

Attracting International Degree Students to Finnish Higher Education Institutions: A Study on Decision Making Processes of Chinese and South Korean Students

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The research on international student mobility in Finland has been limited and often focused on exchange students. Furthermore studies in the field are often descriptive in nature and concentrated on satisfaction and the adjustment of foreign students to Finnish society and education system. The objective of this research is to create understanding of the decision making processes of potential foreign degree students from China and South Korea. This understanding is meant to create knowledge that can be utilized in recognizing ways for Finnish higher education institutions, including universities and universities of applied sciences, to attract international degree students.

METHODOLOGY

The research belongs to the discipline of services marketing and consumer research. The research was conducted as a qualitative research through personal semi-structured interviews. A total of 13 potential students were interviewed for the research. The interview data was examined by utilizing the theoretical framework on international students' decision-making process by Cubillo et al. The framework uses purchase intention of foreign higher education as an independent variable dependent on five factors.

FINDINGS

The study illustrated that reasons related to individual socioeconomic advancement were the main motivation behind the decision to study abroad, while country image effect, institution image and program evaluation proved to be the most important facilitators to achieve this desired advancement. Total cost of international education, including both tuition and general cost of living, was also a significant deciding factor. Advice from family was deemed less important than advice from friends and professors. Personal experience of the destination country was more important to students who were considering Finland. Compared to the rest of the sample, students considering Finland also considered program evaluation more important than institution image or city effect.

Keywords International student mobility, decision making, higher education, China, South Korea, Finland

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TUTKIMUKSEN TARKOITUS

Kansainvälisen opiskelijaliikkuvuuden tutkimus Suomessa on ollut rajoittunutta ja usein keskittynyt vaihto-opiskelijoihin. Lisäksi alan tutkimus on usein luonteeltaan kuvaavaa ja keskittynyt ulkomaalaisten opiskelijoiden sopeutumiseen Suomalaiseen yhteiskuntaan ja koulutussysteemiin. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on luoda ymmärrystä Kiinalaisten ja Etelä-Korealaisten potentiaalisten tutkinto-opiskelijoiden valinta prosessiin. Tämän ymmärryksen on tarkoitus luoda tietoa jolla Suomalaiset korkeakoulut, yliopistot ja ammattikorkeakoulut, voivat paremmin houkutella ulkomaisia tutkinto-opiskelijoita.

METODOLOGIA

Tutkimus kuuluu palvelumarkkinoinnin ja kuluttajatutkimuksen piiriin. Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena hyödyntäen puolistrukturoitua haastattelumenetelmää. Tutkimukseen haastateltiin 13 potentiaalista opiskelijaa. Tutkimusdata tarkasteltiin käyttäen Cubillo ym:n kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden valintaprosessia kuvaavaa teoreettista viitekehystä. Viitekehys käyttää ulkomaisten tutkinto-opiskelijoiden ostopäätöstä riippumattomana muuttujana johon vaikuttaa viisi osatekijää.

PÄÄLÖYDÖKSET

Tutkimus osoitti henkilökohtaisten sosioekonomisten syiden olevan päämotivaatio päätökseen hakea ulkomaille tutkinto-opiskelijaksi. Maan ja kouluinstituution imago sekä koulutusohjelman arviointi osoittautuivat tärkeimmiksi fasilitaattoreiksi sosioekonomisen etenemisen tavoittamiseksi. Opiskelun kokonaiskustannukset, sisältäen lukukausimaksut ja kokonaiselinkustannukset olivat myös merkittävä tekijä. Neuvot perheeltä katsottiin vähemmän merkittäviksi kuin neuvot ystäviltä ja opettajilta. Henkilökohtainen kokemus kohdemaasta oli tärkeämpi opiskelijoille jotka harkitsivat Suomea. Muihin haastateltaviin verrattuna Suomea harkitsevat myös koulutusohjelman tärkeämpänä tekijänä kuin koulun imagoa tai kaupungin vaikutusta.

Avainsanat Kansainvälinen opiskelija liikkuvuus, valinta käyttäytyminen, korkeakoulutus, Kiina, Etelä-Korea, Suomi

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1 INTRODUCTION

The degree of internationalization has become increasingly important to higher education institutions and societies across the world. The portion of foreign students, researchers and teachers directly reflects on the ranking scores of universities. Governments, businesses and universities alike are looking for foreign experts to bring value and their expertise to societies. (Puustinen-Hopper 2005). The International student body can enrich their study institutions already during their degree studies and renew research in Universities and corporate culture. Countries and higher education institutions alike face new challenges positioning in the rapidly changing and highly competitive field. (Gürüz 2008; Puustinen-Hopper 2005). For the past two decades both the global educational and economic fields have been in rapid transformation and the industry. This eruption of growth in internationalization of higher education in the past two decades is largely caused by the emergence of knowledge economies. As economies have become more and more reliant on knowledge intensive industries the demand of highly trained work force has grown exponentially. Higher education institutions have transformed from creators of knowledge to major components of economic prosperity. (OECD 2012; Gürüz 2008; Powell and Snellman 2004; David 1997)

The internationalization of higher education started to gain attention in Finland in the 1980s and in the early 1990s the Ministry of education and Culture made it an official focus of the Finnish higher education policy. The globalization of higher education has increasingly shifted the focus of Finnish institutions of higher education from student exchange and co-operation with foreign education institutions, to offering degree studies to foreign students in English. (Zirra 2006). In 2003 the Finnish Government approved an ambitious development plan for internationalization of higher education. The goal was to double the number of exchange students and degree students coming to Finland. As an exchange destination Finland had become increasingly popular, especially within the EU. Conversely the number of international degree students Finland was still far behind other EU-countries and most OECD-countries. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2005, 22; 9).

Internationalization of higher education has been brought up as an important factor in increasing the competitiveness of Finland in several studies and publications in recent years.

The higher education institutions in Finland have begun to offer more English degree programmes to attract foreign students. While the percentage of international students in Finnish tertiary education has noticeably increased in the past decade, it is still among the lowest in OECD and EU countries (OECD 2012). Additionally in public discussion the percentage of international degree students that stay in Finland after graduating is deemed lower than desired. In order to be able to attract more talented international students it is necessary to understand what it is that these students are looking for in foreign degree studies (Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2008).

1.1 Research problem and research gap

While international student migration is not a new phenomenon research on the subject has been limited until recently. In the past decade the field has become more activated and a lot of new research has surfaced. Particularly the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have been in the focal point of the studies. In Finland however research in the field has been significantly more limited and often focused on exchange students. Furthermore studies in the field are often descriptive in nature and concentrated on satisfaction and the adjustment of foreign students to Finnish society and education system.

The research in the international student mobility both in Finland and rest of the world has practically completely been conducted with students already living abroad. In other words after the decision making process regarding international education destination has been concluded. By nature the decision to study abroad is complex and often expensive (Mazzarol 1998). This exposes the post-purchase decision to possible cognitive dissonance as the commitment to a decision might cause the decision-maker to review the process in an unrealistic skewed way. Thus the post-purchase review on the complex and expensive decision making process and decision might not reflect the process in a true and unbiased manner as a review before the commitment to a decision could. (Cummings and Venkatesan 1975). This thesis attempts to bridge the gap by getting access to people who during the research were in the process of selecting and applying to degree studies to foreign higher education institutions.

1.2 Research objectives

The objective of the research is to create understanding of the decision making processes of potential foreign degree students. This understanding is meant to create knowledge that can be utilized in recognizing ways for Finnish higher education institutions, including universities and universities of applied sciences, to attract international degree students more efficiently. The research was originally conducted by the author as a part of KatuMetro - Urban studies and metropolis policy research and co-operation programme. The research objectives were identical to those of this thesis with the additional focus on the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The international student body in the research was limited to two countries: China and South Korea. These two were chosen as the target countries for the study as they represented two very different student bodies in the Finnish higher education. Asia is the home for a significant part of the international students enrolled in tertiary degree studies in Finland. Within the last decade China has strengthened its position as the largest nationality of foreign students in Finland. In 2010 one in seven foreign degree students originated from China. Conversely, the number of South Korean degree students in Finland has been low even though the country has a large population of students and a high mobility rate in tertiary education.

The objective of this research is to offer new understanding on the decision making processes of potential international students by focusing on students in the process of choosing an international higher education destination. This understanding of the decision making process is intended to help Finnish higher education industry to better respond to the challenge of international student recruitment in the increasingly competitive industry. Additionally the research examines if there are distinctive differences between students who consider Finland as potential destination to those who do not. In order to find the answer to this question the empirical research in the study included both people who were and those that were not considering Finland as a potential study destination. The research also attempts to discover if there are differences between the decisions making processes of Chinese and South Korean students.

1.3 Research question

How can Finnish higher education institutions attract Chinese and South Korean higher education degree students?

Sub questions:

What are the decision making processes of Chinese and South Korean potential degree students in choosing their higher education destination?

Are there differences in the decision making processes of Chinese and South Korean potential students considering Finland as their higher education destination compared to those considering exclusively other countries?

Is it possible to identify Chinese and South Korean potential students who are more likely to remain in their country of choice after graduating?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

After introducing the research topic and research questions in chapter one the existing literature is examined in two sections. The first part, chapter two, will focus on the concept, history and development of international student mobility on a global as well as national level in China, South Korea and Finland. The second part of literature review, chapter three, will then begin with definition of higher education services in the terms of marketing literature continuing with review on the research on decision making processes of international students, introduction of the theoretical framework for the thesis and target country specific research. Next in chapter four the methodology of the thesis is presented along with research plan and depiction of the process and interview sample. In chapter five the findings of the research will be introduced and analyzed within the theoretical framework of the thesis. In chapter six the findings will be discussed within the research questions. Finally the thesis will finish with conclusions.

2 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

This chapter will present the development of international student mobility and will serve as a contextual background for the thesis. The section first illustrates the history and development of international student mobility on general and global level. Next the shift to global knowledge economy as the primary motivator is introduced, continuing with more in-depth analysis on higher education, international student mobility and related policies of China, South Korea and Finland.

2.1 Historical background on international student mobility

OECD defines international students as “students who have crossed borders expressly with the intention to study” (OECD 2012, 63). The term mobile students is also sometimes used interchangeably with international student. The concept of internationalization of higher education includes not only internationally mobile students but also higher education institutions and programs (Gürüz 2010, 135). For the purposes of this study the main focus is exclusively on international student mobility. It can be argued that the history of international higher education begun already circa 500 BC when Pythagoras travelled to Miletus to learn from Thales and Anaximander. Certainly the Greco-Roman and Islamic cultures did open the world to international scholars and students utilizing common language in their vast controlled areas (Gürüz 2010, 117-119) but to understand recent and current international student mobility it is not necessary to examine its history further than the last century.

The industrial development in the latter half of the 19th century truly begun the internationalization of higher education as we now know it. Western countries were at the height of the rapid development and it was in these countries that higher education developed the most. At the turn of the century Britain, France and Germany had become leaders of global higher education. Students travelled to these countries and teachers were recruited abroad from them. During this time the United States too was still primarily a source

of international students. International mobility of higher education continued to grow until the First World War. Soon after the war the development continued. This also marked the period when the “Modern American University” was conceived, having been modelled after European universities. Internationalization of higher education continued steady growth until being utterly devastated by the beginning of the Second World War. (Gürüz 2008, 3-5; 129-135).

It was after the Second World War that international student mobility truly began to surge as it was adapted as an instrument of foreign policy through new programs and scholarships instigated by national governments and international organizations (Gürüz 2010, 135). Advanced industrial nations also begun transitioning from economy based on labor and resource intense industries towards one based more on intellectual properties in the late 1950s. In the beginning of 1960s the term “knowledge economy” was introduced to describe the phenomenon that also created demand for more highly skilled workforce (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). The United States transforming from an industrial to knowledge economy quickly became the world power it is today. With English also becoming the Lingua Franca of the academic world the United States claimed the spot as the center of the international higher education. (Gürüz 2010, 134-135).

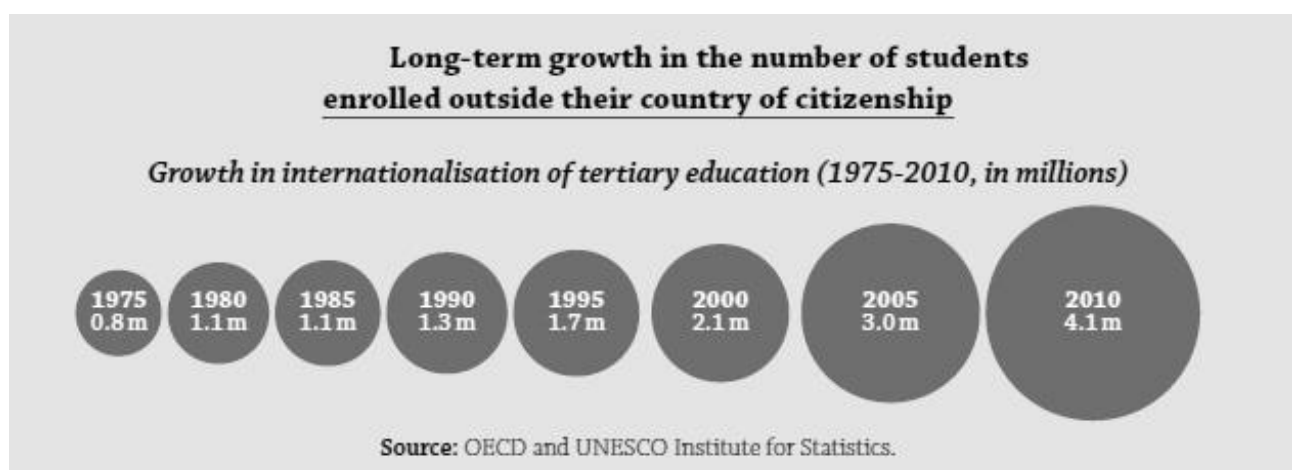
2.2 The global knowledge economy and present international student mobility

Knowledge economy can be defined as production and service industries that are “knowledge-intensive” with characteristically rapid rate of advancement and obsolescence of technology and science as well as output being more dependent on “intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources”. The emphasis in knowledge economy is on “human capital”. (Powell and Snellman 2004). Powell and Snellman demonstrate how the change can be quantified and observed by looking at the number of granted patents by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. They illustrate how the number of granted patents was consistent from early 1960s to mid-1980s before a period of intense growth in 1990s which ended in over double the amount of granted patents by 2001.

Gürüz (2008, 14-15) summarizes the role of knowledge economy in present day higher education "... country's capacity to take advantage of the global knowledge economy, not necessarily as a technology creator or developer but even as a user, adapter, and diffuser of technologies developed by others, clearly depends on its capacity to participate, at least to some extent, in the processes of generating, accessing, and sharing knowledge. If no such capacities exist, then that country is technologically disconnected and excluded from the global knowledge economy."

