing function in the decision making process and not the role of a key driver.

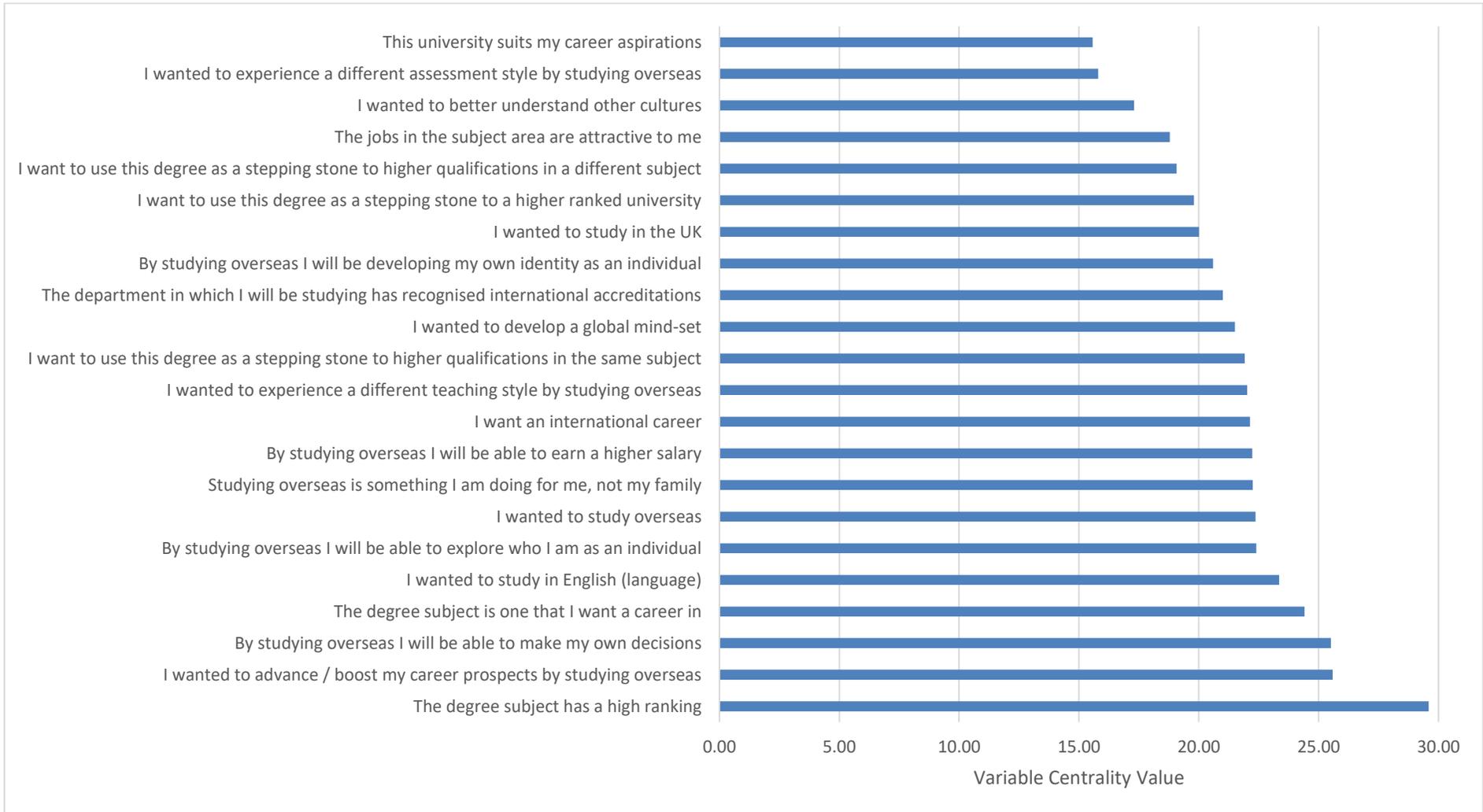


Figure 24: Fuzzy cognitive mapping for internal context specific quadrant

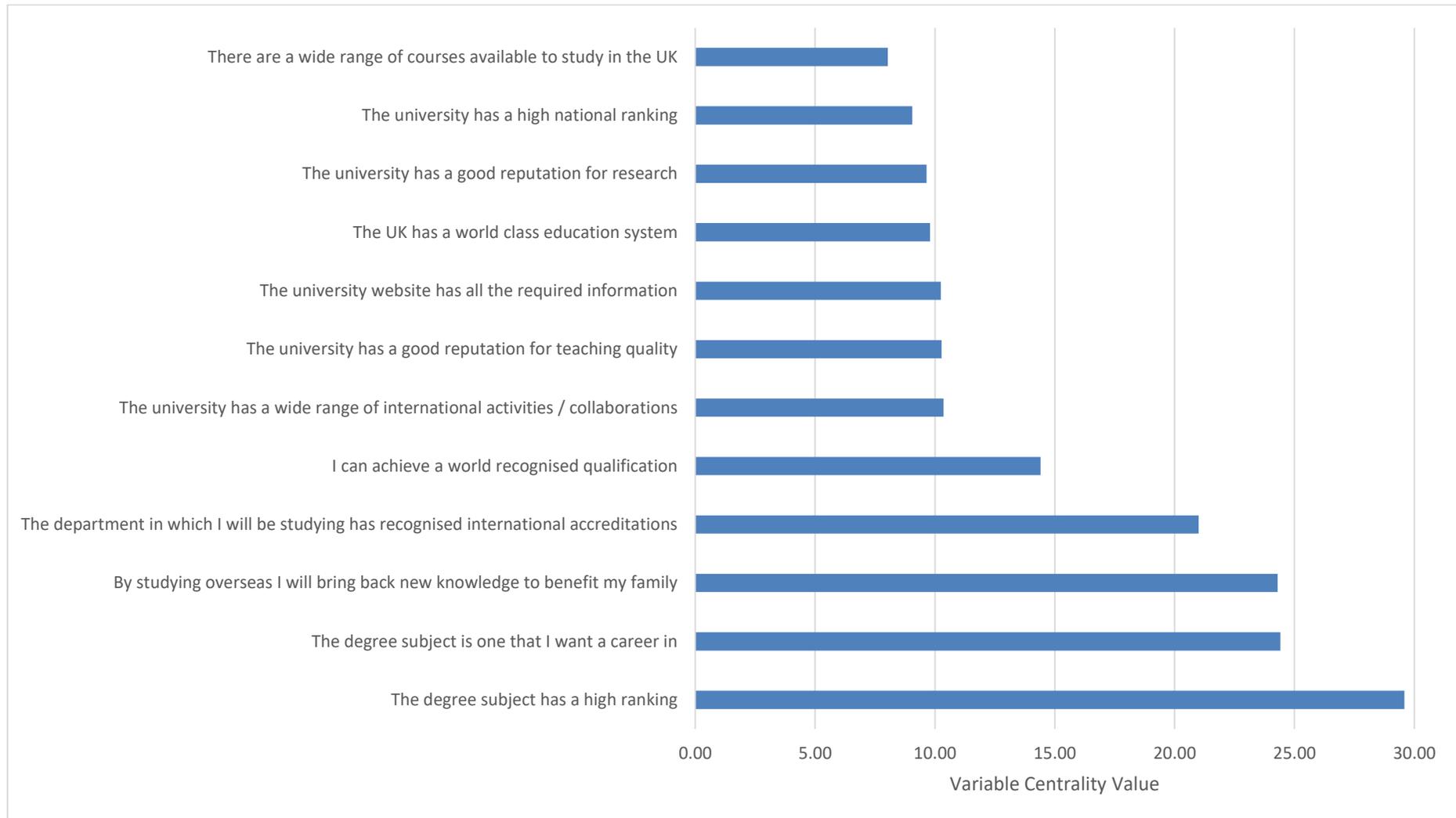


Figure 25: Fuzzy cognitive mapping for external context specific quadrant

#### **8.11.1.3 Internal generic**

This quadrant again focuses on the individual and relates to the cultural personal and social beliefs the individual has and as such provides the underpinning of the self, see figure 28, and is the most densely populated set of variables. The biggest difference between the two internal quadrants is that this one has the addition of a desire to study overseas and the benefits and opportunities that this can bring personally, socially and culturally and how this builds the idea of self-identity in general.

It is very apparent that this quadrant provides the driving force of who the individual is as a person. It underpins the values and beliefs held and therefore provides the decision making process with direction and fundamental criteria from which a decision is made.

#### **8.11.1.4 External generic**

The final quadrant focuses in on the external generic influences which includes the deeply held Chinese cultural values but adds to this aspects such as geographic location and the exposure to international business and brands, technology and the broader drivers behind society, see figure 29. For this generation of Chinese, there are some long held traditional values and beliefs and have been present for different generations. What is interesting here is that they have a lower set of scores to the internal generic variables. This would suggest that this generation is moving away from the traditional collective values held by older generations and moving towards more of an individualistic and international perspective on life.

That said, it is clear that the established cultural values are still important as they contribute to the social and cultural networks the individual maintains – their guānxi network. The significance of this clearly differentiates this decision making process from the individualistic perspectives of Western society.

