Experiences of Chinese Tourism & Hospitality Students in Australia

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Key Research Objectives

To understand the experiences of a significant international student group

through their eyes, words & opinions
Research Method

• Nine focus groups & in-depth interviews
• Chinese degree students - tourism/hospitality/events
• Griffith University & Victoria University
  - Semi-structured discussions of 1.5 – 2 hrs duration
  - Warm-up, open-ended questionnaire
  - Discussions conducted in English

The Student as Purchaser

• Education involves a high commitment, involvement & purchase price
• Purchasing behaviours are likely to vary considerably depending on individual needs
• Different weights & timing given to various factors through the course of consideration
Purchasing as a 3-Stage Process

Push Factors → Motivations Influencing Purchase → Pull Factors

Considerations of Purchase
Process of elimination to the Final Buy
Program Commencement

Best Fit Solution to their individual & varying needs

Why study overseas?

Away from China
- Limited choices & education quality in China
- Need to differentiate themselves in job market
- Difficulty entering top Chinese institutions
- A Masters degree is a 3 year commitment
- Limited availability of THE Masters programs in China

To International Destinations
- Gain a competitive advantage & differentiation by acquiring a reputable international qualification
- Live in a different culture & expand personally to reach one’s potential
- Access high quality institutions
- Acquire a Masters qualification in 12 to 18 months

- Why study overseas?
“if I want to learn hospitality & tourism, other countries say “go to this university”, but if I say in China I want to learn this major, they can’t say any special university.”

Why choose an English speaking Destination?

Away from non-English Speaking Destinations
- Previous English training
- English seen as an increasingly important international language
- Language is a barrier in Switzerland

To English Speaking Destinations
- Desire to practice & improve English
- Association with reputable qualifications & quality education
- Desire to experience western culture
“Switzerland I think is at the top of the tourism education but they speak French & German & that’s a problem.”

**Why Australia?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Away from UK, US, Canada &amp; NZ</th>
<th>To Australia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of UK &amp; US institutions more aspirational than for Australia, but perceived as inaccessible because of visa or university entry &amp;/or expense difficulties</td>
<td>Attractive weather &amp; environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety perceived as less assured in US, UK &amp; Canada</td>
<td>Lower entry requirements for visas &amp; institutions</td>
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<td>Perception of lower quality education in NZ</td>
<td>Affordable vs US &amp; UK &amp; offering more study options</td>
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<td>Negative word-of-mouth from friends, relatives &amp; parents about lifestyle, climate &amp; safety</td>
<td>Reputation for quality education institutions offering western thinking in a developed country setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety perceived as less assured in US, UK &amp; Canada</td>
<td>Safe, relaxed, friendly country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of lower quality education in NZ</td>
<td>Options for work experience or full time work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative word-of-mouth from friends, relatives &amp; parents about lifestyle, climate &amp; safety</td>
<td>Positive word of mouth from teachers, friends &amp; relatives</td>
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"Firstly I think about Britain because I have a best friend there & she is studying Master of Business, but not tourism. But I don't like the weather in London, that's the most important thing for me. I like the warm weather in Australia."

**Why tourism, hospitality, events?**

<table>
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<th>Away from Other Fields of Study</th>
<th>To Tourism, Hospitality, Events Study</th>
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<td>• Other types of program (mainly business degrees) popular but perceived job competition resulting from this</td>
<td>• Exciting &amp; dynamic industry with good long term prospects</td>
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<td>• Difficultly entering other fields of study through personal merit</td>
<td>• Desire to help to develop China’s tourism industry</td>
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<td>• Aligned with travel interest, desire to experience other cultures &amp; ‘people-orientation’</td>
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<td>• Industry values English language capacity</td>
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<td>• Well-developed industry in Australia</td>
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<td>• Desire to advance beyond low level jobs</td>
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“I surf the web and find some useful information about studying abroad, actually Australian... After that I thought about the information, about special courses provided by the uni’s and I think this tourism & hospitality area is quite interesting & I love Australia, so I go there.”