While advanced industrial nations begun the shift towards knowledge economy already in the late 1950s the breakthrough was in 1970s. This transitioning also affected the demand for international higher education and by 1990s the global knowledge economy had become the primary driver of international higher education (OECD 2012, 13; Gürüz 2010, 14-15). Traditionally growth in international student mobility was largely supplied by the less developed countries because they simply did not have higher education capacity that the destination developed countries offered. After the 1990s this is no longer the primary driver of internationalization of higher education. Based on OECD and UIS statistics (OECD 2012, 362-363) the growth of international student mobility was distinct but moderate through 1970s to 1990s. The total number of international students globally grew by just over 60 percent from 1975 to 1990. From 2000 to 2010 the number of international students globally has increased by 99 percent. (Figure 1)

Figure 1, (OECD 2012, 362)



In modern international student mobility, OECD countries have traditionally constituted over 90 percent of the destination countries for international students with the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and France attracting over 70 percent of these students (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). In recent years there has been a change in the traditional state of affairs and the popularity of traditional destinations has fluctuated. By 2010 the global share of international students in the United States fell from 23 to 17 percent in ten years. Similarly the share of Germany has dropped by 2 percent. Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Russia on the contrary have increased their popularity. (OECD 2012, 363). As mentioned earlier English has become the Lingua Franca of academic world and subsequently English speaking countries dominate as the destination of internationally mobile students. Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands are the only non-English speaking countries that are considered to have nearly all higher education programs in English. (OECD 2012, 365).

2.3 International student mobility in China

While the internationalization of Chinese higher education has explosively expanded only in the past decades the tertiary education in China does have international history dating back to the 19th century. During colonization the Chinese higher education system was modelled after Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Japan. (Gürüz 2008, 129; Huang 2003). Many higher education institutes were established in China by foreign entities before early 1950s when the People's Republic of China was founded, after which all higher education institutions were brought under government control (Weber and Duderstadt 2008, 120) The old western model remained in place from the late 19th century until 1952 when a soviet communist model was adapted. During the communist model foreign universities and those funded by foreign religious or governmental entities were abolished from China and all recruitment efforts towards Chinese students were banned. (Huang 2003). From 1967 to 1976 the Chinese higher education was devastated by the China's Cultural Revolution and most tertiary schools halted new student admissions (Weber and Duderstadt 2008, 120). The foundation on the modern internationalization of Chinese higher education was laid in 1971 when People's Republic of China replaced Taiwan as a member of the United Nations

and reformist Deng Xiaoping became the vice-premier of China in 1973. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 Deng became a more prominent figure of Chinese politics and in 1978 he initiated the beginning of the reforms that in education led to the communist model being replaced by a more western type model as well as opening the Chinese higher education to the West. (Gürüz 2008, 213-214)

According to Huang (2003) the internationalization of Chinese higher education can be divided in two phases, one outbound and the other inbound. The first phase from 1978 to 1992 was driven by “the four modernizations” to strengthen and modernize the industry, agriculture, national defense as well as science and technology of China. The focus was on sending students and faculty members abroad and inviting foreign scholars to China as well as teaching and learning English and other foreign languages. In the second phase, from 1993 to present day, the objective has been attract those students and faculty members that left abroad to return to China as well as recruit foreign students to China and internationalize domestic tertiary education. An important milestone in internationalization of Chinese education was a document issued by the State Education Commission of China in 1995. The document permitted Chinese higher education institutions cooperation with foreign institutions of higher education and identified international cooperation as an important component of education policy. (Huang 2003). On September 1st 2003 a regulatory policy paper “Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools” became effective. This paper gave clear guidelines to cooperation with international higher education institutions while protecting the integrity of Chinese education culture. (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2003). According to Zhang (Weber and Duderstadt 2008, 121) there are currently five main models for international collaboration in China: “(i) independent campuses in China set up by overseas universities; (ii) joint institutes or schools; (iii) dual degree programmes; (iv) joint programmes or projects; (v) overseas campuses set up by Chinese universities.”

In 1936 China had 78 institutions of higher education (Gürüz 2008, 129). According to fact sheet from the Ministry of Education, in 2008 there were a total of 2,263 institutes of higher education in China marking an increase of 355 from 2007 and 400 institutes of higher education for adults decreasing by 14 from 2007. Higher education institutions and higher education schools for adults enrolled 29.07 million students in 2008. (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2009).

The increase in the number of international students studying in China in the past decade has also been tremendous following the membership of the World Trade Organization. In 2011 the total number of overseas students was 292,611, out of whom 118,837 were degree students pursuing bachelor's, master's or PhD degrees (China Scholarship Council 2012). While the number of international students in China has increased tremendously, the foreign student body still composes only roughly 1 percent of total student population (Zhang in Weber and Duderstadt 2008, 120). Although the current emphasis in China is on internationalizing Chinese tertiary education institutions and attracting Chinese students and scholars back from overseas (Huang 2003), sending Chinese students abroad is still an important part of the internationalization plan for the Ministry of Education (Zhang in Weber and Duderstadt 2008 120-121). China has become the largest country of origin of international students in the world having grown from practically nonexistent in the 1960s (OECD 2012, 369). While the growth in internationally mobile Chinese students has been steady there are fluctuations in the growth. In 2005 there was a downward swing in the number of Chinese students studying abroad. Admissions of Chinese students to traditionally popular destinations like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia were down reportedly due to tightened immigration requirements, rising living and study costs, improvement of Chinese higher education quality and low salary levels of Chinese students in host countries. (China Daily 2005).

2.4 International student mobility in South Korea

To understand the internalization of higher education in South Korea it is necessary to understand the unique history of higher education in the country. While the beginning of South Korean higher education can be traced back to as early the end of 12th century and Confucian scholars, the modernization of higher education is relatively recent development in South Korea. Higher education of Korean nationals was very limited during the Japanese colonial rule over Korea. The modernization of South Korean higher education dates back to 1945 when the Japanese relinquished their rule over the country, though the Korean War postponed the beginning of the modernization until 1953. (Byun and Kim 2011; Kim and Lee 2006). By early 1960s universal primary education, the first goal in the modernization, was

actualized and was followed by concentration on secondary education to create skilled workforce (Kim and Lee 2006). In the 1960s South Korea invested in labor intensive industries followed by investment in labor and capital intensive heavy industries in the 1970s (Pyo Suh in Weber and Duderstadt 2008, 142). With the government focusing on primary and secondary education, the tertiary level of education became predominantly funded by private institutions (Kim and Lee 2006). This configuration still holds true as out of the current 411 higher education institutions in South Korea 359 are privately owned (Korean Ministry of Education 2013). Regardless of the direct ownership in higher education institutions the higher education field was greatly regulated by the government and the Korean Ministry of Education was, for example, responsible for stipulating student quotas, student admission criteria, staff recruitment and establishment of higher education institutions (Kim and Lee 2006).

In the 1980s and 1990s South Korea began to invest in knowledge intensive industries (Pyo Suh in Weber and Duderstadt 2008 142). This led to the increasing demand of highly skilled workforce and spurred the growth in South Korean higher education in the early 1980s (Byun and Kim 2011). The enrolment rate of higher education institutions in South Korea in 1980 was only 11.4 percent. In 2000 enrolment rate had reached over half of the general population and by 2008, at 71 percent, the South Korean entry rate of students into tertiary education was one of the highest and clearly above the average in OECD countries. (OECD 2012, 279). In 1945 South Korea had 19 institutions of higher education (Kim and Lee, 2006). Currently South Korea hosts 411 higher education institutions, 40 of which are graduate schools (Korean Ministry of Education 2013).

Another unique feature in South Korean education is that the private spending on tertiary education in South Korea is among the OECD countries. Tuition fees paid by South Koreans on average are only second to the United States (OECD 2012, 276). Additionally private spending on extracurricular studies or private tutoring, especially before entering higher education in South Korea is very high (Kim and Lee 2006). The popularity of private tutoring is largely due to the intense competition of entrance exams for the top universities. Parents of high school students are estimated to spend up to over 30 percent of their income on private education and tutoring. Many South Korean students are drawn to study abroad where competition is less intense for quality higher education institutions. (Pyo Suh in Weber

and Duderstadt 2008, 143). Student support systems in South Korea primarily rely on student loans though scholarships are available limitedly (OECD 2012, 279).

Up until the end of 1980s, driven by postcolonial modernization, the role of South Korea in global higher education was primarily to supply students and staff for foreign higher education institutions. Majority of these students and scholars later returned to South Korea with their experience and became the current the political and financial and academic leaders of the country. Ordinary citizens were not allowed to travel abroad until 1989 constricting opportunities of international student mobility. (Byun and Kim 2011). It was not until the “Education Reform Plan” of 1995 under the administration of Kim Young-sam that internalization of South Korean higher education truly begun. The reform largely deregulated the industry emphasized free competition and abolished enrolment quotas outside Seoul. (Byun and Kim 2011; Kim and Lee 2006). Also significant for the internalization process was the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995 which led the South Korean Government to publish the “Initial Plan for Opening the Higher Education Market to Foreign Countries” in pursuit of membership in 1996. The plan allowed curricular collaboration between South Korean and foreign higher education institutions and allowed foreign higher education institutions set up branch campuses. The Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s also played a role in the development by forcing the South Korean government to consider the financial aspects of the internationalization of higher education. This led to the adjustment of focus from outbound students to inbound ones, instigating the growth in the number of incoming foreign students and creating a temporary slump in the number of departing students. (Byun and Kim 2011).

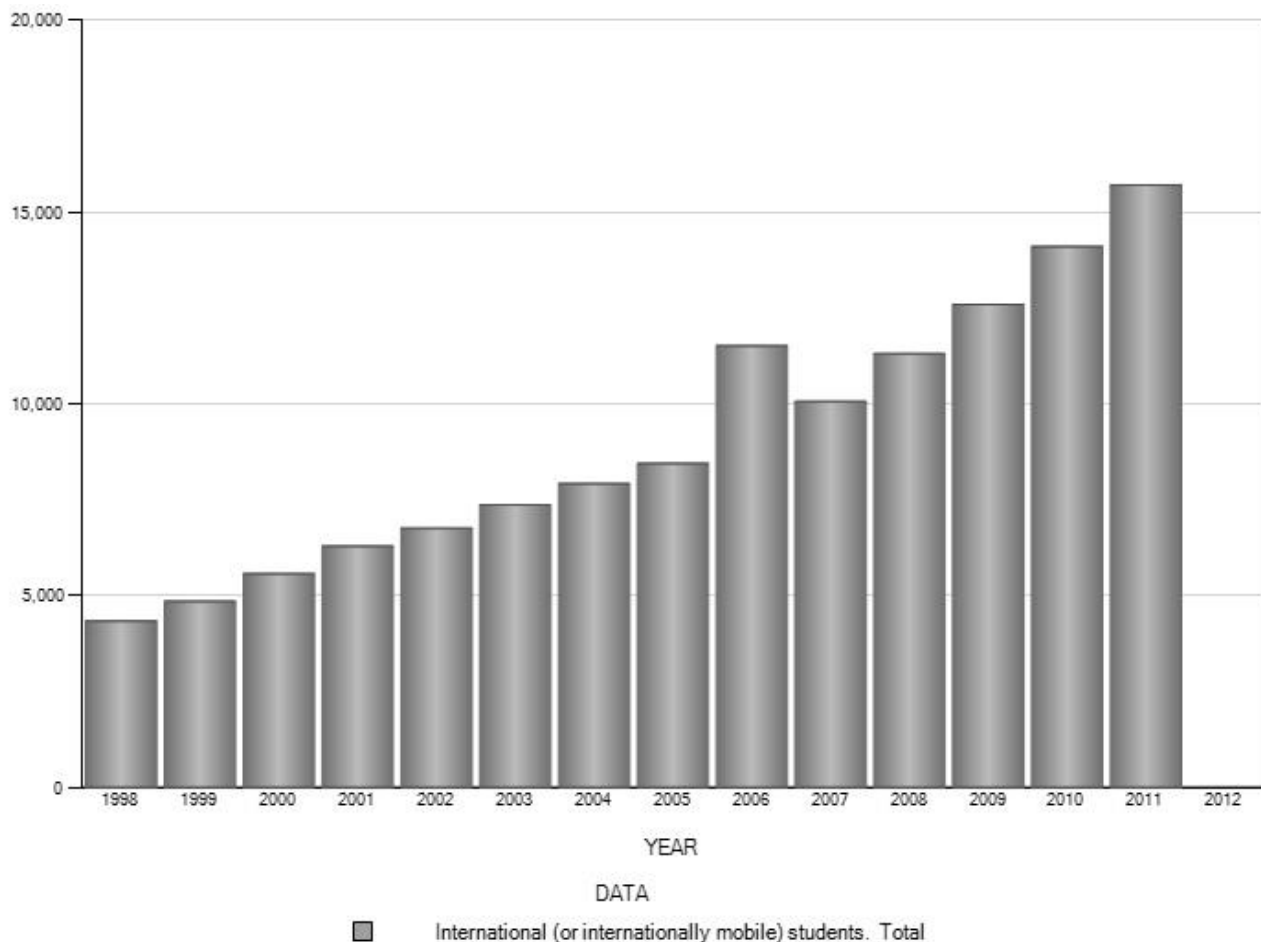
The total number of internationally mobile South Korean students increased over fourfold from 1991 to 216,867 in 2008. The number of international higher education degree students in 2008 was 127,000. (Byun and Kim 2011). Equally remarkable has been the exponential growth in the number of international higher education degree students hosted by South Korea. In 1998 South Korea hosted just 2,538 international students but just over a decade later in 2010 there were 59,194 international degree students. An overwhelming majority of 55,960 of the international students in 2010 were from Asia. (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2013).

2.5 International student mobility in Finland

Finland, like South Korea is a late entrant in internationalization of higher education (Aalto 2003, 7) but the foundations in Finnish higher education were laid in already back in 1640 by the establishment of the University of Turku by the Kingdom of Sweden and later by establishment the University of Helsinki in 1827 after the Great Fire of Turku by Russia after they had won Finland from Russia in the Napoleonic wars. While the motives behind the founding of these universities were political and religious they nevertheless served as important stages in Finnish higher education and the eventual emergence of Finnish nationalism which can be attributed to members of the Finnish academia. The development towards modern Finnish higher education began in the post war industrialization phase of Finland in the 1950s with equal education opportunities as a guiding line. This meant the elimination of tuition fees of higher education institutions. (Välilä 2004). Consequently the amount of private spending, largely caused by the absence of tuition fees in Finland but also by nonexistent expenditure in private supplementary studies, on education in Finland is among the lowest among OECD countries (OECD 2012, 239). During the period of rapid growth in the 1960s and 1970s Finnish higher education policy was largely dictated by the Ministry of Education and it was not until 1980s that policy begun to allow higher education institutions more autonomy following the guidelines of OECD (Välilä 2004).