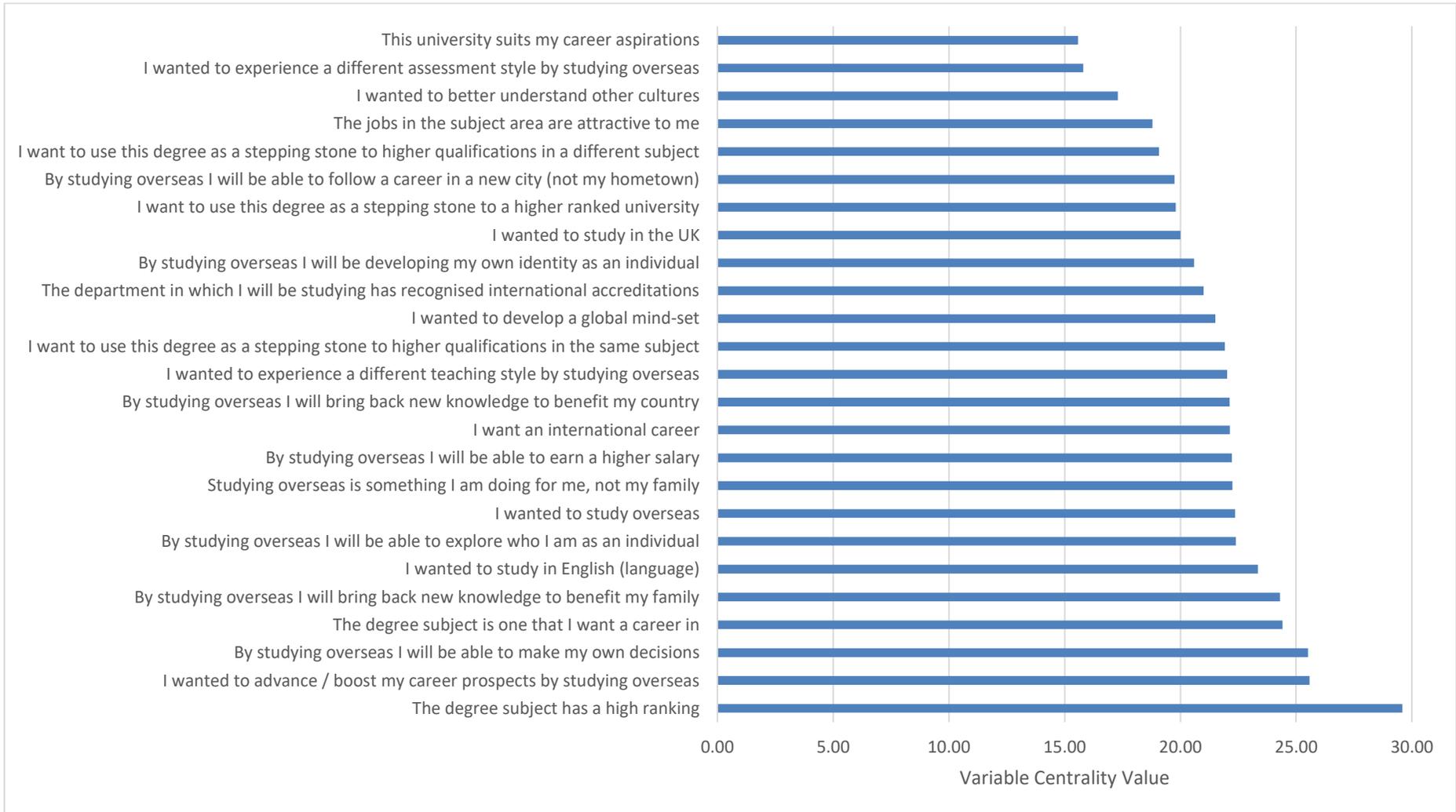


Figure 26: Fuzzy cognitive mapping for internal generic quadrant

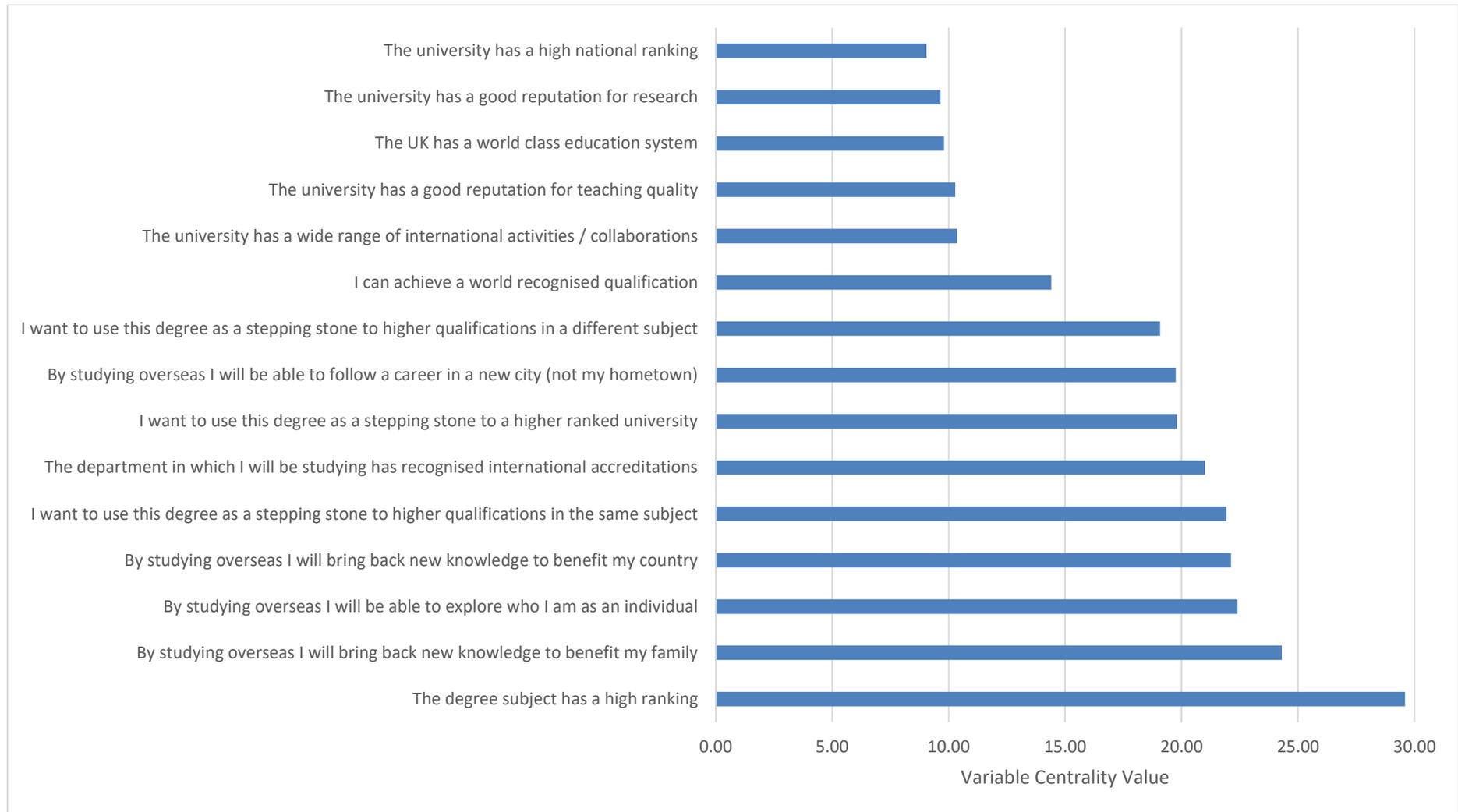


Figure 27: Fuzzy cognitive mapping for external generic quadrant

## 8.12 Chapter summary

It has been confirmed that the data set, despite being limited in size is sufficiently robust to offer a 95% level of confidence and that there is a normal distribution curve in the participants responses. As such they are valid and reliable. The variables were reduced from 75 to 35 by using the mean score of all variables as a cut-off point. This had the surprising impact of eliminating several of the traditional or expected variables for this study.

The focus on identifying any significant differences within the variables has identified that how the male and female respondent's view decision making is different. The females arguably are taking a more planned and self-aware strategy to their decision making whilst still maintaining respect for the more traditional value system within their family network. Whereas the males are indicating that the traditional set of values is less important to them and are shifting to a more individualistic philosophy to life.

When one considers the type of home town the respondents live in, it is clear that those who live in a municipality sought greater international exposure whereas in the provinces the respondents sought the more tangible factors of ranking and teaching quality. What both types of home town agreed upon was the desire to develop their ability to make their own decisions and explore who they were as individuals.

The economic zones do show differences in development and exposure to international trade and life-styles. Those from the Eastern zone unsurprisingly appearing to have transitioned through the desire for a global mind-set and international careers. Respondents from this region are going to be more often exposed to this than the other economic zones. The Western zone indicated two areas of interest, the first is their desire for that global mind-set and international exposure (already experienced by the Eastern zone), but with a strong desire to have this reinforced by reputations for teaching and research quality

The results also demonstrated that age (grouped as undergraduate or postgraduate) was not a significant factor in the decision making process, and should not be used by a university as a differentiating factor for their marketing materials.

The fuzzy cognitive mapping revealed that overall, the two 'internal' perspectives (internal context specific and internal generic) are more densely populated by variables than the external perspectives and that the scores are in general higher. Thus suggesting that the participants consider that their own feelings and values have a higher importance in the decision making process than other external influencing factors. The results place the four quadrants in an order

of internal context specific, internal generic, external generic and finally external context specific. This does not suggest that the external context specific is lesser in importance than the internal context specific quadrant, more that the strength of the driver to determine the end decision is in that order.

Having highlighted the key findings, it is important that they are understood more fully so that the findings can be used to better understand the decision making process of a Chinese student deciding where to study abroad.

## **9. Discussion**

Having explored the results of the data collection process and determining aspects of significance, it is important that these are related back to the literature to try to explain them and move one's understanding forward. This chapter will take the three literature review chapters in turn and relate the findings to them discussing where thoughts have remained unchanged and what new evidence has emerged to challenge earlier or established thought.

### **9.1 The decision making process**

Armstrong & Kotler (2013) argue that the process of making a decision is informed by the characteristics of the buyer and environmental factors. This has been interpreted in this research as internal and external factors. With O'Cass & Choy (2008) proposing that some of these factors are internalised by the decision maker (the self) and Kotler & Keller (2011) proposing that others are external to the control of the decision maker. From this categorisation of decision making variables the researcher constructed the conceptual framework that the results are informed by. The purpose of the framework was to identify if any quadrant was more or less significant than others, to identify which stimuli had the more significant impact on the final decision, and to explore if age, gender or geographic location would also influence the significance of the stimuli.

The variables in the decision making process were then established via the literature review, contextualised to the higher education sector and allocated to the four quadrants, taking into account a range of established theoretical frameworks including the self (Myers, 2012; Sheth, et al, 1991; Leung, 2008; Oyserman, et al, 2001; Ralston, et al, 1999), culture (Hofstede, et al, 2010); marketing 4 Ps (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013; Svensson & Wood, 2007) and Confucian values (Rarick, 2007; Fang, 2003; Fan, 2000; Yau, et al, 1999; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Some of the variables were allocated to more than one of the four quadrants, reflecting the complexity of the decision making process (Edan, 1992; Edan, et al, 1992).

#### **9.1.1 The appropriateness of the conceptual framework**

The first observation is that every one of the variables included in the research were seen as contributing to the decision making process, and there were several additional variables added

by some of the respondents. Given the large number of variables which together make up the very complex decision on where to study overseas, it is appropriate to focus upon the ones that have a higher impact on the decision making process.

The resultant sorting of variables into an order of importance relating to the decision on where to study overseas has resulted in highlighting that the internalised half of the framework is more important (higher values attributed to the variables) to the younger generation than the external half. This does introduce the question, have traditional Chinese values experienced a shift in priority for the younger generation?

When one looks further at the external half of the framework, the quadrant that houses the traditional Confucian values is more significant than the marketing activities of the university. This in some way goes to support the view that the traditional values are still important but have been overtaken by the intrinsic values held by the younger generation. In terms of ordering, the internal generic quadrant was the most significant followed closely by the internal context specific. Then comes the external generic quadrant and finally the external context specific quadrant. From this it is clear that the conceptual framework does enable one to identify aspects of the decision making process as being more significant than others.

### **9.1.2 The role of age**

The younger generation of China falls into what is often described by marketing literature as millennials (Fam, et al, 2008), and within this research this is focusing in on age groups that want to study at undergraduate or at postgraduate levels of study. The analysis of results using age as a factor of differentiation resulted in there being no statistically significant difference between the two sub-groups. As such the analysis rejected the idea that age would influence the decision. In many ways this is not a surprise as they are very close together with regards to age.

However, it must be stated that this study only focused on the younger generation and did not seek the views of parents or grandparents. Sun & Wang (2010); Lan, et al (2009) and Fam, et al (2008) all highlight that the older generations do have different degrees of being informed by traditional Confucian values, are more conservative in their outlook on life and therefore in how they make decisions.

### **9.1.3 The role of gender**

The analysis of data by gender does indicate significant differences between young males and young females. All respondents were indicating a shift towards a more individualistic life style, but for different reasons. The male respondents had a greater reliance on ranking and indicators of quality in teaching and research as well as international / professional accreditations. Whereas the female respondents indicated a preference towards personal development and independence.

The male preferences are consistent with research carried out by Rahmen et al (2020) in which they identify a male preference towards brand image and females a preference towards more personalised / individual attributes. Hu & Scott (2016) report on how females are establishing a different role within family structures and especially in the younger generation are challenging conventional relationships.

The male focus on ranking, accreditations and on other quality measures is also supported by Montgomery, et al (2016) who argue that males seek out the tangible elements of brands and symbolism to demonstrate success and the work of Moore (2005) who argues that the younger generations are seeking for attributes of products to make them look 'cool' to others – a form of social capital.