Preliminary Customer Segmentation
Differentiated & motivating factors

Tourism Enthusiasts
- Participate in the development of the tourism & event industries (more so than hospitality)

Education Compromisers
- Obtain higher qualifications, with THE not their first choice

Experience Seekers
- Experience Australia via travel, study & work

Self Improvers
- Improve on previous jobs, studies, life situation & personal growth

Values Fit

Academic Fit

Destination Fit

Personal Fit
Purchasing Considerations

Motivations Influencing Purchase
- Destination
- Language
- Affordability
- Lifestyle
- Program
- Institution
- Entry

Starting points to purchase based on varying levels of pre-disposition
- "I'd like to study overseas but I'm not sure where or what"
- "I'd like to study in Australia but I'm not sure what"
- "I'd like to study T&H, not sure where"
- "I'd like to study T&H in Australia"

Real options identified after information gathering, often in consultation with an Agent to narrow the field & find the best fit solution to their individual needs

Best Fit Solution
- Program
- Commencement

Why Overseas?

- To get outside their familiar world
- Australia was nominated because of:
  - Weather/environment/lifestyle
  - Joint program offered in China
  - Affordability
  - Developed country/industry
  - Reputation of program, English learning & education quality
"At first I think about I go to study overseas, & I didn’t decide which major I will study, just study, go outside."

"Firstly I had a motivation to study in Australia, so I find the advertisement, the poster in the public transport, in the bus stop."

"When I studied at university in China, my teacher told me, Australia is a really nice place & there are a lot of friendly people there. For me, most of my friends study in other countries instead of Australia, but they told me something bad about other countries."
Destination or Program?

- GU students more likely to have first considered the destination
- VU students more likely to have first considered the program (joint offering in China)
- THE nominated because:
  - A general interest in the tourism industry
  - China’s tourism potential
  - People orientated aspects of working in tourism & hospitality

“I think from before my first travel to Thailand. I thought, oh, it’s outside my world & it’s pretty good. So from that I decided to like study in this area, & searching some universities to make my dream come true.”

“The first reason is I was interested in tourism. The second thing is the perspective of tourism is good in China, & so many opportunities to develop. I think if I can study, I can get a better job in China.”
“I like travel at first. And when I want to study here, I decide to study here when I choose the major, actually I go to the agent ask their suggestion.”

“I think this tourism & hospitality area is quite interesting, & I love Australia, so I go there.”

Consideration of Program & Institution

- Consciousness of reputation & rankings
- Why choose one university over others?
  - Reputation of the major offered
  - Reputation of the university & program
  - Co-operative program delivery in China
“Also look for some paper about the ranking of each university, which major is better, but it always changes.”

“We got information booklet from the Chinese University, & it’s about Victoria University in tourism - get three awards between 1999 to 2000, government award in tourism industry.”
“Australian education quality in China is acceptable”.

The Parental Role

Varies by individual from high to low involvement

“It has to be a joint decision, cos I can’t afford by myself. I have to rely on support of my family, so we just discuss over & over again & it was a joint decision.”

“Individual decision. My parents respect what I choose. My parents encourage me to study abroad. They said if you study abroad you have to be independent, then you will learn many things.”
The Role of Education Agents

Used by 60%-70% of respondents & consulted from the start

“First I went to the agent & they provided me with a lot of information & then I search on the internet. I don’t want to have no direction & then start having the internet, it’s too much information for me, so they can give me some valuable information & based on this I can search a little bit deeper.”

“Like they really decide where you’re going because when I first go, they just really suggest, that’s the place you really should go.”

“I visited different education agents to ask some questions, because sometimes they will give you different answers & from this I get some information which is useful & I search the internet.”

“They strongly recommend the university is very high reputation in tourism & hospitality…. I think the main reason why they recommended Griffith to me is because they have already built up a strong relationship, so I think it’s an easy way for them to imply this uni to me, easy for them to operate.”
Role of the Internet

Used to varying degrees at relevant times throughout the consideration & purchasing process.

- Influences perceptions & what it might be like to study in Australia through general use before students start actively seeking information.
- Direct influence by delivering the information actively sought on institutions, programs, visas, life, culture, accommodation & part-time work opportunities.