The first steps for internationalization of Finnish higher education were taken in late 1980s when the international student mobility was integrated in higher education policies. The first numerical goals for outbound Finnish students were set for 1991-1996. In the 1990s majority of international student mobility was exchange student based and Europe-centric as Finland fully took advantage EU based exchange programs like Erasmus and Socrates. In 2001 the Ministry of Education published the first official strategy for internationalization of higher education. The strategy set guidelines policies and goals for internationalization of Finnish higher education until 2010. One of the goals was to have 10,000-15,000 international students in Finland by 2010. The Ministry of Education estimated the number of foreign degree students and exchange students to be around 1,000 in 1990. (Aalto 2003, 7-10).

Figure 2, International student in Finland (UIS 2013)



Since the late 1990s the number of international students in Finland has tripled with the rate of growth rate clearly accelerating since 2005 (Figure 2). OECD (2012, 366) suggest this rapid growth after 2005 might be caused by the combination of availability of English programs and absence of tuition fees. In 2011 the international student body in Finland was 15,707 students whereas in 1998 it was just 4,331. In 2010 Finland hosted 2,105 international degree students from China, making them the largest nationality of international students in Finland at nearly 15 percent of total international student body of 14,097. The number of South Korean students was quite small in comparison as there were just 49 degree student studying in Finland in 2010. (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2013). Aalto (2003, 11) characterizes the international higher education of 1990s as the “decade of Europeanization” and the beginning of the 21st century as the “decade of globalization” as both incoming and outgoing students started to expand out of Europe to the rest of the world. Currently the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2012) has set a goal of attracting 20,000 international degree students by the year 2015.

Finnish higher education institutions presently, despite guidelines of Ministry of Education, have autonomy in carrying out their internationalization. In a research paper by Aalto (2003) the difficulty of reaching successful potential international students along with insufficient financial and personnel resources were considered the largest challenges by approximately four out of five higher education institutions. Inadequate supply of foreign language education supply was identified as a weakness by 78 percent of universities. This is peculiar given that Finland, as mentioned before, is considered to internationally having a very high rate of English higher education programs. Conversely 62 percent of universities of applied sciences considered insufficient language skills of the staff to be a weakness while 50 percent thought inadequate supply of foreign language education was an issue. Less than one third of Finnish higher education institutions reported having set numerical goals on attracting foreign degree students. The main methods of marketing communication channels for Finnish higher education institutions were the internet and personal associations of the staff (Aalto 2003, 18; 25; 54)

In Finnish public and political discussion the most talked about issue regarding international students has been the issue of getting international degree students to stay after graduation. Consequently this has become one of the most researched topics of the field in Finland. (Niemelä 2008; Aalto 2003; Koivisto and Juusola 2008). According a CIMO (2012) publication based on data from Statistics Finland in 2007 the number of international graduates from Finnish higher education institutions was 1332. Out of these graduates 67 percent were still living in Finland in 2008. In their study Shumilova et al (2012) present in that out of the international students graduating from Finnish higher education institutions in 2009 and 2010 a clear majority of 77.9 percent were still residing in Finland. Graduates from East Asia were slightly more likely to stay after graduation at 80.3 percent. It should be noted that 49.1 percent of the respondents had lived in Finland for more than six months before beginning their studies. Over one third had lived in Finland over a year before undertaking studies. This suggests that for a large number of respondents there might have been other reasons to move in Finland and thus they would also likely have more reason to stay after graduation.

Based on data from Statistics Finland 49 percent out of the 1332 international student graduates from 2007 were employed in Finland in 2008 while out of the graduates that stayed in Finland 73 percent were employed (CIMO 2012). Similar results were reported by

Shumilova et al. (2012). In their sample 71.1 percent of international graduates who graduated in Finland in 2009 and 2010 stayed in the country after graduation. Interestingly they also state that the employment rate for international graduates returning to their home country was similar at 70.2 percent but for those that moved to a third country the employment rate was only 54.5 percent. According to Shumilova et al (2012) 25 percent of those international graduates that were employed currently had an occupation that did not require a higher education degree or required a lower level degree than they possessed. Intriguingly this is similar to the findings by Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen (2010) about Finns who have studied abroad having a considerably higher rate of employment in a position that requires a lower level of education than they possess. This could indicate employer side prejudices towards people who have studied abroad for at least part of their studies.

3 HIGHER EDUCATION AND DECISION MAKING

In this chapter the concept and nature of higher education is first examined and classified as a marketable service. Next the history of research in international student mobility, and specifically decision making processes of international students, is surveyed. Then decision making processes of internationally mobile Chinese and South Korean students are surveyed followed by examination of decision making processes of international students in Finland.

3.1 Higher education as a marketable service

Patterson et al. (1998 quoted in Cubillo et al. 2006) define higher education as a pure service characterized by greater amount of interpersonal contact, complexity, divergence and customization than other businesses. According to Kotler and Keller (2009, 214) "A service is any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything". The main product higher education institutions provide is intangible knowledge and it can thus be categorized as a service industry. Furthermore services can be identified by four distinctive characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability (Lovelock and Gummesson 2004; Zeithaml et al. 1985; Kotler 1982). If we examine higher education in these four parameters we can clearly find higher education to have the characteristics of service industry. First, the most distinguishing feature of higher education is that the main product is intangible knowledge and by extension a diploma serving as evidence of said knowledge. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) emphasize that students are not buying the degree but rather the benefits such as employment, status and lifestyle it can provide. Second, education services are produced and consumed simultaneously and provider-client interaction as well as presence is required in delivery of the service, making the service provider inseparable from the service and customer. Third, variability within higher education is unquestionably enormous as institutions, programs, teachers, locations and other students all affect the heterogeneous nature of the service. Finally, higher education institutions are obviously incapable of

inventorying the provided services in stock. Higher education and international higher education can thus be categorized as a service industry.

As higher education is categorized as a service industry the study of marketing international higher education thus falls into the field of services marketing. Study of services marketing was itself not distinguished as a separate subdiscipline of marketing in general until 1970s (Berry and Parasuraman 1993) and it was not until after 1986 that the study of services marketing truly flourished following the increasing importance of service industries in developed countries (Fisk et al. 1993). During this time in the 1980s and 1990s international higher education became one of the most prominent emerging service industries (Mazzarol 1998). Understanding the decision making processes of potential students is an integral part of effective communication and marketing of international higher education. As higher education has become an international commodity in the past decades research on the different aspects of the subject has become more widespread. Describing the purchase processes of international students is a consumer behavior issue and more specifically a decision making issue.

3.2 Decision making processes of international students

Deciding to study abroad is often one of the most important and expensive choices for students and their families to undertake (Mazzarol 1998) and the more expensive a choice is the more complex the buying process (Assael 1995, 19). Chen (2007) introduced a three-stage synthesis model for explaining international students' decision making process. The first stage, predisposition, comprises of assessing personal need and collecting information before committing to the apply process. The second stage is the selection stage where a student finds out institution specific information and commits to applying to one or more. Finally the third stage is where the final decision is made based on alternatives. (Chen 2007). The problem with Chen's model is over simplifying the process. The complexity of decision making process makes it difficult to analyze and structure the underlying processes in a coherent manner. Rigid choice making models that could be used in a simple buying processes simply will not fit the decision making processes of international students.

Maringe and Carter (2007) also call attention to the fact that the complex and multistage process of choosing foreign higher education can be defined as both the process and the outcome of the process because the choice can be concretized at any point of the choice making process rather than as a final outcome of a set process. Additionally international education services are an unusual type of service because of the amount of auxiliary services that are bound to the core service. These host city and host country specific auxiliary services linked to the evaluation of education service can include aspects such as “safety, security, cultural activities, international background, university environment, quality of life, and visa and entry requirements”. (Cubillo et al. 2006). There have been various different models and studies offered to explain the decision making processes of international students. The next section introduces the widely used neo-classical push-pull model followed by the introduction the theoretical framework of the thesis, a push-pull model by Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño.

3.2.1 Push-pull model

Most of the research on international students’ decision making utilizes some form of the push-pull model, a neo-classical migration theory (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Altbach 1998; Mazzarol 1998; McMahon 1992). The push-pull model was originally introduced to explain migration universally and Lee (1966) was the first to refine the push-pull model into its typical interpretation: having both negative and positive factors on push and pull sides as well as recognizing “intervening obstacles” between the origin and destination including political, social, environmental, cultural and economic factors. One of the first researchers to utilize the model specifically for international student mobility was McMahon (1992) who studied mobility of international students from 18 developing Third World countries to the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The model presented push factors as originating country based, principally negative, issues that generated the desire to study abroad and pull factors as destination country based positive issues that made the United States more desirable in relation to other host countries (McMahon 1992). Philip G. Altbach (1998, 240) presented a push-pull model (Figure 3) of international mobility that resembled that of McMahon in that the push factors remained mainly negative sociopolitical and economic while pull factors

were mainly positive socioeconomic as well as political issues. The principal difference between the two was that Altbach added more emphasis on the educational experience in the host country with “availability of advanced research facilities” as well as non-educational lifestyle issues with “international life experience”.

Figure 3, Altbach 1998, 240

Factors Affecting the Decision to Study Abroad by Third World Students

Home Country (Push Factors)

1. Availability of scholarships for study abroad
2. Poor-quality educational facilities
3. Lack of research facilities
4. Lack of appropriate educational facilities and/or failure to gain admission to local institution(s)
5. Politically uncongenial situation
6. Enhanced value (in the marketplace) of a foreign degree
7. Discrimination against minorities
8. Recognition of inadequacy of existing forms of traditional education

Host Country (Pull Factors)

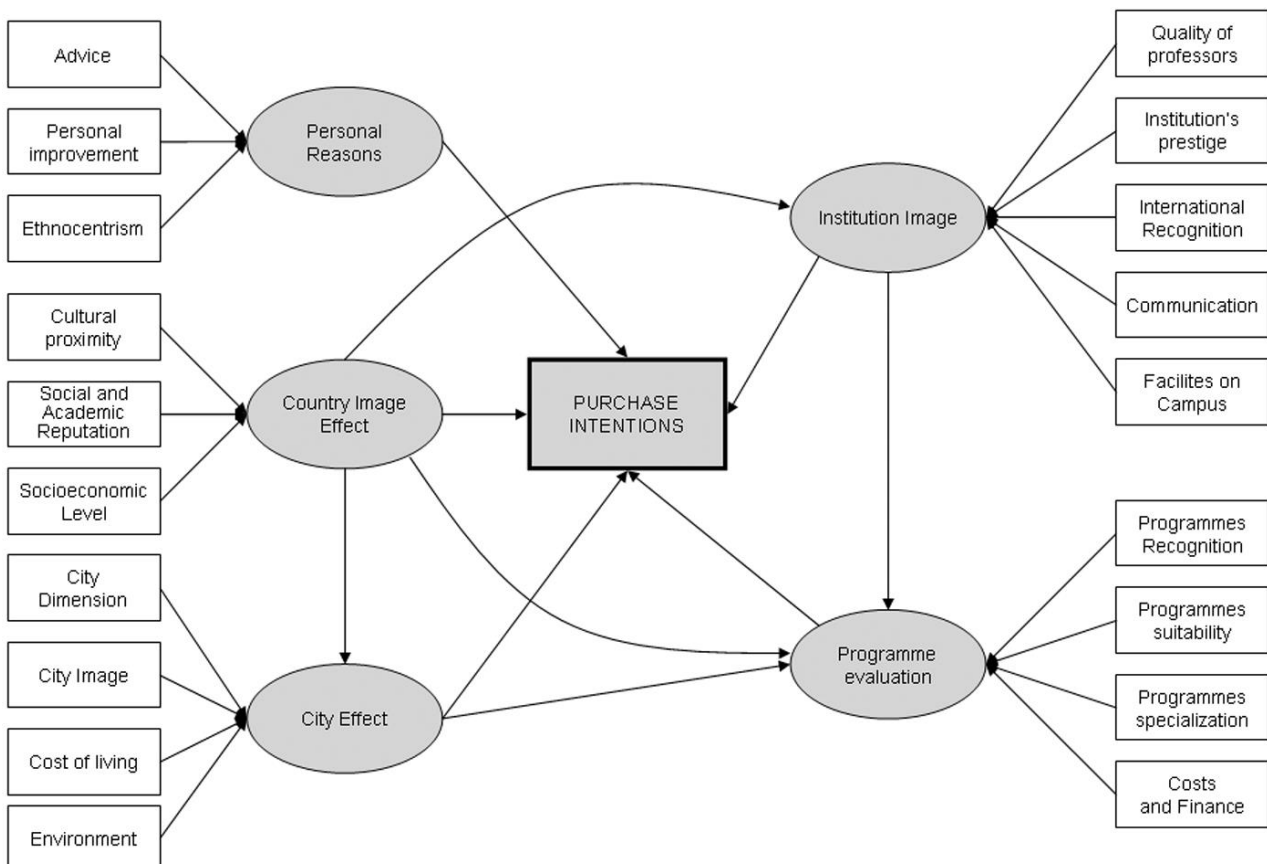
1. Availability of scholarships to international students
2. Good-quality education
3. Availability of advanced research facilities
4. Availability of appropriate educational facilities with likely offer of admission
5. Congenial political situation
6. Congenial socioeconomic and political environment
7. Opportunity for general international life experience

While valuable in establishing parameters for study of decision making in choosing higher education destinations, these basic push-models by McMahon and Altbach are too simplistic in the current complex higher education markets. They work best in a situations where the international mobility occurs from developing to a developed country but this is no longer the primary driver in internationalization of higher education. (Cubillo et al. 2006; OECD 2012). Additionally China and India along with other strong supply countries of international students have begun upgrading the supply side of higher education internally, affecting the push factors of these traditional supply countries of international higher education (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002). Cubillo et al. (2006) attempt bridge this gap with their theoretical model which will also serve as the theoretical framework for the thesis.

3.2.2 Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño: A model of international students' preferences

Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño (2006) criticize existing marketing research on international education being too narrow and simplistic by widely disregarding the influence of country on the decision making process. To tackle this problem they propose a theoretical model (Figure 4) to fill this the gap in existing research in a more comprehensive manner. The paper draws on existing literature to construct the model which is not tested but merely offered as a framework for future research. The model uses purchase intention as independent variable defined by four main factors: personal reasons, country image effect, institution image, and programme evaluation. Country image effect is further divided into country image and city image. Figure 5 presents the full list of factors and variables identified in the decision making process in previous research.