The female focus on personal development and identity, Miller & Fang (2012) suggest is partly as a result of the one child policy and parents unintentionally creating a child centred culture where energies are focused into their child being successful both personally and professionally. Yi, et al (2015) highlight how changes in legislation in China focusing on gender equality has encouraged women to seek employment and careers and this has impacted on how females see their own roles in Chinese society.

### **9.1.4 The role of location**

Geographic location was analysed in the research from two perspectives. The first perspective being from how the location is categorised – a municipality, a province, an Autonomous Region or a Special Administrative Region. The data analysis did not contain sufficient responses from autonomous regions or from special administrative regions to make any informed or confident discussion. As such only municipalities and provinces can be discussed. The difference between them is basically size of population, with municipalities being directly under the administration

of central government. Where the population of a city is not sufficient to be classed as a municipality, the central government administration is at a provincial level.

Irrespective of whether a respondent came from a municipality or a province, all stated that the area of personal development, personal identity and the opportunity to explore who they are as individuals was very important to them. The respondents from the municipalities expressed more of a focus towards developing a global mind-set, wanting an international career, better understanding of international cultures and a desire for an international education. Whereas those who indicated they came from a province had a preference for ranking and other quality indicators.

The second perspective is to analyse by economic zone. Wang J. (2013) argues that all economic zones have benefitted from the economic reforms which included encouraging international investment, this is consistent with Wang & Lin (2009) and Zheng & Chen (2007). Wang J. (2013) goes on to demonstrate how the establishment of the Eastern coastal economic zone has benefitted more than the Western and Central zones again consistent with Zheng & Chen (2007) and Van de Wende (2001).

Arguably it is the longer exposure to international trade, international travellers and global branding, and the economic benefits of being located in the Eastern economic zone that have shaped the individualistic tendencies of the younger generation (Sun & Wang, 2010; Lan, et al, 2009). In addition, the internal migration across China from rural to urban conurbations and from west to east has also influenced levels of education, and employment and therefore life experiences of the younger generation (Zhou, et al, 2018).

#### **9.1.5 Summary**

The development of the conceptual framework used in this research has resulted the ability to place in an order of significance decision making variables according to how they influence internalised and external values. The over-arching results clearly identify that it is the internalised values of the individual that take precedence over the external influencing stimuli. This in turn suggests a move towards a more individualistic approach to decision making by the younger Chinese generation. This is followed by the external cultural values and finally the marketing activities of (in the context of this research) overseas universities. It is important to note however, that the traditional Confucian values do still influence the decision making process.

The analysis also interrogated the role of age, gender and location to identify if these factors established any significant difference in the decision making process. It was discovered that age (translated from whether undergraduate or postgraduate study was being pursued) was not a contributing factor, as all of the respondents came from a social group often described in marketing literature as millennials (Sun & Wang, 2010; Lan, et al, 2009; Fam, et al, 2008).

However, when gender and geographic location differences were analysed, these generated statistically significant differences. Male millennials were attracted by stimuli that created a brand image (Rahmen, et al, 2020; Montgomery, et al, 2016) including stimuli such as ranking and international accreditations whereas female millennials focused on stimuli that were related more towards self-identity and independence as they were challenging the societal gender norms (Hu & Scott, 2016; Miller & Fang, 2012). Geographic location highlighted that the economic zone from which the respondent came from influenced how much exposure they had had to global brands and the degree of internationalisation experienced and this changed the importance of the stimuli (Sun & Wang, 2010; Lan et al, 2009). The more established the economic zone that one came from the more respondents sought international careers and a global mind-set.

## **9.2 Culture, values and society**

From the culture literature review it was established that an understanding of culture guides a society firstly in how it would normally behave or act and secondly provide a pattern of thinking, feeling, acting and reacting (Geertz, 1993) and is conceptualised by Hofstede amongst others arguing that the values, rituals, heros and symbols of a culture is manifested into the practices that one can observe (Hofstede, et al, 2010). Hofstede went on to develop a framework of national cultures (Hofstede, 1983) which was later developed to better reflect Asian cultures (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede, et al, 2010) and resulted in the six dimensions of culture.

The study of Chinese values identified that China is primarily a collectivist society with strong emotional connections to family, society and country (Lin & Wang, 2010; Xiao & Kim, 2009; Lowe & Corkindale, 1988; Yau, 1988) and is guided by a set of pragmatic principles attributed to Confucius, a philosopher and teacher and have informed a set of highly conscious values for over two thousand years (Rarick, 2007; Fan, 2000) that are observed in the concepts of 'face' and *guānxi* (Bain, et al, 2005; Fang, 2003; Bian, 200); Lin N. , 1999; Pye, 1999; Yau, et al, 1999).

The social stratification of modern day China is hugely influenced by the political strategies of the hùkǒu and dānwèi (Wong, 2019) introduced by Mao Zedong and establishing an egalitarian state under the administration of a single political party. Following Mao's death the economic reforms have stimulated considerable foreign investment, especially in the Eastern Coastal Economic Zone (Qinglian, 2002). This economic strategy has resulted in many individuals and families experiencing improvements in their guānxi networks (Granger, 2006; Bain, et al, 2005; Bian, 2002) and has in many ways established a Chinese middle class, under-pinned by the social and cultural capital established via guānxi networks and Confucian values as well as shared life styles and consumption habits.

The results indicate that there has been a considerable shift in the cultural values of the young Chinese population frequently described as millennials when comparing to the established cultural literature.

### **9.2.1 The variables discarded from the analysis**

The initial 75 variables contained within the card sort were established via the literature review. The first stage of the variable sorting process asked the participants to identify which variables were considered in their decision making process and which ones were not part of that process. There were 40 rejected variables (listed in appendix 6). These variables were important to, or essential to at least one respondent so the rejection does not indicate that these variables are no longer important in Chinese society, but were not part of the decision making process.

The rejected variables were interpreted from Confucian values and focused on the following categories,

- **Respecting the relationship with members of the family / society**

Variables in this category included the wishes of friends, family and overseas agents recommending the millennials to study overseas / at a certain university; following the career path of their family (predominantly working in the family owned business); concern for safety (low crime rates / low discrimination).

- **Developing social capital and guānxi networks**

Variables included here surround networks such as an active alumni, friends already studying in the location, the degree leading to professional body membership.

- **Facilities and utilities of the location and university**

Style of campus (city centre or traditional enclosed campus / modern or traditional buildings); quality of computer facilities, extra-curricular activities, use of external speakers, convenience of transportation network; ease of entry to study in a particular country / in that subject area; tuition and living costs.

The rejection of these variables especially those respecting relationships formed the biggest surprise of the study to the researcher; the degree of rejection being higher by male participants compared to female. This may indicate a level of complacency expressed by the male participants. Miller & Fang (2012) explain the consequence of the one child policy across China has had an unintended consequence in that 'little Emperor / Empress' has changed the dynamics of family life with move towards a child centred culture rather than a parental one. This has the potential to explain why the wishes of family elders are finding themselves lower in the order of cultural priorities. Miller & Fang (2012) go on to highlight that the one child policy has a very clear focus on preferences for a healthy male child and that if the first child is female or disabled, then it is possible after a period of time to have a second or even third. This demonstrates the significance of male children in society and will contribute to their elevated status over females.

From a western perspective the strength of a university alumni is one that has the potential to open up opportunities and is a feature of both personal and business relationship building. Given the importance on *guānxi* networks in China, it was surprising that the attractiveness of an alumni was not seen as significant. Badi et al (2017) explore the importance of *guānxi* networks within small to medium sized businesses and their relationship marketing activities. They argue that these networks are of high prominence and deeply embedded in internal markets and are also highly structured. Given that the majority of the respondent's parents owned a family small to medium sized business, it could be taken that the *guānxi* networks are already strong and the alumni will not add a great deal to the relationship and transactional status of the networks.

The variables that focus on location and cost being seen a less important is consistent with the research carried out by Mazzarol & Soutar (2012) and Li & Bray (2007). Price et al (2003) suggest that tangible facilities of universities also have less importance in the decision of where to study, but this is subject to some tolerances (Arambewela & Hall, 2006) such as if technology is consistently broken or unavailable. However, Bodycott (2009) does highlight that to parents the

quality of any specialist facilities does have significance as this will facilitate their child receiving the best education possible.

### **9.2.2 The variables retained for the analysis**

The remaining 35 variables were used to inform the results of the thesis. These variables represented the majority of variables that the respondents more frequently indicated were important to, or essential to them in their decision making process.

These variables were also interpreted from Confucian values and focused on the following categories,

- **Respecting the virtues of wisdom, trustworthiness, propriety**

Variables in this category included the quality of education (subject area ranking); reputation for teaching and research; experiencing a different education and assessment system.

- **Developing social capital and guānxi networks**

Variables included here embrace personal development (stepping stones to higher qualifications); international study, better understand other cultures, study in English (language); career boost.

- **Self-identity**

Make own decisions; explore own personality; career aspirations; global mind-set, improved social mobility.

The significance of these variables associated to Confucian values and to guānxi networks is consistent with the literature and the research published by Yan (2018); Mok (2016); Soria & Troisi (2014); Wu (2014); Henze & Zhu (2012); and Russell, et al (2010). They also support the assertion that an international higher education is an object of desire (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015). What is added to this research is the increase in a desire for Chinese millennials to establish their own identity, and is supported by an increase in the use of the term 'ku', which as Moore (2005) suggests is akin to the American slang term of 'cool'. Montgomery, et al (2016) add to this arguing that this generation are 'the highest educated, most affluent and technology literate generation in China's history' and that male millennials are more likely to purchase luxury brands as a status symbol or to represent success.

Ngai & Cho (2012) argue that the Chinese millennials can be attributed to one of four groups; the overseas pack; the self-established cool; the luxury followers; and the spirituals. Each of these groups exhibiting different levels of individualism. This research identifies that geographic location also contributes to the exhibition of individualism and is a result of exposure to international businesses and brands. However, this display of individuality does come at a price, that of increased pressure to be successful in one's personal and professional life (Montgomery, et al, 2016; Moore, 2005).

### **9.2.3 The new middle class**

As identified in the literature, China's intermediate or middle class differs from the west in that it is not based upon managerial status or salary, but on the social and cultural capital (Granger, 2006; Bain, et al, 2005; Bian, 2002) and is frequently associated with small to medium sized business entrepreneurs. Goodman (2016) identifies that the new middle class is often located in the urban areas and like the western form of this social class is linked to professionals and managerial status. What is different is that they will have close associations with the Party and therefore unlike in the west, there is no threat to the political structure of the country. Goodman (2016) also asserts that there are two layers to the new middle class; the aspirational middle class; and the upper middle class who are generally better educated, more prosperous and healthier.

This research goes some way to supporting the views of Goodman (2016); Granger (2006); Bain, et al (2005) and Bian (2002) with 80% of respondents stating that their parents job is either a general manager, company director or they own the business and 50% earning in excess of 500,000 CNY ¥ per year. The vast majority of these being business owners / entrepreneurs, although the data does not allow for identifying connections to the Party system.

The identification of a middle class firmly established in China is a clear demonstration of a move away from the egalitarian state of Mao to one where social stratification exists and is driven by the entrepreneurial activities of small to medium sized business owners.