The Role of the Internet & Websites in Purchasing

“When I study the internet I found a very famous university in China providing tourism & hospitality course cooperated with VU.”

“There’s a lot of Universities in Melbourne, but I didn’t know so what I did is google.com.au and ‘hospitality, tourism’ & the courses all come up.”

“Firstly I found the list of the university in Australia, then I found out which universities provide Master of Tourism, then I just visit the official website.”
Acclimatising

• The cultural adjustment & approach to learning were major challenges for students

• This impacted upon study & learning how to survive in an unfamiliar environment

• Limited language skills leads to a lack of confidence

• Acquired a sense of freedom & self

“I had a culture shock at first. But the first surprising period, cos when I first came here I go through, err a little bit depressed. I remember that I need to install telephone at my home and I just call the Telstra shop. I talked about 40mins. but I didn’t feel so well in my heart.”

“I think it’s more personal space, because no-one will look at what I doing, or they don’t pay too much attention about what you are doing.”
Acclimatising to Study in Australia

One student attended a creative workshop which helped the adjustment to study.

“Creative thinking workshop, it give us some idea about how to attend the lectures, just not for getting the information in your mind, but understanding the lecture, & related to the practice.”

Acclimatising to Australian Education

Respondents noted significant contrasts with Chinese education

- Focus on Exams vs Practical Learning
- Closed vs Open teaching style
- Finite vs Infinite Knowledge
- Institution Entry vs Exit
“In China...the teacher always say “What the book said is right”, never question the book or the teacher”.

“I think it’s more active for students.”

“You will find in Australia, getting a degree is not easy...individual research, individual assignment, group assignment.”

“I think here education encourages most students to express their different ideas.”

“Here the teacher just teach you the rough idea & you should study yourself, but in China the teacher will give you a lot of hints about the exam.”

“In China it’s very difficult to enter into university study. The entrance examination is very strict, but once you’re studying, it’s easier to graduate. You don’t need to work so hard.”

“...But here, it’s very easy to enter into university to study. You just apply the university, you just get offer, very easy, but it’s difficult to graduate.”
Acclimatising to another Culture

“I think Australian & overseas students have a different culture & see some different concepts and treat some things in a different way. Sometimes we need to use a very big effort to suit the environment. So sometimes how to treat these other country’s people & the local people is quite hard for us.”

“I worked with two guys from Europe & I found their ideas totally different, so I have decided to leave that group & join another group.”

“We got so many different ideas & everyone wanted to be the group leader, everyone want others to “listen to me” & so there’s lots of conflict.”

Cross-Cultural Challenges

Students want to socialize & to integrate

“Whenver they held a party on campus, I am sure there are less Chinese who go because we are not used to that. It’s not a kind of Chinese culture. They say that we have to experience other culture, but we still feel reluctant to go.”
Was the Experience “Excellent”? 

- Knowledge - western-based & developed-industry knowledge (except when familiar)

- Self development - independence, new experiences outside their world & prized opportunities to practice English

“If we doing this course in China & then work in China, we couldn’t know what the hospitality industry in Australia like.”
What was beneficial, but not so excellent?

- Cross-cultural experiences
  = difficult but enlightening
- Same (Chinese) cultural experiences
  = comfortable but lessened opportunities to integrate & speak English
- Practical learning - group assignments/presentations
  = uncomfortable but confidence building
- Industry exposure/work experience
  = very difficult to gain but very highly prized

"Too many Chinese in course just speak Chinese to each other."

"I hope they can supply the chance to practice the knowledge. You know, you just have this knowledge, but you really don’t know how to operate & manage the hotel. I hope if possible they can co-operate with business, because on the Gold Coast there are many hotels here. It’s better compared to China."
Conclusions

• Joint programs assist students recruitment, but an international student mix is important
• Educational agents play a major role
• Students assess options using the web
• Purchasers want evidence about reputation, ranking & achievements
• Chinese students are seeking a combination of benefits
• The connection between Australia as a tourism destination & THE as a field for study overseas

Thank you!

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