Figure 4, A model of international students' preferences (Cubillo et al. 2006)



Personal reasons is composed of three subcategories: personal improvement, advice and ethnocentrism. Personal improvement entails that a student is not purchasing the degree

per se but rather the benefits the degree can create, such as improved employment opportunities, better quality of life or prestige. Furthermore personal reasons include international aspects like language and networking opportunities, as well as advice from family, friends and professors. Ethnocentrism on the other hand is regarded as a solely negative effect on the decision to study abroad.

Figure 5, Main factors and variables identified in the choice process (Cubillo et al. 2006)

Factor	Items	
Personal reasons	Personal improvement	Enhance career prospects Future job prospects Future earnings prospects Higher status Live in a different culture Make international contacts Improve language skills
	Advice	Family recommendation Friend's recommendation Professor's recommendation
Country image effect	Country image	Cultural distance Social reputation Academic reputation Development level Cost of living Immigration procedures Opportunity of working during the course Time to get the degree
	City image	City dimension Cost of living Linguistic proximity or distance Safety and security Social facilities International environment University environment
Institution image	Corporate image	Institution prestige Ranking position Brand reputation Academic reputation Researcher reputation Quality reputation
	Faculty	Expertise of teaching staff Professional experience of teaching staff
	Facilities	Campus atmosphere Social life at university Safety and security Library facilities Availability of computers Availability of quiet areas Availability of areas for self-study
Programme evaluation		Sport facilities International recognition Programme suitability Programmes specialization Quality programmes Recognition by future employers Total cost and finance

Country image effect can potentially have a great impact on both the purchase intention and quality perception in the decision making process. The model divides country image effect further into country image and city image. Country image refers to more general socioeconomic issues, cultural proximity and academic reputation of a country as perceived by the potential student whereas city image includes more environmental factors as it represents the site where the service will be produced and consumed. Still, there is a level of overlapping between country and city image as Cubillo et al. point out that that perceptions about the city will also influence the country image. Furthermore country image can affect the institution image as perceived prestigious quality of higher education in a country tends to be generalized for higher education institutions of the country in general.

Institution image is formed by word of mouth, past experience, and marketing communications. The components in constructing institution image are both academic and social in nature and are associated with institutional image, faculty, and facilities of the institution. Reputation and quality of the higher education institution as well as quality of education staff and institutional prestige are clearly academic issues. Emphasis on facilities is more divided between social aspects like the school and its surroundings, in addition to social facilities and academic facilities such as library and self-study areas.

Finally program evaluation reflects the suitability of the study program for the potential student. Issues affecting the evaluation are selection, quality, and availability of courses, international recognition of the degree by potential employers, and financial factors like total cost of the program and availability of financial assistance.

From the theoretical framework Cubillo et al. deduce the following research propositions:

H1. Personal reasons, advice from family members, friends and teacher positively influence the decision to study abroad.

H2. Ethnocentrism negatively influences the decision to study abroad.

H3. Country image has a direct and positive relationship with the purchase intention.

H4. Country image positively affects programme evaluation.

H5. Country image positively affects institution image.

H6. Country image positively affects city image.

H7. City of destination plays an important role in the configuration of the purchase intention.

H9. The institution's image positively influences the evaluation of the programme to be studied.

The model by Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño will serve as the theoretical framework for the thesis. The framework suits the study particularly well because it does not force the decision making process in a particular order or give certain aspects more weight than others but rather considers the process as a fluid arrangement that can have varying levels of emphasis on different aspects depending on the individual making the choice. Compared to majority of push-pull models the addition of country affect and the inclusion of family, friends, and teachers is similarly fitting addition for the framework of the thesis. The framework does omit the different sources used to gather information other than people close to the decision maker. This is something that will be considered in the thesis regardless of its absence in the model framework. Cubillo et al. implore using their framework for the comparative study of decision making process of international students between the purchase intention and purchase decision. This research thus also attempts to fulfill this request and seek whether there is a difference between the purchase intention and actual purchase decision. The following section of the chapter will present studies on decision making processes of international students from China, South Korea, and towards Finland.

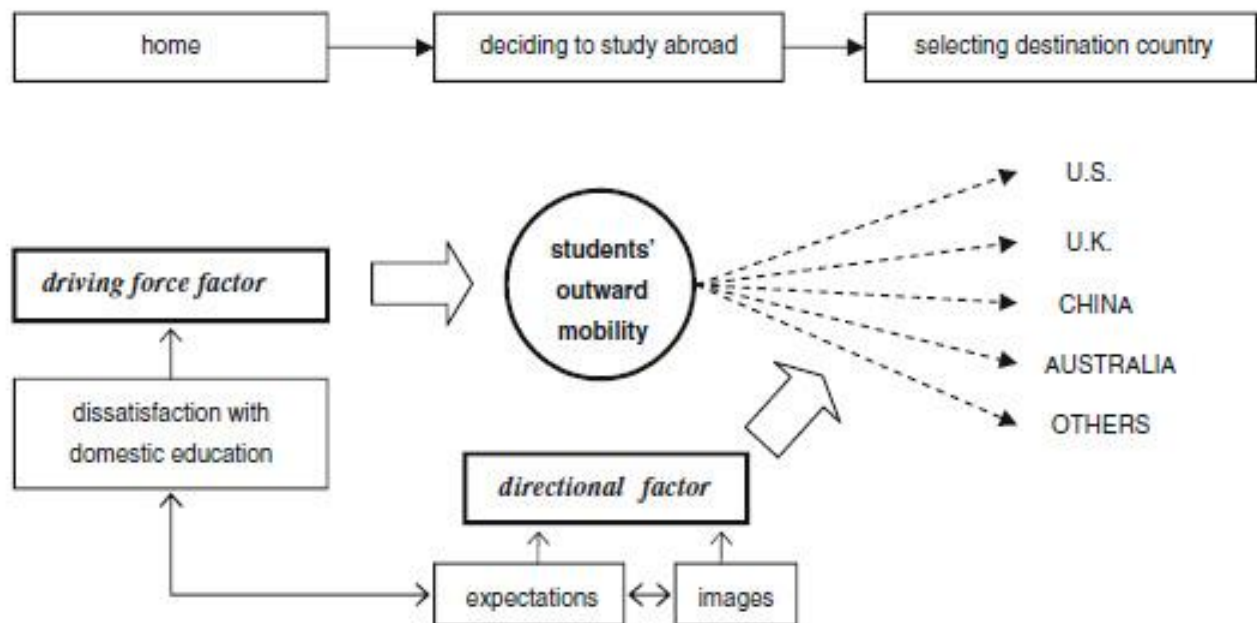
3.3 Decision making processes of internationally mobile South Korean students

3.3.1 Park: Analysis of Korean students' international mobility by 2-D model

Park (2008) examines the decision making process behind internationally mobile South Korean students in a two levelled 2-D model (Figure 6) that can also be categorized as a push-pull model even if the author does not herself refer to it as such. The first D represents "driving force factor", a push factor that stems from "internal, domestic and home components" that are characteristically diverse and driven by "personal and situational reasons" of the student. The second D of the model stands for "directional force factor"

referring to the images and expectations of foreign study destinations which direct students to particular countries.

Figure 6, 2-D model: driving force factor and directional factor (Park 2008)

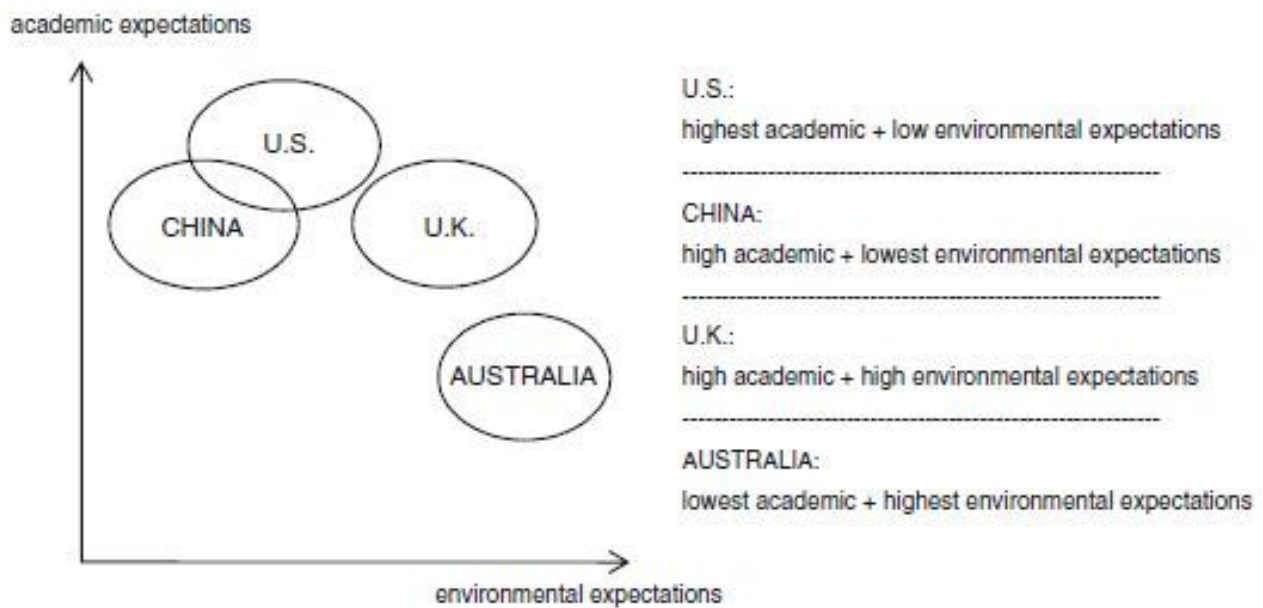


The study examines the differences in decision making process for the four most popular study abroad destinations of South Koreans: the United States, the United Kingdom, China and Australia. The study was conducted with high schools students of diverse socio-economic and academic backgrounds from Seoul based schools. Park declares that the dominant factor in creation of the need or desire to study abroad is dissatisfaction with domestic higher education as perceived by South Korean students. This hypothesis is supported by the study by a clear correlation between dissatisfaction and desire to study abroad. The causality however was not clear; were the students that were disappointed in South Korean higher education more prone to wanting to study abroad, or were the students who wanted to study abroad more prone to being critical towards South Korean higher education. Thus the main outcome of the study is recognition of patterns in the students' decision making processes choosing the country to study in in terms of expectations towards a study destination.

Park identifies two distinct umbrella terms for the directional force factors recognized in the study: academic expectations and environmental expectations. Academic expectations like

“curriculum excellence”, “high reputation of school”, and “high job opportunity after graduation” were clearly the dominant regarding the United States, the United Kingdom or China. Conversely environmental reasons, like “exiting place to live”, “safe environment”, “comfortable climate and surroundings” and “pleasant campus environment” were more associated to Australia. The four study destinations can be placed on a two-dimensional map (Figure 7) to illustrate this.

Figure 7, Comparison of academic and environmental expectations in four countries (Park 2008)



The United States and Australia represent the two extremes while China and the United Kingdom rank high in academic expectations but differ greatly of environmental expectations. United Kingdom can be appears to be the preferred choice for students who also have high environmental expectations while those favoring China would place more importance on low cost of living and geographic proximity in comparison. Regardless of the study destination “improving second language proficiency” and “creative learning environment” were ranked high in expectations towards the country. Park concludes that higher education institutions from the four countries can utilize this information by focusing marketing efforts to emphasize the directional force factors that South Korean students do not have strong images of, or those that are misguided. It can also be presumed that such information could also be used to better target marketing towards more probable segments of potential students.

3.3.2 Seo and Koro-Ljungberg: From Confucianism to Western Educational Values

Seo and Ljungberg (2005) conducted a hermeneutical study concentrating on the experiences of older South Korean graduate students studying in higher education institutions in the United States. While the study focuses on understanding the experiences resulting from moving from a Confucian society to a western one in context of higher education it does offer some insight into expectations the students have placed on studying abroad as well as some of the adjustment difficulties abroad. Seo and Koro-Ljungberg assert that the decision to study abroad is guided by the students' "personal and social values" and "image of successful life in the home country". The main expected benefits from completing a graduate degree abroad were better and higher job opportunities in South Korea as well as better quality of life in general. Their study thus suggests that most internationally mobile graduate students from South Korea plan to return to their home country after completing their studies.

The adjustment difficulties highlighted in the study occurred after moving abroad but they can also be expected to reflect the anxieties of those South Korean students still in the process of choosing a study abroad destination as family, friends and colleagues are one likely source of information for the process. According to the authors the major difficulties studying in a different culture were communication problems, financial uncertainty and age-related problems. Communication problems were caused by limited language skills but also cultural issues like required active participation in classroom discussion and social isolation. Difficulties in getting work, internships or financial assistance were the leading causes of financial insecurity. The age-related issues were profoundly tied to the culture of the students' motherland. The main difficulties were pressure to get married within the "marriageable age" which in South Korea is mid-20s to early 30s and supporting elder relatives which can also cause financial uncertainty. The study highlights important issues that are not directly linked to attracting foreign students but have more to do with supporting them in difficulties that arise from moving into a vastly different culture. By better understanding the embedded cultural identity and heritage of international students and utilizing that knowledge higher education institutions can improve the experiences and quality of education for their international student body.

3.4 Decision making processes of internationally mobile Chinese students

3.4.1 Bodycott: Choosing a higher education study abroad destination: What mainland Chinese parents and students rate as important

The study by Bodycott (2009) while focused on mainland China is also interesting in its possible application to South Korea as it examines the parent-child relationship in Confucian society inside the decision making process of potential international students. Bodycott is also working within the push-pull methodology to study the issues not only potential international students from mainland China but also their parents rated the most important in the decision making process. Bodycott criticizes previous study for neglecting the role of parents of internationally mobile students from Confucian societies where their role is traditionally significant. The study focuses on identifying push factors, information sources, pull factors most important to students' and their parents, as well as how the two groups' answers differ.

The motivation behind the desire to study abroad displayed some differences between the two groups. The students clearly held higher level of education abroad as the most important factor followed by international experiences and improved employment opportunities. From the parents point of view lack of study places in China was the most important factor along with improved employment opportunities and immigration prospects. There was a particularly large discrepancy between the parties in two items: international experience and immigration prospects. Both were ranked as one of the most important motivations for one party and the least important to the other.