### **9.2.4 Enduring traditional values**

The cultural literature identified that there are a set of traditional values that have influenced the behaviour of the Chinese population. The differences of lived experiences of the different generations of modern day China need to be considered. The older generation that lived

through the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution will hold very conservative values of roles of different people in society (including gender roles), hard work, thrift, loyalty and respecting public property (Lin & Wang, 2010; Xiao & Kim, 2009; Rarick, 2007; Fang, 2003). The generation that lived through the economic reforms experienced a relaxation of some of these values, particularly regarding gender roles (Fam, et al, 2008) and exposure to some international business investment, mainly in the Eastern economic zone.

Sun & Wang (2010) and Lan, et al (2009) identify that the younger generations in Shanghai have moved their value system from a collective society system where the benefit of country and the community are seen as more important than the self, to a much more individualistic one and are more likely to live according to their own life-style regardless of the views of their older generations. This research supports this view and goes further to suggest that generational gaps exist across China not just in the municipalities of the Eastern economic zone. However, as Fam, et al (2008) point out, this should not be viewed as a total disregard for traditional values or a move towards western individual values, but is a moderated individualism that still refers back to the guiding principles of Confucianism (Fam, et al, 2008). This is reinforced by the variables not included in the deeper analysis for this research containing a number of what would be described as the traditional values and given that they were part of the decision making process for that they cannot simply be ignored.

### **9.2.5 Summary**

The analysis of the cultural aspects of this research have exposed a clear change in the values and beliefs of the younger generation of mainland China, with a move towards a moderated individualistic view of life. One in which self-identity, personal success and living one's own life are seen as being important, but are still influenced by *guānxi* networks and as such the traditional Confucian value system does still influence behaviour. Tsai, et al (2018) argue that this shift in values when applied to a family owned business has a positive impact on the quality of the decision making ability due to the diversity of views.

Two other significant developments have also been noted. The first is that there is still a difference in behaviour between the genders, with males making more of a statement of their success but the females are also demonstrating their desire to be individuals in their own right and have career successes. The second development is the establishment of an intermediate or middle class (with Chinese values) not only in the Eastern economic zone, but across the whole of China. This suggests that there are indeed different *habitas* or sub-cultures across China and

that the established cultural dimensions of culture need some adjustment according to which generation they are referring to.

### 9.3 Higher education

The marketization of the UK higher education sector has resulted in universities changing the way they market their products and services to potential students and their families (Luescher-Mamashela, 2010). This has resulted in marketing language becoming dominant (Svensson & Wood, 2007) and a series of performance indicators designed to help applicants make a more informed choice (Brown, 2011; Maringe, 2011). In addition to this the funding mechanisms for universities has also changed moving from a largely government funded model to a student fee model (Rodgers et al, 2011; Freeman & Thomas, 2005), which in turn has given rise to the international student market being a key income stream (HESA, 2019). The Chinese market is by far the largest contributor to the UK international student market (OECD, 2018)

The conceptual framework grouped the marketing activities of a university as the 'external context specific' quadrant, and was structured around the marketing 4 Ps from Kotler & Keller (2011). Despite the over-arching analysis identifying this quadrant as having the least impact on the decision making process, it is still a fundamental part of the information search phase of the whole process (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013).

When applying the 4Ps to a higher education institution, the following aspects are associated to each P:

- **Product** – courses offered; teaching and assessment strategies; facilities available (library, IT, sport, etc); university and subject ranking; reputation for teaching quality and research quality; external accreditations.
- **Promotion** – Prospectus; websites; recruitment fairs; overseas recruitment agents; alumni and past student career profiles.
- **Place** – campus location and buildings; history of the institution; reputation and international recognition of the quality of the education system and qualifications; transport system; level of crime; experience of international activities / collaborations.
- **Price** – Tuition fees; cost of living; study visa and application process.

### **9.3.1 Product**

Of the variables associated to the product aspect, the most significant one being subject ranking (the most important variable of all variables in this quadrant), followed by university ranking, quality indicators for teaching and research and that the range of subjects on offer linked with career aspirations. This is reflective of the work by Bright Futures (2018); Yan (2018); Collins (2012); Findlay, et al (2012) and Sauder & Lancaster (2006).

The areas of computing facilities and extra-curricular and sporting activities came out as the least important. These finding can be explained by the assertions made by Montgomery, et al (2016) suggesting that this generation of young Chinese are the most digitally literate of all generations and as a result will probably have their own computer equipment and not require these campus facilities.

### **9.3.2 Promotion**

When focusing on the variables associated to the promotional aspects of the marketing mix, the most significant variable is that all of the information is available on the website, followed by the website meets my own 'brand identity'. The least important variables were on course content and the recommendations of the overseas study agent.

Ngai & Cho (2012) identify that the younger generation of Chinese millennials are much more likely to select a product that meets their individual identity. Kim & Chao (2019) add to this explaining how brand image and brand trust play a pivotal role in a brand purchase decision and how important it is to have an appropriate branding strategy for Chinese millennials.

The use of education agents as third party to assist in applying for an overseas course to study is discussed by Serra Hagedorn & Zhang (2011). It is suggested that students use the agents as a way to mitigate against the application and study visa process and is more often used by those who have a lower ability in the English language.

### **9.3.3 Place**

The place perspective identified that it was important to have world recognition of the qualifications (seen as the most essential of all variables in this quadrant) and quality of the education system were the most important variables, followed by the history of the institution and that it had a city centre location. The style of the buildings (traditional or modern) was considered unimportant by the majority of respondents.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2012), Lee J. J. (2008), Suter & Jandl (2008) and Gray et al (2003) all explain that the reputation of the country and of its education system and the university reputation are key drivers to establish an image of quality and high levels of global recognition. The desire to be a city centre location can be explained by Moore (2005), who identifies that many millennials want to look 'cool' to their peers and as such an international city centre location should add to this dynamic.

The design of buildings, be they modern or traditional was one of the least important factors of all. Price, et al (2003) discuss that the design principles of buildings has less impact on the decision of where to study, so long as facilities work and are accessible.

#### **9.3.4 Price**

The most significant considerations when cost was the focus centred on the cost of living, then tuition fees with the study visa and university application processes considered a slightly lower level of importance. Of the four Ps, this P was considered overall the least important, possibly as a result of the kind of incomes the respondents parents were generating, but this is consistent with the views expressed by Miller & Fang (2012) that the costs of education have a lower importance than the educational achievement itself.

#### **9.3.5 Summary**

The analysis of how this research highlights that despite this quadrant appearing to be the least significant quadrant of the four, it still serves a very important role in the search for information leading to the evaluation of alternatives. The most important variables of this quadrant are that the qualification is recognised internationally as high quality and that the ranking of the subject is high followed closely by other tangible symbols of quality. Other important marketing aspects include that website details are aligned to the personal values of Chinese millennials which as Moore (2005) suggests will add to and enhance their personal brand identity.

Aspects that were considered to have the least impact on the decision making process include the IT facilities, the use of third party agents and the general cost of achieving a degree in the UK.

### 9.3.6 The Covid-19 pandemic

The importance of having the appropriate marketing strategies is even more apparent currently with the Covid-19 pandemic having a very definite impact on international student recruitment. Coughlan (2020) and Mok (2020) report how the pandemic has caused uncertainty amongst Chinese students applying to study in the UK, the main reasons behind this is personal health / safety. Coughlan (2020) suggests that a reduction of between 12% and 61% of Chinese students arriving in the UK to study in September 2020 is feared by the British Council, the same concern is reported by Adams (2020). Bothwell (2020) and Jackson (2020) suggests that trans-national education hubs in South East Asia might become a preferred destination for Chinese students rather than the traditional English speaking countries of the USA, UK and Australia.

Coughlan (2020) and Mok (2020) also suggest that a move from face to face teaching to an online provision will have a detrimental impact on recruitment. Other concerns Coughlan (2020) and Weale (2020) highlight:

- Social media reports of poor social distancing and the non-wearing of masks in the UK.
- An increase in racist attacks on non-UK students following the Brexit referendum.
- Missing the wider cultural experiences associated to studying at a UK university.
- Access to English proficiency tests allowing access to study at UK universities for those with less linguistic ability.

Ross (2020) however suggesting that despite 'suboptimal' experiences of online course delivery interest in remote learning in their home country has snowballed and may open up new markets to higher education providers. Jackson (2020) however highlights the need for investment and training to improve the online delivery platforms and remote and distance learning should be viewed as equal in quality to face to face delivery models.

The results of this study have identified that pre-Covid-19, the UK was considered a safe place to study and the benefits of studying in English and the wider social experiences (including travel) are important considerations in the decision of where to study. The protective instincts on parents over their children, especially in a one-child society as highlighted by Miller & Fang (2012) is also very influential. International recruitment for 2020 may well rest upon how effective the individual university's are at sending out the message that their university and location is safe, that despite the Covid-19 pandemic the student experience will still be of high quality and that the pandemic is being taken seriously in the country as a whole. However, consideration needs to be given to the potential loss of the wider cultural experiences and

fundamentals of international study and the impact this might have on social capital and guānxi networks.

#### **9.4 Chapter summary**

The conceptual framework developed for this research has enabled one to prioritise different aspects of the decision making process into levels of significance, and as a result identify where the focus for higher education marketing teams should be. From the analysis of results, it is clear that the external context specific quadrant informs the information search phase of the EKB purchase decision-making model as explained by Armstrong & Kotler (2013). The other three quadrants of the conceptual framework all contribute to the alternative evaluation phase of the EKB model.

The literature on national culture suggested that there are a strong set of values and beliefs that all of China live their lives by, enshrined within the relationships and virtues taught by Confucius. The impact of the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the later economic reforms in a relatively condensed period of time has resulted in there being multiple generations that have lived through very different life experiences and as a result have slightly different sets of values. This research has questioned the homogenous nature of those cultural traits and demonstrates that it is more heterogeneous in nature and a clear move from a collective society to one that is emerging as more individualistic.

This is manifested by the older generations (grandparents) being much more consistently conservative and collectivist across China (reinforced by the hùkǒu and dānwèi policies) than their younger generations. The generation that are in effect the current students' parents have grown up with the one child policy resulting in a focus on bringing personal and professional success to their child whilst experiencing the effects of the economic reforms, increased internal migration towards the larger cities and moving towards the Eastern Coastal economic zone for better opportunities. This has fostered the establishment of a middle class underpinned by the growth in family owned small to medium sized enterprises. In turn for the current generation of students (often referred to in marketing literature as millennials), there is evidence of a further shift in values, towards a more individualistic nature. This is reinforced by which variable were retained and discarded for deeper analysis.

The significance of age is not identified as high, however this is explained by the respondents all belonging to the millennials social group and so this is not a total surprise. It does however indicate that whereas the information search may contain slightly different information the way in which the alternatives are evaluated is very similar. The analysis by age does reinforce the shift in cultural values of the younger generation towards a more individualistic focus.

Gender differences did identify much that was in common, but also slight variations. The common variables included developing a global mind-set, wanting to study abroad, better understanding different cultures and boosting career prospects. Where they differed was that the male millennials had a preference for the more tangible variables that would enhance their image of success; including ranking, and international accreditations. Whereas the female millennials indicated a preference for variables that focused on independence and personal development, including making one's own decisions and exploring one's own identity.

Geographic location also had considerable impact on which variables were considered more significant with those from municipalities, especially from the Eastern Coastal economic zone having greater aspiration for developing a more global mind-set and having an international career. Those from the provincial towns and cities and from the Western and Central economic zones seeking more tangible symbols such as ranking, improving their English language abilities and participating in wider cultural experiences.

Guānxi networks and social capital are also identified as significant areas to enhance by studying abroad. With the social capital being developed by international study in general and the wider experiences of understanding other cultures better, improved English language ability and travel opportunities.