For information sources both groups rated educational fairs as the most important factors. Interestingly parents rated university representatives, often encountered at the fairs, significantly more important information sources than their children. Bodycott explains this is caused by the fact that while educational fairs or exhibitions on international higher education are frequently organized by private and public institutions in China, these fairs are typically attended by parents and relatives rather than the potential international students themselves. Thus the students might not necessarily even meet the representatives in

person. Family and friends was given great significance in both groups as to be expected in a Confucian culture. Internet was more significant to students but for both groups it ranked clearly above the traditional marketing channels.

Out of the three subjects studied the attraction, or pull, factors had the most variation between the two groups. The students emphasized international education experience, living environments, social aspects and English-speaking environment, while the parents were concerned with more practical issues like financial matters, proximity to home, safety, reputation of the higher education institution and employment prospects following graduation. Both parties also raised range of programs and friends or relatives living in the area as important factors.

Bodycott concludes that the parent-child relationship can play a significant role in the decision making processes of potential internationally mobile Chinese students and marketers of foreign higher education institutions would benefit from understanding the significance of cultural traditions like parental influence in the process.

3.5. Decision making processes of international students in Finland

Because the history of international student mobility in Finland is relatively short and based on student exchanges rather than full degree studies, the amount of research on the topic is scarce, focused largely on student exchange and descriptive rather than inspective. (Niemi 2008, 12; Kinnunen 2003, 7). The fundamental problem in research on international student mobility towards Finland from the perspective of higher education marketing is that it is largely descriptive in nature and focuses more on how international students consider living and studying in Finland than on the issues that made the students choose Finland. It is true that these issues do play a part in the process of services marketing in the review of purchase decision. Furthermore they might be crucial in terms influencing prospecting international students through word of mouth and recommendations. Yet these issues are only a part of the entire decision making process and thus research focusing directly on the decision making processes is required to better respond the increasing

competition among higher education providers. In recent years there has been some research of international student mobility in Finland focusing on degree students and their decision making process: Shumilova et al. 2012; Koivisto and Juusola 2008; Niemelä 2008; Kinnunen 2003. Next these three studies will be discussed in more detail. Though considerably more comprehensive than most Finnish studies on international students' decision making, these studies are limited on their emphasis on the pull side of the process.

3.5.1 Kinnunen: “If I can find a good job after graduation, I may stay”

The research paper by Kinnunen (2003) explores international student mobility towards Finland. The research was conducted by having 873 students from Finnish higher education participate in a questionnaire. The main focus of the paper is on studying, living and working in the Finnish society as well as future plans of current international students. While these issues are not relevant to this thesis, the study also has more applicable sections regarding the decision making rationale behind choosing Finland as the foreign study destination as well as choosing higher education institution to study in. The two issues were addressed separately in terms that suggest the author makes the assumption that the choice of country and school are done separately with the latter choice following the former.

Kinnunen presents that the most significant reasons for a decision to study in Finland were largely academic and career centric but importance of social and financial factors was also evident. Quality of education and positive career development were regarded very important as were experiencing a foreign country and lack of tuition fees to a slightly lesser extent. Asian and African student considered academic reasons more important than other nationalities. While a quarter of those interviewed had spouses in Finland this was not deemed as an important deciding factor. The study also reveals that before beginning their degree studies in Finland, nearly half of the participants of the survey had some previous experience of the country either from travel, period of study or work. Some had originally become exchange students to Finland due to positive travel experience before deciding to pursue degree studies in a Finnish higher education institution. Still less than one third of the respondents considered previous experience as an important deciding factor. Kinnunen

contemplates that previous experience of Finland was a more significant cause of moving to Finland in the 1990s and that it was not a significant motive in the survey. Reputation of Finland was generally not considered a significant reason for moving as was not working in Finland after studies. However, employment in Finland had become a more enticing possibility as a cause of studying in the country for some respondents. Significant portion of the respondent were willing to stay in Finland if they found a satisfying job.

As for choosing the higher education institution to study in, Kinnunen states the respondents overwhelmingly considered the possibility to choose a special field of study to be the most important deciding factor. Possibility to study in English was also clearly accentuated and more so among students from universities of applied sciences. Students from universities of applied sciences also considered better employment opportunities as highly important unlike university students. The reputation of the higher education institution along with student benefits and services were considered relatively significant. Easy admission, supplementing previous studies, location of school facilities, and learning Finnish or Swedish languages were not rated significant.

3.5.2 Niemelä: International degree students in Finnish universities

In her study Niemelä (2008) focuses on describing the international degree students in Finnish universities by examining the decision making process on choosing Finland, their adjustment to studying in Finland and what their future plans are. The study was conducted by surveying 952 international students and interviewing eight. Niemelä reports that moving to Finland because of higher education studies was the primary reason for 68 percent of the respondents. A significant part of these international degree students had thus moved to the country for reasons other than studying, becoming students only after migrating. At 84 percent Asian students were significantly more likely to move primarily for studying. There also proved to be differences dependent on the fields of study. Under half of humanities students moved to Finland primarily to study compared to nearly 80 percent of those studying agriculture and forestry, technical sciences or fine arts. Male students had also moved to Finland principally for studying more often than female students.

When presenting the analysis on the reasons for moving to Finland Niemelä separates those that moved primarily to study from those that did not. Those moving to Finland primarily as students rated quality of education, absence of tuition fees, experiencing a foreign country and career development the most important. Nearly all rated quality of education and lack of tuition fees at least fairly important. High standard of living, plans to work in Finland, learning a foreign language and previous knowledge of Finland were also evaluated as fairly important. Social reasons were not significant reasons for the majority of the group. For students that moved to Finland primarily for reasons other than higher education, family reasons were clearly rated the most significant with 79 percent rating them very important. Experiencing a foreign country, lack of tuition fees, high standard of living, previous knowledge of Finland, job offer and social reasons were rated important but to a clearly lesser extent than family reasons. A portion of the group stated troubles in home country as a motivation to move to Finland making this the only distinct push factor stated among the motivations. Nearly half of the respondents reported previous experience of Finland, having visited the country at least once. The most common reasons for previously travelling to Finland were vacation and visiting friends and family, and exchange semester in university. Other less common reason included work, other education related trips, exchange high school semester and living in Finland as a child.

Niemelä also surveyed the choice of higher education institution as a separate issue. The respondents clearly rated possibility to study a special field of study that is of personal interest as the most important deciding factor. Nearly as significant were possibility to complement/continue studies, possibility to study in English and good reputation of the university. Other clearly significant factors included quality of student services and benefits, information available on the university and employment opportunities abroad after studies. Employment opportunities in Finland were considered less important though still relatively significant. Location of the university, familiar alumni and current students from the university, and previous experience of the university were rated somewhat important issues in the decision making process.

As for information sources used in gathering information, university websites were indicated as the most important source. Nearly all respondent utilized institution websites and 72 percent rated them as very important. University faculty and student services were regarded as very important or fairly important by 75 percent of the sample. Finally friends and relatives

were living in Finland or home country were rated at least fairly important by about half of the respondents. Other sources were considered relatively insignificant. The quality and sufficiency of the information regarding chosen university was deemed satisfactory by 57 percent while the rest of the respondents felt there was either lack of information, that the information was not accurate or both. Degree and study structures as well as the amount of information in English were the largest problems. The perceived difficulties in information gathering related more in the quantity rather than quality of the available information.

3.5.3 Koivisto and Juusola: “We need more English information about our study, life in Finland and this country”

The research by Koivisto and Juusola (2008) is also largely focused on international degree students' integration and experiences in Finland and Finnish higher education but there is a section of the study investigating the reasons of choosing a Finnish higher education institution. The study was conducted on degree students from Finnish universities of applied sciences by surveying 1,157 students.

The study presents that the motives for moving to Finland for the surveyed students were primarily academic in nature. The main reasons being quality of education, experiencing a foreign country, completing a degree and possibility to study without tuition fees. Desire to work in Finland, high standard of living, family ties and learning a foreign language were also considered fairly important reasons for moving. Nearly all Asian students rated completing a degree and quality of education as very important reasons. Absence of tuition fees was also considered at least fairly important by nearly all Asian students. Family ties were a less important motive for students from Asia the rest of the sample.

Koivisto and Juusola also separated choice of higher education institution from choice of country. By far the most significant factors affecting choice of school were personally interesting study program or degree and possibility to study in English. They were deemed important by four out of five students. Quality of education was also a deciding factor for majority of respondents as was possibility to study without paying tuition. Half of the students

indicated good reputation of universities of applied sciences as an important factor. Personal recommendations, proximity to working life, webpages and marketing communication, and good location influenced the decision making processes of one third of the respondents.

3.5.4 Shumilova, Cai and Pekkola: Employability of International Graduates

Educated in Finnish Higher Education Institutions

The survey by Shumilova et al. (2012) is a result of the VALOA-project study on international graduate employability. Although the focus of the survey is on post-graduation employability there is a section applicable to international student decision making. In the description of the survey data the authors examine the respondents' motivations for studying in Finland. The examination on motivations is focused exclusively the pull side. The study was conducted by surveying 363 international students from 15 higher education institutions and complimenting the survey with interviews of ten international students from the sample. Shumilova et al. identify the main reasons for international students choosing Finland as their higher education destination as: tuition free education, possibility to study in English, a chance to improve employability, a chance to explore a foreign country, reputation of higher education institutions and reputation of Finland as a place to live. Family reasons, personal recommendations and reputation of Finnish industry were also somewhat common motivators. The authors also report that a significant part of respondents had been living in Finland for more than six months before beginning their studies. Over one third had lived in Finland over a year before undertaking studies. This suggests that for a significant portion of the sample there might have been other reasons than higher education for moving to Finland.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the reasoning behind the methodological choices made for the study is described. First the research method is presented followed by an examination of the chosen data collection method of semi-structured interviews. Next the selection of interviewees, framework for the interviews, and the execution of the interviews are defined. Finally the analysis of the interview data is described followed by portrayal of validity, reliability and quality of the data.

4.1 Research method

The empirical part of this study was conducted in China and South Korea using a qualitative approach by interviewing potential international students using a semi-structured method. Qualitative research aspires to represent real life phenomena by describing the researched subject holistically (Hirsjärvi et al 2010, 161). Qualitative research is often used to discover unexpected occurrences rather than testing hypotheses and it favors people as the instrument of gathering information (Hirsjärvi et al 2010, 164). If the research topic is complex and difficult to measure the topic can be better understood by interviewing people. Interviews may also introduce issues that the researcher would not otherwise realize to explore and it is thus possible to direct the data collection within the interview (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 34-35).

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Unlike a structured interview the semi-structured interview does not usually have a formalized limited set of questions that needs to be followed rigorously. Instead semi-structured interviews usually have framework of questions to be discussed and give the interviewees more freedom to converse on topics they consider important. Interview

question framework can help researchers focus an interview on the topics at hand without constraining them to a particular format. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to express his or her own interpretations and viewpoints of the discussed theme more comprehensively. Additionally it gives the interviewer the ability to follow topical trajectories in the conversation even if they stray from the themes. This can enable the researcher to recognize common themes and features from the interview data even if they do not originate from the original themes. (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 34-35; 47-48. In an interview it is possible to emphasize the person as the subject of the research situation, making the interviewee an active knowledge creator. This gives the interviewed person the opportunity to bring out personally significant issues as freely as possible. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010, 205).

The level of standardization in semi-structured interviews can vary a great deal. The questions can be quite specific and clearly organized or they can be a simple list of discussion themes. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010, 47-48) call this latter type of semi-structured interview a “theme interview”. This study could thus be called semi-structured theme interview as there was no specific list of questions but rather a framework of themes that would be used as the topics of the interview discussion. This method was chosen to give the interviewees freedom to talk about the issues in their own terms without influencing their narrative by forcing them to a predetermined interview path.

With semi-structured interviews it is possible to explore these unforeseen topics that can rise out of the interviews (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010). This technique was thus the most suitable method considering the objective to record thick individual narratives from the potential students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the entire process of becoming an international degree student in the context of individual values, expectations and requirements of the interviewees. The semi-structured interview suited this study especially well because it is fairly difficult to predict all important topics before conducting the interviews.

4.3 Interview sample

When utilizing qualitative methods the researcher typically attains comprehensive information on the studied subject when research data is collected in natural and real situations. People are used as the research instrument in qualitative research which is why the sample for qualitative research needs to be carefully selected. The size of the sample is not important but rather the fact that the sample can give enough insight into the research subject. (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 58-60). While there is no definite ideal sample size for this type of qualitative study, the sample sizes often vary between single digits to up to twenty. This is largely due to the vast amount of data generated and the complexity of analyzing the data. For the data sample to be sufficiently significant I determined I would need to get at least five interviewees from both China and South Korea. Because of the possibility of cancelations and other complications I decided it would be best to schedule eight to ten interviews to both countries.

The sample for the interviews was contacted with identical invitations either by e-mail or through my personal and extended contacts in Shanghai and Seoul. The invitations for the interviews in Shanghai and Seoul can be found in Appendix 2 and 3 respectively. The invitation was designed as a short one page letter describing the purpose of the study, organizing parties, requirements for participants, length of the interviews, terms of confidentiality as well as locations and dates for the interviews. The invitations were handed out in person to some prospective interviewees through personal contacts in the region and sent as mass mail to certain student groups in the following universities: Tongji University in Shanghai and Korea Advanced Institute of Technology, Yonsei University, Seoul National University and Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul. The invitations for the interviews were thus sent to a much larger crowd than the actual sample would be. Additionally in Shanghai a part of the sample was acquired through a local agent. The final sample was then selected from those who replied to the invitation to best meet the purposes of the study. That is to say the interview sample was diverse in gender, age, and field of study as well as capable of conversing proficiently in English. Additionally the people in the sample were at different stages of the selection process and were looking for study abroad options in multiple different countries including those that were considering Finland and those who were not. From the group that responded to the invitations it was possible to gather the interview

sample without compromising the requirements or heterogeneity and diversity of the sample.

The interviewed potential international students were between the ages of 19 and 31. The participants ranged from recent entrants to higher education to upcoming bachelor's graduates. One participant, a Chinese male, had already graduated several years before and had considerable work experience. The interviewees represented a wide variety of study fields though technology or economics were the most common. Each participant was presently considering or was in the process of applying to study abroad on master's level degree program. Two interviewees had already decided to apply to Helsinki as their first choice for a foreign study destination. Three were seriously considering Finland while the rest had not considered studying in Finland as a viable option. The final sample consisted of four male and four female participants in China and three male and two female participants in South Korea.

The questions, or the thematic framework, for the interviews was constructed based on previous studies in the field, discussions with professionals in the field of tertiary education in addition to my own personal work and study experience in the region. The topics of the interviews ranged from personal background information and current status to motivation to study abroad, expectations and requirements towards the place of study as well as the participants' perception of Finland and other prospective destinations. The framework for the interview can be found in Appendix 3. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author and by Tutkimustieto Oy.

Semi-structured interviews can be carried out individually or in group settings such as focus groups. There were two main reasons to complete the interviews for this study individually rather than in groups. First the group setting could produce difficulties with narration construction and time. It could significantly complicate the construction of individual narratives from the interviews and there might not be enough time for all the participants to speak as much as they would like to. Secondly both China and South Korea are countries with highly hierarchical cultures where the Confucian traditions are still heavily present (Graham and Lam 2003). Cultural factors could thus affect a group dynamics in focus group interview by, for example, making the participants unable of voicing their opinions openly for

the fear of losing face or disrespecting elders by disagreeing with their opinions. In a group discussion this can easily lead to the eldest of the group to dominate the discussion inhibiting divergent opinions to be heard. These risks could be reduced by dividing focus groups by age or study experience but this measure could also prove to be insufficient as issues such as place of birth, family history or social status, that are very difficult for an outsider to recognize, can also affect the group dynamics.

The interview process, as anticipated, was not without its problems. The time allotted in Shanghai was reduced from five days to only three because enforced flight rescheduling due to the Expo 2010 Shanghai China closing week rush. The interviews had to be rescheduled and in the end eight interviews were conducted in Shanghai. One interview recording in Shanghai was lost due to a technical malfunction. As the notes taken from the interviews were minimal this interview was removed from the sample. In Seoul there were similarly difficulties with the interviews as the time of the interviews was right in the middle of university midterms. This led to cancellations and rescheduling of interviews and in the end I was able to conduct only five interviews in Seoul. Still the total of 13 interviews was an adequate sample. The length of the interviews ranged from 38 minutes to 2 hours 14 minutes with most lasting between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. The rather large fluctuation in interview duration was caused by the open-endedness of the interviews.

4.4 Analysis of the data

The analysis of the interview data was conducted through the analytical framework of Cubillo et al. (2006) as presented earlier in chapter three and by utilizing phenomenological approach. Phenomenology as a methodology in consumer research is often used in order to develop an understanding of complex issues that might not be easily conveyed in interviews (Goulding 2005). This is why the approach suited the study especially well even if phenomenological approach traditionally does not utilize preconceived theoretical frameworks as this research does. Phenomenological interpretation of the data focuses on the narratives, finding significant statements and giving them meanings. (Goulding 2005) Typically this generated data is then categorized but in this research the categories are pre-

set and the most meaningful input of the phenomenological interpretation comes in assessing the weight and importance of these categorized items. While interview and post-interview notes were made during the interview process, the interviews were not further analyzed before being transcribed after the interview expeditions. After the transcription was completed the issues affecting the decision making processes of potential students were then classified and analyzed using the categories presented in Figure 4.

4.5 Validity, reliability and quality of the data

The concepts of validity and reliability originate from quantitative research. Validity of data refers to the capability of the research data to accurately describe the phenomenon examined. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010, 231-232). The problems with validity of data can originate from imprecision at data level or interpretation level. Inconsistency between reality and the recorded causes a validity issue on data level whereas discrepancy between the examined phenomenon and the interpretation of the researcher cause a validity issue on interpretation level. (Gobo 2008, 266). Reliability of data is considered to be achieved if the findings of the study can be repeated at a different time or by different methodology (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 186).

Both validity and reliability of data can be difficult to demonstrate in qualitative research due to their origin of quantitative research. Still it can be reasoned that the validity and reliability of this study can be established. The validity of the data provided by the interviewees can be presumed to be satisfactory following the previously described carefully planned method in which the sample was chosen and the fact that there were no signs that would have suggested otherwise during the interviews. The validity of the interpretations of the researcher can be claimed satisfactory through the thorough familiarization with the topic and previous research in the field as demonstrated in the previous chapters. The reliability of the data can be deduced from the fact that the findings of the study largely supported previous studies and perhaps more importantly from the fact that even the issues that differentiated from existing research could be reasonably and logically explained by the more specified sample used in the study.

Another way to evaluate the validity of interviews is to look for a saturation point of data. This is a point after which additional interviews do not yield the study any significant new information (Eskola and Suoranta 1998, 214). While perhaps not the best indicator of validity in this type of research the saturation point did become apparent with many topics as the answers began to reiterate. Naturally there were topics, especially those concerning the personal lives of the interviewees, that did not reach a saturation point but this was neither expected nor sought after.

Elwood and Martin (2000) discuss how the effects of physical location of interviews can affect discussion. They point out that this is an issue that can easily be overlooked in both planning and in the post-processing of data. To reduce the possibility of physical context of the research affecting the results the setting for the interviews was made as homogenous as possible. Given that the interviews were done in two countries naturally made it impossible to replicate the conditions perfectly but the locations were similar enough to claim that the physical environment did not cause discrepancy in the interviews.

Because the purpose of semi-structured interviews is to generate rich and thick narrative, the complexity and accurateness of the interviews could be threatened by the use of nonnative language for both the interviewees and the interviewer to conduct the interviews. All of the interviews were conducted in English as none of the interviewees possessed Finnish skills nor I Mandarin or Korean skills of an adequate level. However I can confidently claim that using a nonnative language for both the interviewees and interviewer did not cause any problems as the language skills of each party were provably sufficient for academic studies in English. Because of the small sample size of the interviewees, the findings of the study cannot be generalized nor is it the objective in this type of study. Still the findings of the study can provide insight in to decision making processes and expectations and requirements held by potential international students from China and South Korea.

5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the main findings of the empirical study are introduced and analyzed. In the following pages the findings of the research will be presented by breaking them down to the factors and items presented in the theoretical framework of Cubillo et al. (2006) as previously stated in chapter three. When identified, the differences between Chinese and South Korean students will be addressed as will the possible differences between students considering Finland as higher education destination and those only considering other countries. The excerpts from the interviews presented in the chapter are presented verbatim, with no grammatical corrections.

5.1 Personal reasons

There were no distinguishable differences in regards to personal reasons affecting the purchase decision or the roles and advisors in the process when it came to students considering Finland as compared to other countries as potential destination. The interviews in both China and South Korea also yielded very similar results with only minor differences that are discussed in more detail in the following sections. The role of ethnocentrism is not discussed in more detail as it proved to be a non-factor for the entire sample. This was to be expected to some extent as the interviewed student were after all seriously considering studies abroad. Still it was somewhat surprising that not one of the potential students expressed any reservations or anxieties regarding studying abroad in culturally different society. In fact there seemed to be much more of a predisposition towards xenocentrism than ethnocentrism. That is to say the culture of the home country was more likely to be a positive than negative push factor as opposed to the hypothesis H2 of Cubillo et al (2006). This factor is also related to cultural proximity which will be discussed later in the chapter. Naturally the chosen sample for the study affected the insignificance of ethnocentrism. After all there were no participants who were not already considering studying abroad.

5.1.1 Advice

While the role of information sources in the theoretical framework by Cubillo et al. was limited, in essence, to recommendations by family, friends and professors, it seems fitting that the role of advisors could include other sources like agencies, exhibitions and school websites as mentioned in several other studies. Thus the role of sources of advice is considered in this more comprehensive manner also as a source of information.

Three of the potential student interviewed in China were contacted through an agency that assist its customers in the application processes and serve as an information source. Naturally these participants all expressed their trust in these type of agencies and indicated trust in their services as advisors. One first year student in China also conveyed at least a possibility of utilizing said services while the remaining three indicated no such plans. In South Korea there was no mention of similar agencies having a role in the process. The role of exhibitions as an information source was brought up in previous studies as important especially in China, still none of the respondent in either country really exhibited any dependence on these international study fairs. In China the fairs were not really discussed at all and in South Korea two interviewees brought them up but indicated them to be thought of more for people going to study abroad for social and language learning reasons or for exchange type periods of study not for degree studies. Male student from South Korea on visiting an education fair:

“I don't know where the parents can find that complete information from that booth, it's too loud. Really confused to really stay and discuss about many other questions with the people from, let's say, Finnish education. I think American universities, they are mostly, they offer the English program to the parents, rather than their education. I think it might be useful for someone who want to learn English in English-speaking countries. But it really depends on the program, I think this was mostly, yeah, it was like English programs.”

It should be noted that it was possible that the exhibitions did not come up in the interviews because they are more directed at the students' parent as indicated by Bodycott (2009) in regards to China. The situation is somewhat similar in South Korea as pointed out by the previous excerpt.

Given the common cultural background in Confucian tradition the role of the students' parents as advisors could have been expected to have been a significant. Though the role of parents was an important one as enablers in financial sense, their role as advisors seemed to be surprisingly insignificant. There were several participants who indicated their parents' role having been more significant on the decision making process regarding their selection of higher education institution in their home country. In the current process however their role both in China and South Korea seemed to be more of a supporter in a decision making process than that of an advisor. Female student in China on discussing foreign degree studies with her parents:

"Yeah, my family, well my parents, they're, when I talk to them about this, they actually have a hesitation I think. But they really respect me, I think, they still support me for whatever I want... Yeah, overall they're really, supporting me and my dad has always want me to get more, you know, like higher education."

Chinese male student talked about the role of his parents in the decision making process:

"Of course they support it. In the process I grew up, they always give me the right to make decisions for myself. And from the university to the programme, they just say it's up to yourself. If you think, if it's suitable for you, you can just choose it, and we will always support you."

Korean male student describes the role of his parents:

"It is just important to my parents if I can explain them why I go to this school, and why I have to spend this tuition fee to this course, and why I have to spend two or three years in that course."

The role of friends as an advisor seemed to be far greater than that of parents in both China and South Korea. This might be due to the fact that these friends often had personal experience of studying abroad in general or in the possible destination country or higher education institution. While most of the participants did not talk about their friends giving them specific advice in the selection process they did express talking to their foreign or domestic friends about studying abroad which can be considered indirectly affecting the

decision making process. The interviews seemed to indicate this. Korean male student talking about in getting information on Finnish higher education:

“The Finnish friend Suvi gives me some, school system, like the lectures or exams or the facilities in school, stuff like that. And the Korean friends who were in Lapland gives me some, gives me some information to get the visa or insurance.”

The role of professors as advisors seemed more important in South Korea than it did in China. Three of the four South Korean students mentioned to having professors advising them in some regarding studying abroad. The role of international faculty was also discussed by a South Korean male student:

“There are English teachers in SKKU and I'm quite close with them, so just, yeah, one of them just offered me to write a letter of recommendation if I needed, but I don't think he will step forward or anything. Maybe he can give me some advice or tips or information about a few universities, or how to prepare and stuff.”

In China however the role of faculty seemed much less important as only one female and one male student mentioned having been given advice by her professor and this was largely due to the fact that one was working on a project at the university for the professor in question and the other's professor was in charge of international affairs for the university. Though the professors were not identified as important advisors in China there might be demand for such a role. A second year student male student in China expressed his frustration about getting help with or information on foreign higher education from his professors:

“Yeah, it would be nice but, we don't really, we can't really, you know, see our teachers very often... And I don't really know, if I need this kind of information, who can I consult to. So I just find some information from the Internet. But, I don't really know which aspects should I look for.”

The internet, as to be expected from previous research, was an important source of information in the selection process as all participants talked about utilizing it in some form whether looking for information on countries, cities, higher education institutions, study

programs, immigration and education laws, cost of living or other related issues. Those just beginning their higher education were not as involved in the search for information as those already further in the process. As pointed out in the previous excerpt, there was a level of frustration on finding relevant information that became apparent in five of the interviews. These frustrations were either caused by difficulty of finding relevant information or by simply not being certain what information to even look for.

5.1.2 Personal improvement

Enhanced career prospects was clearly a tremendously important factor in the decision making process. It was also often talked about in conjunction with improved social and financial status indicating the perceived link between the factors by the participants. A Chinese male student on the effect of studying abroad from the perspective of employers:

“I think that's highly based on, depends on companies. Because, I think some domestic or state-owned company, they don't really care about that. But if you're applying for some foreign company, or some really, some who really focus on talent, so they will look at it. I think that depends a lot. And.. I think, besides the degree itself, I think the employers, they may think you have more experience, and you can, at least you have the ability to handle yourself, you know.”

The foreign degree studies were also usually seen as a continuation of domestic higher education in socioeconomic advancement. Female students in China talking about foreign degree studies as a step on moving up in societal sense and support from her parents:

“They always support me with, you know, go out to see the world outside. You know, move to Shanghai is an example of that, yeah. My family, in the northwest of China, it's, it has a pretty large gap between these two places. So, you know, moving forward.”

A female student from South Korea described how her pursuit in improving socioeconomic status through higher education caused separation from her family:

“Yeah, like I said, I’m already having a huge student loan, which means that my family really can’t support, with money things. So they wanted me to go to Kyungpook National University, which is, well, at least the best in Daegu. Yeah, because it’s a national university, so it’s a bit cheaper and I can just stay at home. But, maybe that’s why I, I rather wanted to get away from my family because I didn’t want them to shackle me down. I just wanted to do as I want, so, and I really hate it if money is the obstacle for my own good. Because, being poor is not my fault, so OK, you don’t have money but that doesn’t mean that you can tell me what to do, so, yeah, that’s why I just went for SKKU and Yonsei.”

Most interviewees did not consider continuing studies in their home country a viable option to studying abroad. It was generally thought that this would not improve employment possibilities dramatically as opposed to international degree would. Only one male student in China also considered the possibility on continuing to master’s studies in China an option to foreign degree studies. Also one female student in South Korea wanted to continue studies in South Korea after completing a degree abroad. The situation would likely have been different if the interviewed sample would have included students who were just entering higher education rather than those already studying in an higher education institution.

Living in an international culture and international contacts were a widely discussed topic in all interviews. While experiencing international culture clearly was an important factor it seemed to have less weight than socioeconomic improvement as it was discussed more in a manner of being an additional benefit to studying abroad rather than the definitive motive.

5.2 Country image effect

Country image effect was considered as a type of focal point of the framework of Cubillo et al. (2006) as it was expected to have an effect on city effect, institution image and program image as well as directly effecting purchase intention. This hypothesis did display support in the research to varying degrees. For one, institutions from traditionally strong international study destinations clearly benefitted from their country of origin. As for Finland however,

country image did not really have any effect unless some level of personal experience towards the country was present. Those not considering Finland as a viable option did not really have any coherent image of Finland as a provider of higher education. Finland itself was associated with positive images of clean nature, high technology and even high level of primary education by some but this still did not transfer to them considering Finland as a higher education destination.