Finally it has been identified that in the context of higher education, the values of individuality, independence and exploring personal identity sought by the Chinese millennials need to be reflected in the marketing materials produced by universities in addition to the more customary symbols of quality.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has generated a number of issues that universities need to address especially within the context of international student recruitment. It is predicted that a significant number of Chinese students will decide not to study next academic year in the UK due to health concerns, other concerns extend from a feeling of the UK being less safe and the transition from face to face education to a more online experience. News reports suggest that international students feel that the higher education experience will be different in future, this

research finds that if this is the case then universities need to carefully consider how they will manage the softer aspects of the student experience; namely the loss of the wider cultural experiences, and the impact this might have on social capital.

In summary, the analysis of the results and the subsequent discussion has exposed that:

- There is evidence of a middle class in China, however this is based on social capital and not how the west understands middle class.
- There is a cultural shift seen in the younger generation, away from a wholly collectivist society to one that is becoming more individualistic.
- Male millennials seek to reinforce success by tangible symbols whereas female millennials seek to challenge the traditional gender roles by enhancing their independence and personal development.
- There are clear differences what is significant in the decision making process influenced by geographic location and how much exposure individuals have had to international trade, travellers and global brands following the economic reforms and creation of three economic zones.
- There is a need to have targeted and differentiated marketing messages across geographic regions, between genders and as a result of predicted changes to the delivery models of higher education in the future.

## **10. Conclusion**

Having discussed the findings from the research programme, it is appropriate to consider if the research aim and objectives have been achieved and what contributions to knowledge and practice have been created. The conclusion to this thesis therefore will firstly discuss the extent to which the aim and objectives have been delivered. This is followed by a review of the implications of the findings and then how this research has contributed to knowledge and to practice. Finally, consideration of the limitations of the research are reflected upon.

### **10.1 Research aim and objectives**

From the initial catalyst of the cultural awareness trip the researcher was a part of and the subsequent observations made during further business trips to China a research aim and several objectives were established. This section considers to what extent these were achieved as a result of this research programme.

#### **10.1.1 Research aim**

The overarching aim of this research programme is to test the developed framework in the context of the Chinese student applying to study at a UK university. To identify differences and similarities in decision making in relation to the established cultural norms and if there are significant subcultures geographically across China.

This aim has been achieved. The literature review established that it is not appropriate to simply transpose western conceptual and theoretical frameworks over to China due to the different social and political structures that exist. From this a four dimensional model was developed that considered internalised values and external influences which are all part of the purchase decision making process, these were then split into context specific (study abroad) and generic (cultural, political) factors.

As a result of a digital card sort being deployed it has been possible to identify a hierarchy of variables that influence the decision on where to study abroad, and to determine gender and geographic differences according to the degree of exposure to international business, travellers and global brands. The differences have not only identified that there are different sub-cultures

across China but also that there has been a cultural shift for the younger generation towards a more individualistic view of life.

### **10.1.2 Research objectives**

The research aim was broken down into five specific research objectives.

**Objective 1 - To confirm the appropriateness and completeness of the conceptual framework design.** The conceptual framework was formed on the basis of four quadrants that all contribute to the overall decision making process. 75 variables from the literature were established and associated to each of the quadrants. All of the variables presented were acknowledged by the sample population that they contributed the decision making process; some more so than others. There were four additional variables that were added by the respondents which centred on employment post study; safety as a result of a local Chinatown; ease of application and entry to the destination country; and also so that it was possible to study with their partner.

The results highlighted that of the four quadrants the two internalised quadrants had greater influence on the final decision of where to study, followed by the external generic quadrant and finally the external context specific quadrant. As such, this objective is considered as being achieved.

**Objective 2 - To determine if there is a correlation between the exposure to international brands and a change in cultural values within the young generation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China.** The findings are analysed and compared across geographic location, which in the case of this study utilised the three economic zones established during the economic reforms. The findings reveal that there are several variables that are consistent across all three economic zones, these include the desire to study overseas, to better understand other cultures and to enhance the individual's feeling of social capital. What is clear though, is that those in the Eastern Coastal economic zone; those who arguably had experienced more exposure to international business, travellers and global brands expressed the desire to develop a global mind-set and have an international career as being more significant than those from the other economic zones.

The findings also demonstrated that the younger generation has made a clear shift towards an individualistic perspective on life when compared to the established cultural literature. It is considered that this research objective is therefore achieved.

**Objective 3 - To demonstrate that the conceptual framework enables differences and similarities of a specific population to be identified and prioritised.** In addition to being able to identify a shift towards a more individualistic view on life and that exposure to international business and brands has influenced priorities in purchase decision making, this research also enables one to determine if gender and age also have an impact. The type of degree studied (undergraduate or postgraduate) did not demonstrate any statistical significance in the relative importance of variables. This is explained by despite the levels of study being quite different when one considers the typical age profiles of these students they will all fall into what marketing literature describes as millennials. As such any difference will be negligible.

However, the findings do establish that there is a clear difference between genders, with male respondents highlighting that tangible symbols of quality are sought to enhance their own image of success and therefore self-identity. The females on the other hand expressed a preference for developing independence and making their own decisions. This is explained as being linked to challenging the more traditional views of gender roles in society held by the older generations and the changes in legislation to promote equality in careers. The findings therefore support the claim that this objective has been achieved.

**Objective 4 - To examine the implications of those differences and similarities on the decision making process.** The discussion chapter reviewed the findings and sought to explain their implications more widely. There are several key findings that have significant implications to understanding the influencing factors of the decision making process of young Chinese and subsequently have implications to the UK higher education sector and other industries. The key findings include:

- Evidence of a middle class in China, based on social capital.
- Evidence of a cultural shift has been detected in the younger generation moving towards a more individualistic view of life.
- Evidence of gender differences in the decision making process.
- Evidence of geographic location influencing the significance of different variables within the decision making process.
- Evidence of the need for a differentiated marketing message to be developed for optimal market penetration for higher education institutions.

By identifying these implications, it is argued that this objective has been achieved.

**Objective 5 - To reflect upon the ability of the research method to engage with and extract meaningful data in a cross-cultural study.** Having an appreciation of one's own ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions assists in the researcher mitigating against any unintentional bias in the data collection and analysis stages of the study. In addition to this, the cross-cultural nature of this study had the risk of causing offence, have implications for 'saving face' and may negatively reflect on the respondents personal construct of their 'self'.

To mitigate against this a completely anonymous digital card sort was developed that respondents could if they wished forward to peers and in effect establish a snowball sampling approach. In addition, the variables included in the digital card sort were reverse translated from English to Mandarin Chinese and back again to ensure accuracy of interpretation and meaning. This mitigated against any language barrier a respondent may have and would in practice improve the efficiency in time to respond and encourage participation in general. The order of the variables in the digital card sort were randomised and not associated to any reference to self-identity or any other value system. This would also encourage participation.

The personal and demographic information collected enabled the data to be coded by several categories (age, gender, geographical location) but also confirmed the subject area being studied, parental support and family background. This helped to identify aspects of social stratification and shifts in cultural values and enabled the triangulation of data; improve the reliability of the findings.

It is considered that the methodological approach deployed in this research has been appropriate for cross-cultural study and has enabled the identification of meaningful results. As such, this objective is considered to be achieved.

## 10.2 Implications

The findings from this research have implications clearly for the higher education sector, but also for other business sectors and decision making contexts. As summarised above, this research had generated evidence of:

- A middle class existing in China, but is based on social capital.
- A cultural shift detected in the younger generation towards a more individualistic view of life.
- A differences between genders in the decision making process.
- Differences in exposure to international trade and global brands across China influences which variables are considered more significant within the decision making process.
- The need for a differentiated marketing message to be developed for optimal market penetration.

### **10.2.1 Implications to UK higher education**

Clearly, there are implications for the future recruitment strategies that UK higher education institutes should take into account. This specifically will involve creating differentiated messages across the economic zones and messages that target gender and different generations as well. The way recruitment websites are constructed need to reflect the individualistic preferences of the younger generation, the focus on being able to gain cross-cultural experiences, explore one's own identity as well as portraying the tangible symbols of success such as ranking and international accreditations.

The cultural shift exposed will also have implications on course content, on course delivery methods, on assumptions held by academics that deliver course materials and the graduate skills developed throughout the curriculum. The development of employability strands running through UK degree programmes might be utilised effectively in marketing strategies, especially where personal development opportunities can be linked to career success in alumni profiles. The changes identified will not only affect the experiences of China's study abroad students, but should also influence the overall experience of academics and students in Trans-National Education (TNE) collaborations between higher education institutions. Requiring content and delivery to be contextualised slightly by geographic region to take into account the differences in experience of internationalisation across the economic zones of China and enabling student mobility as key features of the programme of study.

This is reinforced further by the events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the perception that it will change higher education forever with blended forms of learning being utilised more and the possibility of a more flexible and internationally diverse curriculum design that enhances a wider world view. It is essential that the cultural experiences gained by studying abroad are enhanced

and become central to any provision, as is the development of soft skills such as independence of decision making and enhancing social capital.

The purchase decision making attitudes are evolving at considerable speed across China, the UK higher education system if it is to continue to be a major player in the international student market must react proactively to this changing cultural backdrop and not just rely on being a leading English-speaking provider of higher education.

### **10.2.2 Implications and wider application**

From a wider perspective, the evolving social stratification and cultural values as a result of the economic reforms will impact on knowledge, understanding and business in general in several ways.

The use of national culture to understand and predict how a population will behave has been essential to establish international trade relationships, political alliances and leisure activities such as tourism is well established. This research has not questioned the importance of this stance, but has questioned how appropriate a national culture is for a single country the size of China. The evidence of several sub-cultures both across China geographically and arguably inter-generationally suggests that business will have to amend its perspective on China and be more specific and customised in its dealings with business and with politics.

The evidence of a middle class, based on social capital rather than the managerial status and salary variables used in the west is a further implication that business may benefit from understanding. Market segmentation, product development and product placement will provide new opportunities for business to generate not only sales but also brand awareness and loyalty, especially in light of the evolving individualistic preferences of the younger generations, which in time are likely to become more and more established.

Although the context of this study has been within higher education, the research approach could also be used in different contexts such as the purchase of other major items including cars, houses, and in different professions such as travel, engineering, computing, medicine, etc.

### **10.3 Contributions**

Having reviewed to what extent the aim and objectives have been achieved and identified the implications for business as a result of this study it is now possible to detail the contributions to knowledge and to practice this research has made.

#### **10.3.1 Contribution to knowledge**

There are five contributions to knowledge that this research can make.

1. Evidence of a middle class in China is confirmed, based on social capital is a contribution to knowledge in the context of social stratification highlighting the premise on which it is formed is different to the established understanding of middle class in the western economies.
2. Evidence of a cultural shift has been detected in the younger generation towards a more individualistic view of life contributes to the cultural literature and highlights a new complexity to be considered when considering social interactions or business transactions.
3. Evidence of gender differences in the decision making process highlight changes in gender roles within Chinese society and specifically how female millennials are establishing greater independence and self-identity.
4. Evidence of geographic location as a result of economic reforms does play a role in influencing how significant different variables are and the impact they have on the decision making process with exposure to internationalisation being the key driver.
5. The development of a research instrument that will enable cultural values to be embraced but also allow for objective, generalizable knowledge is a contribution specifically to research methods.

#### **10.3.2 Contribution to practice**

The practical application of the contribution to knowledge is essential if the value of this research is to be realised. By taking on board the new insights to Chinese culture and decision making of the younger generation new approaches to product development, market segmentation and marketing messages can be established not only by higher education institutions, but also by other commercial ventures.