The socioeconomic level was not directly discussed in any of the interviews which is why it is not further discussed here. Still, it should be noted though that there is a strong indication that the socioeconomic aspects did matter to the sample as a whole as all the potential countries discussed in the interviews could be considered as economically, technologically and socially advanced countries from North America, Central, North and West Europe, and Australia. Thus it can be argued that the importance of socioeconomic level is implied in the countries considered.

Security issues were brought up in context of country image and not with city or institution image as expressed in the framework by Cubillo et al. (2006). While high level of safety did not seem to register as particularly important factor but lack of security could prevent potential students from choosing a country. Female respondent from South Korea in regards to importance of safety being an issue:

“Well I didn't think about it at first, but now it seems important. Because I would live alone, yeah, so, yeah, so if I live alone I should feel safe. If I don't have a family there, yeah.”

Another female student from South Korea on security after studying in Finland as an exchange student:

“And I, what impressed me a lot was, Finnish people put a lot more, a lot of emphasis on trust, credit, that, yeah, you'll still be safe even though you walk in the middle of the night and, what was really surprising to me.”

The female respondents brought the issue up more. Three female participants brought the issue up, compared to just one male respondent.

The possibility to work during studies either off-semester or during semesters was considered important by seven of the interviewees. Three even rated the possibility very important as they expected having to work to manage total living costs. Chinese male student on working during studies.

“I think, financial-wise, I'd really to do some internship, because I'm willing to cover my expense. So, and I'm not, I don't know about the study program yet, so I don't know how it's gonna occupy my time, but generally I really want to do some internship outside of my study. And it's also about getting to know how people work in that country, and, you know.”

While the desire to work during studies mostly had a financial motivation, it was also mentioned as an instrument of creating connections which could be important after graduation.

5.2.1 Cultural proximity

The effect of cultural proximity on the purchase intention was evident though in a manner quite opposite to what the general consensus of research in the field. None of the interviewees expressed any desire to study abroad in culture that was similar to their home country. Rather it was expressed in some form by most respondents that they preferred to get to live or study in a vastly different culture. A female student from China:

“And I really like the independent sort of lifestyle. Abroad. And also the freedom, at least we can accept Facebook and Twitter, you know.”

This could be caused by the fact that the sample consisted of students primarily considering western education destinations. Had the sample included student primarily considering, for example, Asia there could have been opposite views on the issue.

5.2.2 Social and academic reputation

As with personal reasons both academic and social aspects of country reputation came up frequently in all the interviews though social aspects in country image effect were clearly not as important of a factor. The academic reputation was clearly discussed more frequently and usually before social reputation. Korean male student on image of academic reputation:

“In Korea, we consider USA has the best education in higher education level. And I personally partially agree with the idea. But when I learned how we can make these education different from the education which we have to spend big money, rather than the ideas and the knowledge, real knowledge the student can learn easily without any barriers. I, my idea and my perspective in education changed a lot in Finland.”

The previous quote also demonstrates how country image effect can have a profound effect on the higher education field of a country as a whole. The citation also displays how the student had his view changed by personally experiencing a foreign academic culture during his exchange semester in Finland. However without personal experience only the countries traditionally popular as international higher education destinations seemed to have this general image of quality in academic reputation.

The image of education culture can also be perceived as an academic reputation issue. The images and expectations towards foreign education culture came up in the interviews often even if the student did not have personal experience in the foreign academic teaching style. South Korean female student on her image on European education compared to South Korean:

“But I think the Europe education, it's different from Korea, and they use, I heard that they usually, they also took lecture lessons, but they have also, some, uh, intercommunication?”

The dissatisfaction in education culture of home country could also elevate the perceived image of foreign education cultures. Chinese female student on why she wanted to study in a western education culture:

“Well, I think overall that’s about a kind of freedom and independence. I think.. well, in China, the study or the education system is just a bit different, and I think the atmosphere is not open enough.”

As mentioned before, social reputation did not seem to have as much importance in regards to country image save from one male student. Male student from China on motivation for wanting to study in France:

“So I just want to put myself in an environment, it is a pure French environment, to practice my French, to contact with the French and study with them, play with them, to join their parties, their activities, to really understand their culture background. And it also makes sense for my later life.”

One reason the social aspects seemed to not come up as important as the academic aspects was perhaps indicated by a Chinese female student:

“I think, of course, because I think the education system and also the educating style, let’s say, is highly dependent on the cultural background of a certain country. So I think that affects a lot, how the society is. That affects the education itself. So for me it’s like a holistic thing. It’s not separated.”

It could thus be that the social and academic reputation are considered as an inseparable issues and considering the emphasis for majority of the sample seemed to be on academic goals it is only natural to talk about the issue through academic perspective.

5.3 City Image effect

Interestingly the only cities that came up in the interview in a manner that would affect the decision making process were mainly Central European ones. Even regards to the United States and the United Kingdom, there was no indication on specific cities having an effect in the process. Rather the decision would be based more on country, institutions and study

programs. The same was true with Finland. Even those who had previously studied in Finland did not indicate that choice of study destination in Finland would be affected by perceived advantages of one city compared to another. The only indication on city image possibly having an effect in relation to Finland was indicated in two interviews where it was stated that capital cities were considered having generally more international environment. Neither one of these Chinese students was considering Finland as a destination. Another Chinese male student who was considering Finland contemplated larger cities possibly having better employment opportunities during studies.

5.3.1 Cost of living and finance

The cost of living, as expected, was also a major talking point and clearly a significant deciding factor for all but one of the interviewees. The cost of living was also mostly associated with tuition fees and talked about in terms of general cost of living. This is understandable as from the international students' perspective the distribution of costs does not make much difference. The findings on cost of living in general will thus be discussed here and not separately with cost and finance under program evaluation section.

Majority of the sample were going to have their parents help finance the foreign degree studiers either partially or entirely. Only one potential male student from China and one female student from South Korea were going to fully finance their studies by themselves. The fact that the potential students were reliant on their parents help was clearly an issue that caused stress even if from a cultural perspective it was expected. South Korean male student:

“Because you really have the pressure that you, like, your parents have to support you for another two years, and then that's not a small money.”

Chinese male student expressed how the high cost of living might make him change his preferred study destination:

“When we Chinese thought about going abroad, the first thing we think of is the expenses. And just as I said, I come from a small city. If I go abroad, my parents will have, will still have a financial burden. And I have thought about this. So, maybe I won’t choose Paris, because it’s, the cost there is too high.”

One Chinese male student also expressed not being able to afford studying abroad without some type of scholarship or financial aid:

“It has been kind of my plan for a long time. So, my family is not that rich to just, whenever I wanna go abroad then I can go abroad. So it’s just a part of my plans, and before that I have to do a lot of, yeah, exams, like GMAT, something like that. But I just started my university so I haven’t get prepared for those kind of exams. So, just because of my family’s condition, if I go abroad for studying, my plan is to get some kind of scholarship, then I can go. If I don’t get a scholarship I (will) not go.”

Three other participants said they might not have the means to fund their studies abroad without a scholarship if they were required to pay high tuition fees.

Tuition fees, as expected, did come up as significant factor in choosing the potential destination of study abroad almost all of the interviews as they were often largest investment in the studies abroad. Conversely they could be considered as the largest saving in higher education costs, considering the possibility to study without tuition fees in some countries. After all both in China and South Korea there are considerable tuition fees in higher education. Due to their possibly significant part of the entire cost of living tuition fees could cause budgetary limitations to the selection of schools and countries or cities. A male student from China on why he was presently considering European countries as destination:

“Oh, yeah. I think, one of the most important is, I do like Europe, because on the one hand (--) culture, you know, everything. And, on the other hand you know, it’s about tuition fee. I think it’s more expensive to go abroad in America than Europe, to me. So, I just, I didn’t consider about America”

Because of the absence of tuition fees Finland was considered to have an edge over countries that did have tuition fees even if the general cost of living were considered higher than some other countries. This knowledge however was limited to only those interviewees who had already been contemplating Finland as a potential destination as the rest of the sample did not have knowledge of tuition free studies in Finland. Only two of the participants were aware of the possibility of having to pay tuition fees for certain degree studies as non-Schengen students in Finland even though the tuition fee trial period of 2010-2014 had already begun. South Korean female student on possible tuitions in Finland:

“So then I thought, yeah that sounds fine because I know that Finnish universities don't get tuition fees. But what I, concerned me was, what if they want money from non-EU citizens like me. And he wasn't sure about that either, because I already know that Denmark started, yeah, make, non-EU citizens pay, so I was kind of worried. And also, thing is, just, it's just my personal background, I already have a huge student loan for my university here, so I thought, if I have to study master's degree, then it would cost me a lot of money and time again. So I couldn't really decide, and I thought, if I should study master's in other countries, then it doesn't really have to be Finland, actually, because I can. Well, I just thought I prefer Germany, it's like, bigger cities and bigger.”

The possible introduction of tuition fees for non-Schengen students was explicitly considered a drawback but acceptable if the received benefits, primarily the quality of education, justify the cost. This included those student whom had not known of the possibility before the interviews.

However there was also reminder of the fact that traditional roles in internationalization of higher education no longer apply as both economic and academic positions have changed tremendously in the past two decades. Chinese female student compares living expenses in Shanghai and Finland:

“Although it's, it's quite expensive, but you know, in Shanghai it's not that cheap as well.”

5.3.2 Environment

City environment seemed to be largely based on country image as there were only two cases where a participant indicated environmental aspects of a specific city being important. Seven respondents did not really discuss environmental reasons at all and the rest of the sample used country environment image interchangeably for any city in the country. This was the case with Finland as well, even with those who had previous personal experience of the country. The environmental image of Finland was clearly a positive one of clean and beautiful nature but infrastructure and cities were hardly mentioned. A South Korean female explained how she ended up choosing Finland and Kuopio as her exchange student destination in her bachelor's studies:

“What made difference for me was, It's not a big thing, but yeah, when I was looking at the universities I also looked at pictures of the universities, and then I just fell in love with a picture of University of Kuopio, because it has a lake inside the campus. So just, only that fact, just, blew my mind so I just, yeah, that's why I ended up in Finland.”

5.4 Institution image

Institution image was another issue where Finnish higher education institutions did not register strongly. While many European countries and especially the United States have a number of highly ranked higher education institutions Finnish higher education in general is still very poorly represented in these rankings. This was evident by the fact that those students not considering Finland as a study destination could not name a Finnish higher education institutions save from two Chinese students who knew of Aalto university through the joint program facilities on their campus area. Those that were considering Finland did not perceive large differences between institutions.

Communication from the institution to the prospective students was not described directly in the interviews though the indicated frustration by some could suggest that there is some room for improvement in the marketing communications towards foreign students. Facilities

living conditions were another topic that was discussed in the interviews but proved to be a insubstantial factor that had no weight in the decision making processes of the sample.

5.4.1 Quality of professors

Though the quality of professors was considered important by over a half of the respondents, it was not clearly vocalized by how this quality would be established or evaluated. Well known academic publications were mentioned by two participants. The fact that quality of professors was deemed important but difficult to measure might be explained by the fact that the topic was introduced to be discussed, not brought up spontaneously, in all but three interviews. A South Korean male student who brought the issue up spontaneously.

“First step is to find what I want to learn, but the second one, if I want to learn this, who is the best professor that I need to contact so I can get advice or I can even get later a lecture from him.”

5.4.2 International recognition and prestige

International recognition of foreign higher education institutions came up in seven interviews. Still none of the participants indicated any minimum level of recognition required. Rather the issue often came up with and in conjunction with tuition costs or general cost of living expenses. It seems thus that there is a clear correlation between willingness to invest more into the degree studies abroad and institution having high international recognition and prestige. While it was not clearly vocalized this could indicate the country image being projected to institution image.

5.5 Program evaluation

The independent variables under program evaluation proved somewhat difficult to separate from each other which is why they are presented here jointly. Surprisingly the research indicated program evaluation to be more important deciding factor than the city image effect. Also the country image effect did not seem to have as substantial of an effect on program evaluation as it did to city image. In fact there seemed to be almost no effect on program evaluation from the on behalf of country, city or institution.

This was evident by for example the fact that while Finnish higher education institutions were not consider particularly internationally recognizable on two interviews individual programs were. The program in both cases was The International Design Business Management (IDBM) program at Aalto University. In fact the only specific programs mentioned in the interviews were Finnish ones. This could be due to participants considering Finland being much closer to actual decision than the sample on average. International recognizability of the programs was not considered as important as the characteristics regarding the suitability of program from a personal and career skill point of view.

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the findings will be discussed in context of the research questions. First the decision making processes of Chinese and South Korean students will be described. Next the perceived differences in decision making processes of students considering Finland and those considering countries other than Finland will be discussed followed by examination of recognizing students more likely to stay in their destination country after graduating from their foreign degree studies. Finally the primary research question: “how to attract Chinese and South Korean students to Finland?” will be discussed.

6.1 Decision making process of Chinese and South Korean potential students

There were no real noticeable differences in the decision making processes of Chinese and South Korean students in the sample that could have been used to differentiate between the two nationalities. This can at least partly attributed to the shared sociocultural background of the countries. The goal of the research was not to create hierarchical decision making model but rather, through the theoretical framework create understanding of the complex decision making process and the interaction between different components within it. It became apparent that personal reasons were the common denominator for the entire sample on the decision to study abroad. More specifically it was the personal improvement factors that served as the initiators for the process. The most prominent factors were clearly related to socioeconomic advancement of the participants. This is in line with some previous studies indicating students from Asia being more likely motivated by academic or career related goals.

Only one Chinese female student seemed to indicate that her decision making process had begun from purely program evaluation perspective upon learning of a particularly interesting degree program. Still her decision could also be perceived to have been affected by her desire to live outside Chinese culture which could be categorized as personal improvement, though in her case it seemed more akin to push factor regarding China than pull factor of a foreign country.

The push factors in traditional decision making process models for higher education mobility were usually nearly as prominent as the pull factors of foreign study destinations. This was not the case with China and South Korea any longer as it might have been 20 years ago. The previously mentioned Chinese female student wanting to distance herself from Chinese culture was the clearest example. Other illustrations of push factors had to do with dissatisfaction towards the education style of the respondents' home country. As push factors go, this dissatisfaction could not be considered a specifically strong compared to those in traditional push-pull models.

Both the Chinese and South Korean cultures are very family-orientated, which is why it was surprising that the respondents' parents or the extended family did not appear to have much effect on the process of choosing a suitable foreign school but rather their role seemed to be limited to merely that of financial and emotional support. In comparison during the application process to a domestic school after secondary education the respondents families seemed to have had a far greater influence on the decision making process. Friends and professors advice however was evidently more important. Though it would not seem to have an effect on the desire to study abroad they were consulted with applying procedures and were considered a somewhat important source for information on living and studying abroad.