In addition to the contribution to marketing / international student recruitment strategies, this research can also inform the design of curriculum and supports the need for including more cultural experiences in the overall student package as a way of mitigating against some of the potential risks higher education institutions face as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These developments are clearly applicable to study abroad students, but also in TNE collaborations and blended / distance learning strategies

#### **10.4 Further research developments**

This research naturally provides further areas of research that could be carried out to create further contributions to knowledge and to practice.

It should be possible to investigate multi-generational views on the decision making process of where to study abroad. This will not only enrich the understanding of the decision making process and who / what has the most influence on the final decision. However, it will also provide an insight into further shifts in traditional cultural values and the social stratification of China.

A more complete picture of the decision making process by geographical area could be developed by ensuring that not only are the three economic zones included but also all municipalities, provinces, Autonomous Regions and Special Administrative Regions. This would assist in the better targeting of marketing messages and further enrich the understanding of gender differences in decision making across China. If this were to form a longitudinal study, the mapping of changes in gender behaviour and expectations over time might also be possible.

It should also be possible to amend the context of the decision from higher education to other major purchases such as housing or travel, and to extend this research programme to include other subject disciplines such as engineering, computing, medicine, and so on.

Finally, it should be possible to extend the cultural understanding to other collective cultures, such as Japan, Korea, Argentina, Brazil and India. This would add to the cultural literature but also make many more contributions to marketing practice.

## 10.5 Limitations of the research

Ross & Bibler Zaidi (2019) and Ioannidis (2007) amongst others argue that it is important that limitations of the research is considered so that one can interpret the validity and credibility of the findings and places the conclusions drawn into context. This will aid the reader in their overall understanding of the findings, and will help to reduce the risk of over-inflating or minimising the conclusions. Regarding this research, there are several limitations that should be reflected upon to provide the context of the contributions and implications.

The first area to consider is the level of confidence in the findings. The confidence interval was calculated to be 95%, this is the most common level and provides a balance between precision and reliability (Triola, 2004). The sample size only just achieved this degree of certainty and is a combination of those wanting to study at undergraduate and postgraduate. Therefore, by increasing the sample size a higher degree of confidence could be gained for the overall sample and potentially confidence of 95% or more for both levels of study independent of each other as well as when combined. This may have enabled more specific implications to be identified for undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study. However, as both levels (by age profile) fall into the marketing defined socio-group of millennials, the combined findings are still appropriate, informative and reliable.

Three other aspects of the sample population could also be developed to enhance the completeness of the study. Firstly, this study focused only on the decision making perspective of the young Chinese generation. A more complete picture would be achieved if the study were to include the views of parents and grandparents providing a more inter-generational view of purchase decision making. Given that the variables were translated into Mandarin Chinese the older generations could have participated as this mitigated against any language barriers, however the ability to generate family wide responses remotely and to ensure that each generation was equally reliable would add much more complexity.

The second aspect that could be considered a limitation of the sample population is that the geographic representation is partial and not complete. The analysis included respondents from all three economic zones but not from all municipalities, provinces, Autonomous Regions and Special Administrative Regions. Given that the majority of the population will reside in either a municipality or a province the findings are still reliable and do enable one to identify considerable differences in attitude across zones and specific provinces. It would be interesting to be able to identify if there are further differences in purchase decision making attitudes from

the Autonomous Regions and Special Administrative Regions given the different backgrounds to their political administration.

The third aspect when considering the completeness of the sample population is the range of subject areas included in the study. All respondents stated that they were studying a business related subject, as a result the perspective of those studying other subjects (for example engineering, computing, humanities, the arts or medicine) have not been reviewed. Higher Education Statistics Agency (2019) identify that 41.6% of Chinese students study a business related subject in the UK, as such the findings of this study are restricted to the most dominant segment of study, so it would be wrong to generalise to all Chinese students studying abroad share these views.

Finally, the richness of the qualitative comments gained from the digital card sort could be enhanced by engaging in dedicated focus groups. Specifically, this may have developed further the area of fuzzy cognitive mapping and confirming the hierarchy of variable and the relationship that have with each other. The inclusion of focus groups would have required changes to the ethical approval documentation and removed some of the anonymity enjoyed by the respondents. Pragmatically, the researcher at the time of data collection was experiencing several health issues and was not in a position to instigate and run several focus groups. Despite the acknowledgement that the qualitative responses could be richer, the comments received did add to the completeness and understanding of the quantitative data and have aided in the establishment of several key assertions from this study.

## **10.6 Personal reflection**

My doctoral journey, as with others I have spoken to about it has been one huge roller coaster of a ride. There have been the great highs of passing the DB2, enabling me to progress to research this thesis topic. Of those eureka moments when one finds an article that explains a topic you have been struggling with. Of actually getting some data back and then discovering some really fascinating results. There is the development of a bond between the researcher and the supervisory team and the personal development experienced as the way one thinks about a topic alters as one reads more about it and evaluates data.

There have also been a number of lows experienced, some related to the process and others much more personal and challenging which have resulted in having to navigate the whole

project through some complex and sometimes over whelming circumstances. And of course there is the pride, fear and sheer exhaustion of submitting the thesis for examination.

The things I have learnt along this journey will stay with me for a very long time and hopefully have made me a better person. I consider different perspectives on a range of topics in a much more holistic, full and reflective way trying to better understand the views of others. I explore how they rationalise their viewpoint and what evidence is there to support that point of view, and enjoy finding out more about pretty much everything... my mind has been opened up! I have learnt that one needs to engage with a range of soft skills including emotional intelligence, wellbeing of oneself and of others and not be afraid to stand up for what you believe in, no matter how big a reputation and personality others have.

Above all, I now have much more self-confidence and a feeling of being worthy to study at this level and to be able to discuss the topic with authority while taking on board other people's viewpoints. I am much more resilient to the whole process of having ones work being scrutinised and critiqued and don't take it as a personal failing anymore. And probably most importantly I have discovered which aspects of life (personal and professional) are the most important to me. The journey whilst not being easy at all has for me been life changing!

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## Appendices

### 1. Card Sort Statements

	Internal Context Specific	External Context Specific	Internal Generic	External Generic
1. I wanted to study overseas	x		x	
2. I wanted to study in the UK	x		x	
3. I wanted to better understand other cultures	x		x	
4. I wanted to develop a global mind-set	x		x	
5. I want an international career	x		x	
6. Studying overseas will bring honour to my family			x	x
7. Parents / friends want me to study overseas			x	x
8. Parents / friends want me to study in the UK			x	x
9. I wanted to study in English (language)	x		x	
10. I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects by studying overseas	x		x	
11. I wanted to experience a different teaching style by studying overseas	x		x	
12. I wanted to experience a different assessment style by studying overseas	x		x	
13. The UK has a world class education system		x		x
14. I can achieve a world recognised qualification		x		x
15. The study visa process is quick and easy		x		
16. There is a low level of crime in the UK		x		
17. There is a low level of discrimination in the UK		x		
18. The study overseas agent recommended the UK		x		
19. The study overseas agent recommended the university		x		
20. The study overseas agent recommended the degree		x		
21. There are a wide range of courses available to study in the UK		x		
22. There is a history of Chinese students performing well at this university		x		
23. There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent student experience at this university		x		
24. There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent social experience at this university		x		
25. The tuition fees to study in the UK are reasonable		x		

26. Parents / friends recommended me to study in the UK			x	x
27. Parents / friends recommended that I study at this university			x	x
28. It is an easy process to apply to a British university to study		x		
29. I have friends from home studying in the UK	x		x	
30. The university is recognised in China				x
31. The university's location suited my needs	x		x	
32. The transport system in the UK is convenient	x	x		
33. The university has a good reputation for research		x		x
34. The university has a good reputation for teaching quality		x		x
35. The university has a high international ranking		x		x
36. The university has a high national ranking		x		x
37. The university has a long history in education		x		x
38. The university has modern buildings		x		
39. The university has a city centre campus		x		
40. The university has a traditional style of campus		x		
41. The university has high quality computer resources		x		
42. The cost of living in the UK is reasonable		x		
43. The university has high quality extra-curricular / sports activities		x		
44. The university alumni has strong career profiles in my subject area		x		x
45. The degree has a record of quality external / guest speakers as part of the degree		x		x
46. The university has a reputation for quality professors and academics		x		x
47. The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborations		x		x
48. The degree subject is one that I want a career in	x	x	x	
49. The degree subject has a high ranking	x	x	x	x
50. The department in which I will be studying has recognised international accreditations	x	x	x	x
51. The degree subject leads to professional body membership	x		x	x
52. The degree subject is easier to pass than other subjects	x		x	
53. The degree will allow me to get a high salary after graduating	x		x	
54. The degree content is typical for this subject		x		
55. The degree will help me to develop a wider network of friends	x		x	x

56. The degree will help me to develop a wider network of professional contacts	x		x	x
57. The jobs in the subject area are attractive to me	x		x	
58. I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in the same subject	x		x	x
59. I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject	x		x	x
60. I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to a higher ranked university	x		x	x
61. The university alumni activities are attractive to me	x		x	x
62. This university suits my career aspirations	x		x	
63. By studying overseas I will be developing my own identity as an individual	x		x	
64. The university website is easy to navigate		x		
65. The university website has all the required information		x		
66. The brand image portrayed by the university website meets my own 'brand identity'		x	x	
67. By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual	x		x	
68. By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions	x		x	
69. By studying overseas I will be able to earn a higher salary	x		x	
70. By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my family			x	x
71. By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my country			x	x
72. I want to follow the career path of my family			x	x
73. By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown)			x	x
74. By studying overseas I will be able to spend more on luxury brands			x	x
75. Studying overseas is something I am doing for me, not my family	x		x	

## 2. Digital Card Sort

# Important factors in choosing a university for Chinese study-abroad students

I confirm that

- a. I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet and am fully aware of my rights with completing this research questionnaire. If the Participant Information Sheet was not attached to the email containing the link to this survey, please email Robert Hayward at [r.w.hayward@shu.ac.uk](mailto:r.w.hayward@shu.ac.uk) and he will send you a copy.
- b. My nationality is Chinese.
- c. I am happy to complete and submit this questionnaire.

Yes (Required to answer)

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1. Please read through the following factors which you may or may not have considered whilst deciding which overseas university to study at. The factors are spread over several pages and total 75 factors in total. Please note, they are not grouped in any particular order or priority. Please read through all the factors and initially decide if you did or did not consider the factor whilst making your decision on where to study. Then review your responses highlighting which of the factors you did consider were important factors to you in that decision making process and finally select the factors that were essential for you. If you are completing this on a mobile device, you may find it easier to read through all the factors first and then go back to the beginning and indicate how important the factors were in making your decision.

*Please make a choice for each factor*

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
I wanted to study overseas 我想出国留学	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to study in the UK 我想在英国留学	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to better understand other cultures 我想更好地了解其他文化	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to develop a global mind-set 我想培养一种全球性的思维方式	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want an international career 我想要一个国际化的职业前景	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Studying overseas will bring honour to my family 出国留学会给我的家庭带来荣誉	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
Parents / friends want me to study overseas 家长/朋友希望我出国留学	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents / friends want me to study in the UK 家长/朋友希望我在英国学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to study in English (language) 我想学好英语 (语言)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects by studying overseas 我想通过出国留学来提升我的职业前景	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to experience a different teaching style by studying overseas 我想通过出国留学来体验不同的教学方式	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to experience a different assessment style by studying overseas 我想通过出国留学来体验不同的评估方式	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The UK has a world class education system 英国拥有世界一流的教育体系	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can achieve a world recognised qualification 我可以获得世界公认的学历资格	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study visa process is quick and easy 出国学习签证过程快速、简单	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
There is a low level of crime in the UK 英国的犯罪率低	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a low level of discrimination in the UK 英国的歧视程度低	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study overseas agent recommended the UK 留学中介公司推荐来英国学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study overseas agent recommended the university 留学中介公司推荐了申报该大学	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study overseas agent recommended the degree 留学中介公司推荐了申报该学位课程	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are a wide range of courses available to study in the UK 有各种各样的课程可在英国学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a history of Chinese students performing well at this university 这所大学中国学生过去有优秀的学术表现	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent student experience at this university 在这所大学里, 有中国学生有很好的学习经历	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent social experience at this university 在这所大学里, 有中国学生有很好的生活经验	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tuition fees to study in the UK are reasonable 在英国学习的学费是合理的	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents / friends recommended me to study in the UK 家长或朋友建议我到英国学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents / friends recommended that I study at this university 家长或朋友建议我在这所大学学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is an easy process to apply to a British university to study 申请英国大学学习是一个容易的过程	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have friends from home studying in the UK 我有在家乡认识的朋友也在英国学习	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university is recognised in China 这所大学在中国是有名气的	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university's location suited my needs 大学的地理位置适合我的需要	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The transport system in the UK is convenient 英国的交通系统很方便	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
The university has a good reputation for research 这所大学在研究方面有很好的声誉	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a good reputation for teaching quality 这所大学在教学质量方面享有盛誉	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a high international ranking 这所大学的国际排名很高	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a high national ranking 这所大学的英国排名很高	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a long history in education 这所大学在教育方面有着悠久的历史	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has modern buildings 这所大学有现代化的建筑	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a city centre campus 这所大学有一个位于市中心的校园	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a traditional style of campus 这所大学的校园具有传统风格	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has high quality computer resources 这所大学拥有高质量的计算机资源	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
The cost of living in the UK is reasonable 在英国的生活成本是合理的	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has high quality extra-curricular / sports activities 这所大学有高质量的课外/体育活动	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university alumni has strong career profiles in my subject area 该大学校友在我要学习的学科领域有很强的职业影响力	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree has a record of quality external / guest speakers as part of the degree 我申请的学位有高质量的客座讲师/教授, 是学位学习中的一部分	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a reputation for quality professors and academics 这所大学以高质量的教授和学者而闻名	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborations 这所大学有广泛的国际合作项目	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree subject is one that I want a career in 学位课程符合我想要的职业规划方向	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree subject has a high ranking 该学位科目的排名很高	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
The department in which I will be studying has recognised international accreditations 我将学习的大学院系已获得国际资质认证	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree subject leads to professional body membership 该学位科目可帮助获得专业团体成员资格	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree subject is easier to pass than other subjects 该学位科目比其他科目更容易通过	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree will allow me to get a high salary after graduating 获得该学位可以让我毕业后拿到高薪的工作	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree content is typical for this subject 该学位学习的内容非常经典	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree will help me to develop a wider network of friends 该学位将帮助我发展更广泛的朋友社交网络	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree will help me to develop a wider network of professional contacts 该学位将帮助我发展更广泛的专业联系网络	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The jobs in the subject area are attractive to me 这个领域的工作对我很有吸引力	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in the same subject 我想把这个学位作为在该领域获得更高资格的基石	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject 我想把这个学位作为在其它领域获得更高资格的基石	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to a higher ranked university 我想把这个学位作为未来进入排名更高的大学的基石	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university alumni activities are attractive to me 该大学校友活动对我很有吸引力	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This university suits my career aspirations 这所大学符合我的职业抱负	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will be developing my own identity as an individual 通过出国留学, 我将发展自己的独立个人身份	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university website is easy to navigate 该大学网站很容易浏览	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The university website has all the required information 大学网站上有所有所需的信息	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand image portrayed by the university website meets my own 'brand identity' 大学网站描绘的品牌形象符合我自己的'品牌认同'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I did not consider this factor	I did consider this factor	This factor was important to me	This factor was an essential factor to me
By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual 通过出国留学, 我将能够探索我自己的本身	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions 通过出国留学, 我将能够做出自己的决定	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will be able to earn a higher salary 通过海外学习, 我未来将能够获得更高的薪水	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my family 通过海外学习, 我将学到新知识, 让我的家人受益	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my country 通过海外学习, 我将学到新知识, 造福我国	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to follow the career path of my family 我想跟随我家人目前的职业道路方向	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown) 通过海外学习, 我将能够在新的城市 (而不仅是我的家乡) 发展我的事业	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By studying overseas I will be able to spend more on luxury brands 通过海外学习, 我将能够更多地消费高档品牌	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I did not consider this factor  
I did consider this factor  
This factor was important to me  
This factor was essential factor to me

Studying overseas is something I am doing for me, not my family 在海外学习是我为自己做的事，而不是我的家人

5.Are there any other factors that you considered in your decision making process?

*Please mark them as 1 - I considered this factor; 2 - this factor is important; 3 - this factor is essential*

6.Regarding the factors you have identified as 'essential'; please explain why you feel this way about them

7. My gender is

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

8. My age is

- Less than 18 years
- 18 - 21 years
- 22-25 years
- 25 or older

9. My hometown municipality / province / autonomous region is

- Anhui Province
- Beijing Municipality
- Chongqing Municipality
- Fujian Province
- Gansu Province
- Guangdong Province
- Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
- Guizhou Province
- Hainan Province
- Hebei Province

- Heilongjiang Province
- Henan Province
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
- Hubei Province
- Hunan Province
- Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
- Jiangsu Province
- Jiangxi Province
- Jilin Province
- Liaoning Province
- Macau Special Administrative Region
- Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
- Qinghai Province
- Shaanxi Province
- Shandong Province
- Shanghai Municipality
- Shanxi Province
- Sichuan Province
- Taiwan Province
- Tianjin Municipality
- Tibet Autonomous Region
- Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

- Yunnan Province
- Zhejiang Province

10. I would describe my parents jobs as

- Business Owner
- Director
- General Manager
- Departmental Manager
- Supervisor
- 

11. My family annual income is approximately

- Less than 100k (CNY ¥)
- 100-250k (CNY ¥)
- 250-500k (CNY ¥)
- 500k-750k (CNY ¥)
- 750k-1000k (CNY ¥)
- Greater than 1000k (CNY ¥)

12. The source of financial support for my tuition fees is

- Parents

- Own savings
  - Government grant
  - Scholarship
  - Loan / credit
  -
- 

13. The source of financial support for my living expenses is

- Parents
  - Own savings
  - Government grant
  - Scholarship
  - Loan / credit
  -
- 

14. The university I applied to study at is

15. The level of study I applied for is

- Access course / Pre-sessional
- Undergraduate 1st year (level 4)
- Undergraduate 2nd year (level 5)
- Undergraduate final year (level 6)

- Postgraduate (Masters)
- Doctoral

16.The degree title I applied for is

17.My ambition immediately after this degree is to

- Continue with further studies
- Begin my career in home country
- Begin my career in the country of study (e.g.UK)
- Begin an international career

18.I there anything else you would tell me about why you chose your university to study at?

Submit

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Powered by Microsoft Forms

### 3. Participant Information Sheet

## Important Factors In Choosing A University For Chinese Study- Abroad Students

### Participant Information Sheet

Reference number: ER18527063

#### 1. Invitation to take part in our research

You are being invited to take part in a questionnaire based research activity being developed Robert Hayward (Principle Investigator) as part of his research degree thesis. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why this activity is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this participant information sheet.

#### 2. Why have you asked me to take part?

You have been given this participant information sheet to read because you have been forwarded an email using a 'snowball' approach to collecting data. That is to say that someone you are connected to has forwarded the email and link to the questionnaire thinking that you are an appropriate person to complete it.

You **can** take part in this study if you:

- are male or female
- are Chinese
- between 18 - 65 years old
- have or are in the process of selecting which course and UK university to study abroad at
- have access to a computer / mobile device and the internet

You **cannot** take part in this study if you:

- are under 18 years old
- are not intending to study at a UK university.

#### 3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. The copy of the information provided here is yours to keep. If you decide to take part, by submitting the questionnaire it is considered that you have read this participant information sheet and that you consent to Robert Hayward being able to use the data collected for his research thesis and other published work appropriate to the data collected. The data is completely anonymous and it will be impossible to identify any individual from the research.

**4. What will I be required to do?**

You will be required to read through an electronic questionnaire and indicate which factors you considered during your decision of where to study abroad. There also some demographic type questions to help with data analysis.

**5. Where will this take place?**

The questionnaire can be completed by the participant wherever there is appropriate technology and internet access, and that is of course that the participant does not put themselves at any risk whilst completing the questionnaire. The submitted responses will be accessible by Robert Hayward only.

**6. How often will I have to take part, and for how long?**

You will only have to complete the questionnaire once. Pilot study tests suggest that this will take around 15 to 20 minutes.

**7. Are there any possible risks or disadvantages in taking part?**

There are no perceived risks to taking part.

**8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The benefits of the study are to help better understand any changing attitudes across China in the selection of an overseas university. This better understanding may lead to clearer and more appropriate information being made available in the near future to assist others in their decision making process.

**9. When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?**

Because the questionnaire is an electronic one and self-administered, you are in control. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point prior to clicking 'submit'.

**10. Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?**

All the information about your participation in this study will be kept confidential. The Principle Researcher carrying out this study has a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and nothing that could reveal your identity will be disclosed outside the research site. Your data and the procedures for handling, processing, storage and destruction of your data are compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

All data collected will be analysed using excel spreadsheets. Only the Principle Investigator will be able access the data, and he is not able to link any individual to the data in the study.

The Freedom of Information Act (2000) grants the right of access to recorded information that the University holds (in any format) and it can be requested by anyone, regardless of their relationship with the University. Information about third parties may be requested but is exempt from disclosure if releasing it would conflict with data protection obligations.

You have the right to contact the University and ask for identifiable information which we hold on any subject or relating to any particular topic. Any information held by the University may be eligible for release.

However, a number of exemptions may be applied to protect information which needs to be restricted (see below). If we cannot tell you whether we have the information you want, or if we refuse to disclose information we hold, we will explain the reasons and you will have the opportunity to appeal against our decision. If we do not have the information, but know that it may be held by another public authority we will tell you and we may forward your request.

If the information you require is not available via the University's publication scheme, you will need to put your request in writing. Please send your request to the University Secretariat by e-mail at [foi@shu.ac.uk](mailto:foi@shu.ac.uk) or post to:

University Secretariat  
Sheffield Hallam University  
City Campus  
Sheffield  
S1 1WB

**11. Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?**

The Principal Investigator will be responsible for your information.

**12. Who will have access to the information?**

During the study, only the Principle Investigator and his research supervisory team will have access to any of your information.

**13. What will happen to the information when this study is over?**

All the information collected, will be retained for 5 years after the study has been completed.

**14. How will you use what you find out?**

The results of this research will be used primarily to produce the thesis for the Principle Investigators research degree. If thought appropriate, the thesis maybe developed into academic papers for publication in academic journals, academic conferences or used to inform business interested in the recruitment of Chinese students to university. It will not be possible to identify you in any of these presentations or publications.

**15. How long is the whole study likely to last?**

Your part in the study will last approximately 20 minutes in the completion and submitting of the questionnaire.