While the personal reason seemed to serve as the spark to ignite interest in studying abroad it seemed that serious contemplation towards actualizing purchase intentions required a specific facilitator related to country image effect, city effect, institution image or program evaluation. As mentioned the primary motivations for considering to study abroad were clearly socioeconomic advancement orientated. Thus these facilitators would serve as the means to actualize these goals.

Though it is not expressed in the theoretical framework of Cubillo et al. (2006) there seemed to be a link on advice and perception of country image and program evaluation. In other words positive country image or program evaluation of a friend or a professor would be reflected on the participants' image of said country or study program. This would like hold true with city effect and institution image even if they did not come up in the result of the research.

The country image had both direct and indirect effect on the decision to study abroad. The country image as hypothesized by Cubillo et al. (2006) did also seem to have a positive effect on city image and institution image. Program evaluation though, it seemed, was not positively affected by the country image, as was not the institution image. The importance of city of destination was also less significant to the decision making process than hypothesized by Cubillo et al. (2006) as it seemed country, institution and program factors were all observably more significant to the process.

6.2 Finland as a higher education destination compared to other countries

The most evident difference in the decision making processes of those considering countries including Finland and those considering countries excluding Finland was the role of previous experience of the destination country. All respondents who were considering Finland had been previously exposed to Finland either directly or indirectly. Still, even an extremely positive image of Finland or Finnish higher education program acquired through personal experience did not make Finland the only option when choosing foreign higher education destination. These exposures to Finland included a combination of experiences as exchange students in Finland, recommendations from friends and co-operative courses or research programs between a local and a Finnish universities. In contrast the respondents who were primarily considering other countries than Finland did not rely on personal experiences clearly as much, though in regards to friends, professors, and family as advisors the results were identical. This seems to indicate that that Finland and the Finnish higher educational system does not enjoy the same kind of pull as do countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany with long traditions in higher education or environmentally appreciated countries like Australia.

When it came to Finland the respondents were more likely to consider program evaluation more important than institution image or city effect. This was not the case with other countries in the interviews. City effect and institutional image were practically synonymous with country image for Finland, indicating a lack of knowledge on cities and higher education institutions. This was even evident, to a degree, in those participants who had previous

experience of Finland. There is perhaps a discrepancy between the assumed image of Finland and the actual perceived image of Finland among the interviewees. We in Finland seemingly like to think that Finland is known globally for our high rankings in the PISA-test, Newsweek magazine's recognition as 'best country' and for our high level of technology. The reality is that for most average Chinese and South Koreans these subjects are not necessarily particularly well known, or not perceived affecting the image of Finland as destination for higher education.

If Finland was to be placed in the Park's 2-D model of comparison of academic and environmental expectations based on the interviews it would situate somewhere between the United Kingdom and Australia. Having higher environmental and lower academic expectations than the United Kingdom, and lower environmental and higher academic expectation than Australia. This of course was only the case with people who even considered Finland as a possible destination for higher education studies in the first place.

6.3 Identifying potential students more likely to stay after graduation

As mentioned before one of the most researched and talked about topics in regards to international degree students in Finland is their actions after graduating. The interest generated by the topic is most likely due to concern over wasting resources on educating people who will not contribute to society after graduation. Naturally this is quite a narrow view on the benefits on internationalization of Finnish higher education but furthermore from this research it can be deducted this is also an issue that is extremely difficult to predict. There were only four respondents who stated that they would certainly come back to their home country after studying, though three of them said they could consider staying for some time before returning to their home country. Then again there were five students who indicated they would want to stay and work in the country where they graduated. The rest would consider staying but were not certain.

Nearly all respondents also talked about the perceived advantage of having a foreign higher education degree from employers' point of view. This of course seems to contradict the

presumption of staying in the study destination post-graduation. After all if a student stays in his or her foreign higher education destination country the degree could hardly be considered foreign. This faulty of logic can simply be caused by the situational point of view as the participants at time of the interviews were still in their home countries, with some still years away from actually leaving. Yet it could also signify uncertainty over the decision to stay just as well. After all it is somewhat presumptuous to expect anyone make decision that are several years away and even more so when the decision has to do with living in a foreign country of which there is only limited personal experience at best.

Ultimately the decision to stay or leave seems to be a combination of several factors like employment opportunities, adapting to the culture and social relationships. Most of which will not be perceivable before the time is actually at hand. One way to increase probability of foreign degree students staying in the country could be different incentives to both the graduate and potential employers. Still if a person does feels like not fitting in a foreign culture there is likely very little to be done to make them stay. Thus perhaps the best way to ensure foreign students staying after graduation is making things that can be affected as supportive as possible towards the foreign students. One reason for the difficulty of employment can be the language barrier. Focusing on attracting students to studies which lead to degrees to fields in which knowledge of Finnish is less important could be one way of increasing the employment possibilities.

6.4 Attracting Chinese and South Korean degree students to Finland

As indicated in the study by Aalto (2003) Finnish higher education institutions are generally not investing heavily on promoting themselves as international higher education destinations. They mostly rely on webpages and networks of faculty in promotion. Most institutions do not have clear numerical, or regional targets set for their foreign degree student recruitment. It is not surprising that without clear objectives and communication strategies, the staff in many higher education institutions find international degree student recruitment problematic. Higher education as a service industry is becoming ever more competitive and to be able to compete within the industry countries like Finland, not having the benefit of being considered

a traditionally attractive destination in academic or environmental perspective, have got to invest in promoting themselves. Efficient marketing communication in international higher education, as previously mentioned, requires understanding the decision making processes of potential students. The lack of research in the field partially explains the limited marketing approach towards international students.

Clearly the largest take-away from the research regarding Finland as a possible study destination for Chinese and South Korean students was the fact that all of the interviewed potential students who were considering Finland had previous personal experience of the country. This indicates a clear correlation between the previous personal experience and probability of becoming a degree student. Previous studies have not shown similar relationships. The focus on Chinese and South Korean students in this research might at least partially explain the emergence of the correlation as previous studies in Finland have not concentrated on specific demographics

The possibility of having to pay tuition fees for higher education studies in Finland came up as an issue that can possibly exacerbate the already difficult situation of Finnish higher education marketing. The tuition free studies were clearly one of the perceived benefits of choosing to study in Finland. Tuition fees however were generally thought of as part of total costs of living. This means that the higher living costs of Finland compared to countries with tuitions but cheaper general cost of living might, expense wise, put these countries in the same total cost range. Naturally Finland will, compared to countries with similar total costs before the introduction of tuition cost, thus become more expensive. Tuition fees for non-Schengen students would consequently raise Finland to a more expensive class of international higher education destinations. The research did display evidence that potential students were willing to pay more if the perceived quality of education and prestige of education institution or program was high enough. Thus Finnish higher education institution would have to be able to justify this increased total cost by demonstrated quality of education.

Existing research conducted on international students studying in Finland seems to suggest that Finland enjoys having a relatively highly regarded image higher education destination and is often among the top choice of destinations for higher education. This study suggests that there is difference between the preferences of international students studying in Finland

and those in the process of making a decision to study abroad, at least when it comes to Asian students. Finland does not easily register as a potential higher education destination for Chinese and South Korean students who do not have either direct experience of Finland or Finnish higher education. As Finland does not seem to have a significantly distinctive profile as a quality higher education it is more difficult to justify the higher costs to students without personal experience of the country.

A good example illustrating these findings was the case of South Korean male student who had already decided to apply to a Finnish higher education institution. He had previously in his bachelor's studies been an exchange student in Rovaniemi largely by chance. The student was a part of program where an exchange semester to a partnership university was mandatory. The students had were given a choice of university in order of academic success. The interviewed student had just completed his compulsory military service and was not able to study much resulting in grades that left him with two options he had not considered as desirable destinations. Between South Africa and Finland he chose to go to Finland and Rovaniemi as advised by his father largely because of higher level of safety. This experience in Finland eventually led him to seriously consider beginning degree studies in Finland after graduating from a bachelor's program in South Korea. The student had already reached a point in his decision making process where he was no longer considering other countries seriously as study destinations. However upon learning that he might have to pay tuition fees to study in Finland he began to consider other countries again.

While creating an image of quality higher education on country level is process that will take considerable time there are ways in which Finnish higher education institutions could market themselves more efficiently in China and South Korea. Partnerships with higher education institutions or research institutions in target recruitment countries and cities can both promote Finnish higher education institutions as degree study destinations and increase international scientific cooperation. Concentrating on promoting strong study programs rather than institutions could also be more effective considering potential students without personal experience of Finland. While the exchange student programs are no longer the primary goal in internationalization goals of either institutions of higher education nor the Ministry of Education and Culture it is quite likely that these exchange programs, including those of secondary level education, cultivate a significant number of future foreign degree students in Finland.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study illustrated that personal reasons related to individual socioeconomic advancement were the main motivation behind the decision to study abroad. The country image effect and institution image and program evaluation proved to be the most important facilitators to achieve the desired socioeconomic advancement. Total cost of international education including both tuition and general cost of living were also a significant deciding factor. The push factors identified in traditional push-pull models were not evident in the study. Though desire to study in a foreign education culture was a significant factor it was clearly more of a pull factor. Advice from family was deemed less important than advice from friends and professors.

The importance of personal experience in the destination country was evidently more important to potential students who were considering Finland as a destination as opposed to those not considering Finland. This was the most evident difference compared to previous Finnish research. Compared to the rest of the sample, students considering Finland were also considering program evaluation more important than institution image or city effect.

7.1 Implications for marketing of international higher education in Finland

The decision by some higher education institutions to begin charging tuition fees from non-Schengen students can potentially begin to turn non-Schengen degree students away from Finland. At worst it will lead to homogenization of international student body in Finland with more and more emphasis on Schengen countries. It is imperative to understand that higher education institutions have got to be able to justify the tuition fees and that by introducing the fees Finland will move up to different segment of higher education destination countries when it comes to total cost of studying abroad.

This research also gave clear indication that regional and national differences can cause significant differences in decision making processes of potential international students. Finnish higher education institutions cannot market themselves efficiently if they regard the

entire globe as a single potential customer body. Understanding different customer segments will make it possible to cater to regional needs better. The study indicated personal experience being an important factor for both Chinese and South Korean degree students seriously considering Finland as a study destination. Through partnerships with foreign higher education institutions Finnish higher education institutions could increase their recognizability through personal experiences. Identifying few major institutions in large countries like China and South Korea might create more recognizability than trying to mass-market to the countries.

7.2 Future research

Research on international students' decision making processes is consistently either theoretical or conducted in the post-purchase stage of the subjects' decision making process. The fact that virtually no literature exist in the pre-purchase stage is depictive of the fact that the field of study is still young. While this research attempts to bridge the existing gap, the results are not directly comparable to previous research. There is a need for a study that would follow up on the research on potential students' international degree students in purchase intention phase with a research on the same sample in post decision phase to truly be able to achieve a reliable comparative analysis on the subject.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1, Invitation letter for Shanghai



Invitation for interview

Aalto University School of Economics has contracted with the Helsinki Metropolitan Area to design and carry out a study to better understand and respond to the needs of international students. The empirical data for the study will be collected through interviews with international students before, during and after their studies abroad. As a part of the study we will conduct a series of interviews with potential international students from Shanghai.

Who are we looking for?

We are looking for students who are interested in taking on degree studies abroad. It does not matter what your major is or where you are planning to study. You do not have to have any affirmative plans, genuine interest is enough. If you have considered studying abroad we would like to hear from you.

There's Value in Participating:

Participants can benefit by influencing the debate and current practices in supporting and better responding to the needs of international students in Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Participants will also receive small gift from Finland as a token of appreciation for taking part in the study.

How to Participate:

The interviews will be carried out in week 42 (October 20-22) as personal interviews in Shanghai and will require approximately 1 hour of time. We encourage prospective participants to contact us directly regarding interview scheduling by emailing: ville.vierimaa@aalto.fi



Invitation for interview

Aalto University School of Economics has contracted with the Helsinki Metropolitan Area to design and carry out a study to better understand and respond to the needs of international students. The empirical data for the study will be collected through interviews with international students before, during and after their studies abroad. As a part of the study we will conduct a series of interviews with potential international students from Korea.

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Participants can benefit by influencing the debate and current practices in supporting and better responding to the needs of international students in Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Participants will also receive small gift from Finland as a token of appreciation for taking part in the study.

How to Participate:

The interviews will be carried out in week 43 (October 25-29) in Seoul. They are carried out as open-ended personal interviews and will require approximately 1 hour of time. We encourage prospective participants to contact us directly regarding interview scheduling by emailing: ville.vierimaa@aalto.fi

Appendix 3, Discussion topics for the interviews

Teemahaastattelun aiheet

1. Haastateltavan taustatietoja

- missä asunut
- missä/mitä opiskellut
- millaista opiskelu kotimaassa on ollut
- vapaa aika
- työssäkäynti/harjoittelu koulun ohella

2. Syyt haluun lähteä opiskelemaan ulkomaille

- vaikuttimet
- motivaatio
- odotettu hyöty
- tavoitteet opiskelun päätyttyä ulkomailla
- jatko opiskelumaassa vai paluu kotimaahan

3. Odotuksia/vaatimuksia tulevalta opiskelupaikalta

- mitkä tekijät tärkeimpiä?
- sijainti
- turvallisuus
- kieli
- asuminen
- oman maan kansalaiset
- sosiaalinen elämä
- opiskelupaikkakunnan koko
- hintataso
- vapaa-aika
- harrastusmahdollisuudet

4. Odotuksia/vaatimuksia tulevalta koulutukselta

- mitkä tekijät tärkeimpiä?
- koulutuksen laatu
- koulun tunnetuus
- koulutustyyli verrattuna kotimaiseen
- koulutuksen hinta
- opiskelumäärä
- opiskelun kesto
- työssäkäynti/harjoittelu mahdollisuudet opiskelun ohella
- kyttyt liikemiljoonaan
- application

5. Ulkomaisen opiskelupaikan valinta

- kuinka tietoa potentiaalisista opiskelupaikoista kerätään

- osallistuuko päätöksen tekoon muita, missä määrin (vanhemmat, opettajat, sukulaiset, ystävät)
- kuinka eri opiskelupaikkoja verrataan toisiinsa
- haetaanko ensin opiskelumaa, vai kilpailutetaanko vaihtoehtoja loppuun asti kansainvälisesti
- kuinka opiskelukulut kustannetaan

6. Näkemyksiä metropolialueesta/Suomesta mahdollisena opiskelupaikkana

- tieto metropolialueesta/Suomesta
- kuinka metropoli/Suomi näyttäytyy suhteessa muihin vaihtoehtoihin