**16. How can I find out about the results of the study?**

The results of the research will be available upon completion of the degree assessment process, predicted to be late summer 2020. To find out about the results please contact the Principle Researcher directly, details provided below.

**17. The legal basis for research for studies at Sheffield Hallam University.**

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of **public tasks that are in the public interest**.

A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study has been reviewed and approved by Sheffield Business School Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

**18. Details of who to contact if you have any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study are given below.**

**Researcher/ Research Team Details:**

**Principle Researcher**

Robert Hayward  
Senior Lecturer in Hospitality Management  
Management  
Sheffield Hallam University

[r.w.hayward@shu.ac.uk](mailto:r.w.hayward@shu.ac.uk)

+44 (0)114 225 6091

**Director of Studies**

Dr Wei Chen  
Senior Lecturer in Hospitality

Sheffield Hallam University

[w.chen@shu.ac.uk](mailto:w.chen@shu.ac.uk)

+44 (0)114 225 2949

<p><b>You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you have a query about how your data is used by the University</li> <li>• you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)</li> <li>• you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk">DPO@shu.ac.uk</a></p>	<p><b>You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="mailto:a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk">a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk</a></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB Telephone: 0114 225 5555</p>	

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in this study.**

If you decide to take part, you will be able to print a copy of this information sheet for you to keep.

#### 4. Risk Assessment

Description of the Process/Activity: Digital Card Sort / Questionnaire	Location(s): Office (Principle Investigator) / home location (Participant)
	RA Ref:

Hazard	Who could be harmed?	Existing safety precautions	Risk level	Additional safety precautions needed to reduce the risk level?	Revised risk level	Action by whom?	By when?	Date completed
<b>Online Safety</b> The questionnaire may be received by a vulnerable person	Participant	The initial list of participants to be included in the research are known by the Principle Investigator. The Participant Information Sheet provides instructions on who should complete the digital card sort and that the participant and exit the process at any time / not submit	Low	Participants are over the age of 18 and have / are experiencing university, therefore have experience with using online facilities.	Low	Principle Investigator	September 2019	9 <sup>th</sup> September 2019
<b>Hacking</b> Hacking of the desktop in which the data is stored may	The data	Making sure that the initial invitation to participate is distributed via a secure	Low			Principle Investigator	September 2019	On-going

occur during the collection of responses		network i.e. Sheffield Hallam email system						
<b>Data protection &amp; GDPR</b>	Participants are not asked for personal data such as their names / contact details	All data that is collected will be completely anonymous and secured on a password protected desktop computer	Low			Principle Investigator	September 2019	9 <sup>th</sup> September 2019
<b>Offending a participant</b>	Participant	Prior to any distribution of the card sort or digital card sort, consideration is given to the phrasing of the questions. A double translation approach is utilised to ensure accuracy. Part of this process will also ensure that not question is asked that will cause offence. The pilot study exercise will confirm this	Low			Principle Investigator	September 2019	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Conducting data collection / Analysis</b>	Principle Investigator	Data collection and analysis is undertaken via desktop computer located in the university / at home office	Low			Principle Investigator	September 2019	On-going

<b>Conducting data collection</b>	Participant	Digital card sort is completed and submitted by the participant on either a desktop / laptop or via mobile device. This can be completed at the participants convenience and in a location that they feel safe in.	Low			Principle Investigator	September 2019	On-going

Communication of significant findings		
<p>Method of communication (describe):</p> <p>Digital card sort sent out via email message</p> <p>Data received via Office Forms / Excel</p> <p>Data Analysis via Excel</p> <p>Findings reported in thesis</p>	<p>Person/people to communicate findings:</p> <p>Principle Investigator</p> <p>Supervisory Team</p> <p>Examining Team</p>	<p>Target date(s):</p> <p>Spring / summer 2020</p>

Approval

Carried out by: R Hayward	Post: Principle Investigator	Signature: RW Hayward	Date: 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
Approved by: W Chen	Post: Director of Studies	Signature:	Date:

Review of risk assessment

The frequency of the review is (refer to guidance):

Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:
Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:
Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:
Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:
Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:
Review date :	Carried out by:	Signature:

## 5. Data Management Plan

### Data Collection

#### a) *What data will you collect or create?*

- Are there any existing data that you can re-use?
- What type, volume and format of data will you collect or create?
- Do your chosen formats and software enable sharing and long-term sustainability of data, such as non-proprietary software and software based on open standards?

#### b) *How will the data be collected or created?*

- Are you using standardized and consistent procedures to collect, process, transcribe, check, validate and verify data, such as standard protocols, templates or input forms? What quality assurance processes will you adopt?
- How will you organise data, records, and files (file naming, folder structures)?
- How will you handle versioning?

### Documentation and Metadata

#### a) *What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?*

- What documentation and metadata explain what your data mean, so that it can be read and interpreted in the future? Is this sufficient for others to understand your data and use them properly?
- How will you capture / create this documentation and metadata?
- Which metadata standards will you use?

### Ethics and Legal Compliance

#### a) *How will you manage any ethical issues?*

- Do your data contain confidential or sensitive information? If so, are you gaining written consent from respondents to preserve and share data beyond your research?
- How will you protect the identity of participants if required? Will your data be need to be anonymised / pseudonymised- how will this be managed?
- How will sensitive data be handled to ensure it is stored and transferred securely?

**b) *How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues?***

- Have you established who owns the copyright in your data? Might there be joint copyright?
- If you are purchasing or reusing someone else's data sources, are there any restrictions on their reuse? Have you considered how these data might be shareable, for example by negotiating a new license with the original supplier?
- Have you considered which kind of license is appropriate for sharing your data and what, if any, restrictions there might be on reuse?
- Will data sharing be postponed / restricted, for example to publish or to seek patents?

**Storage and Backup**

**a) *How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?***

- Do you have sufficient storage?
- How will your files be backed up, and how regularly? Are your backups stored safely?
- How will the data be recovered in case of an incident?
- Who will be responsible for back-up and recovery?

**b) *How will you manage access and security?***

- What are the risks to data security and how will these be managed?
- Do you need to securely store personal or sensitive data? If so, are they properly protected?
- Do you need to transfer personal or sensitive data? If so, how will you ensure that they are transferred securely?
- If data are collected with mobile devices, how will you transfer the data into your main secured storage?
- Who has access to which data during and after research? How will you ensure that any collaborators can access your data securely?

**Selection and Preservation**

**a) *Which data are of long-term value and should be preserved and/or shared?***

- What data must be retained or destroyed for contractual, legal or regulatory purposes?

- How will you select which other data to preserve and/or share and which data to destroy?
- What are the foreseeable research uses for the data?
- How long will you preserve your data for?

**b) *What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset?***

- How and where will you preserve your research data for the longer term? Does your repository of choice charge any costs?
- How will you prepare and document the data for preservation and sharing? Have you costed in time and effort to do this?

**Data Sharing- this section relates to sharing data after the project is completed**

**a) *How will you share the data?***

- When will you make the data available?
- Will you share via a repository, handle requests directly, or use another mechanism?
- With whom will you share the data, and under what conditions? Is there a need for access restrictions?
- How will potential users find out about your data?

**b) *Are any restrictions on data sharing required?***

- Will there be any difficulties in sharing data, and how will you overcome or minimise these?
- Would a data sharing agreement (or equivalent) be required?
- If applicable, for how long do you need exclusive use of the data and why?

**Responsibilities and Resources**

**a) *Who will be responsible for data management?***

- Who will be responsible for implementing the DMP and ensuring that it is reviewed and revised?
- Who will be responsible for which activities?
- How will responsibilities be split across partner sites in collaborative research projects?
- Will data ownership and responsibilities for RDM be part of any consortium agreement or contract agreed between partners?

***b) What resources will you require to deliver your plan?***

- Do you require any training, people, time, software, hardware, expertise? Are there any other costs, such as charges applied by data repositories?

## 6. Rejected statements

Studying overseas will bring honour to my family	Parents / friends recommended me to study in the UK
Parents / friends want me to study overseas	Parents / friends recommended that I study at this university
Parents / friends want me to study in the UK	It is an easy process to apply to a British university to study
The study visa process is quick and easy	I have friends from home studying in the UK
There is a low level of crime in the UK	The university is recognised in China
There is a low level of discrimination in the UK	The university's location suited my needs
The study overseas agent recommended the UK	The transport system in the UK is convenient
The study overseas agent recommended the university	The university has a long history in education
The study overseas agent recommended the degree	The university has modern buildings
There is a history of Chinese students performing well at this university	The university has a city centre campus
There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent student experience at this university	The university has a traditional style of campus
There is a history of Chinese students having an excellent social experience at this university	The university has high quality computer resources
The tuition fees to study in the UK are reasonable	The cost of living in the UK is reasonable

The university has high quality extra-curricular / sports activities	The degree content is typical for this subject
The university alumni has strong career profiles in my subject area	The degree will help me to develop a wider network of friends
The degree has a record of quality external / guest speakers as part of the degree	The degree will help me to develop a wider network of professional contacts
The university has a reputation for quality professors and academics	The university alumni activities are attractive to me
The degree subject leads to professional body membership	The university website is easy to navigate
The degree subject is easier to pass than other subjects	I want to follow the career path of my family
The degree will allow me to get a high salary after graduating	By studying overseas I will be able to spend more on luxury brands

## 7. Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping – Variable Significance

Variable	Out-degree	In-degree	Central ity
The degree subject has a high ranking	17.60	11.99	29.59
I wanted to advance / boost my career prospects by studying overseas	15.72	9.86	25.58
By studying overseas I will be able to make my own decisions	15.63	9.89	25.52
The degree subject is one that I want a career in	12.26	12.16	24.41
By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my family	11.85	12.45	24.30
I wanted to study in English (language)	13.39	9.96	23.35
By studying overseas I will be able to explore who I am as an individual	12.37	10.02	22.40
I wanted to study overseas	12.36	10.00	22.36
Studying overseas is something I am doing for me, not my family	12.24	10.01	22.25
By studying overseas I will be able to earn a higher salary	12.20	10.03	22.23
I want an international career	12.12	10.01	22.13
By studying overseas I will bring back new knowledge to benefit my country	9.60	12.52	22.12
I wanted to experience a different teaching style by studying overseas	12.00	10.02	22.02
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in the same subject	9.39	12.53	21.92
I wanted to develop a global mind-set	11.47	10.04	21.51
The department in which I will be studying has recognised international	8.74	12.27	21.00
By studying overseas I will be developing my own identity as an individu	10.51	10.08	20.59
I wanted to study in the UK	9.90	10.10	20.01
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to a higher ranked universi	7.20	12.60	19.80
By studying overseas I will be able to follow a career in a new city (not my hometown)	7.14	12.61	19.75
I want to use this degree as a stepping stone to higher qualifications in a different subject	6.45	12.63	19.08
The jobs in the subject area are attractive to me	8.64	10.16	18.80
I wanted to better understand other cultures	7.08	10.22	17.30
I wanted to experience a different assessment style by studying overseas	5.52	10.29	15.81
This university suits my career aspirations	5.28	10.30	15.58
I can achieve a world recognised qualification	9.76	4.64	14.40
The university has a wide range of international activities / collaborator	3.73	6.63	10.36
The university has a good reputation for teaching quality	5.36	4.92	10.28
The university website has all the required information	6.71	3.53	10.24
The UK has a world class education system	4.85	4.95	9.80
The university has a good reputation for research	4.69	4.96	9.65
The university has a high national ranking	4.05	5.00	9.05
There are a wide range of courses available to study in the UK	4.80	3.23	8.03

