

Understanding Western Students: Motivations and Benefits for Studying in China

Alexander S. English^{1,2}, Jessica Allison², Jian Hong Ma³

¹Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

²School of Business and Professional Studies, Concordia University, Irvine, California, United States of America

³Vice Dean, Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

Correspondence: Alexander S. English, Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Zhejiang University, Xixi Campus, Hangzhou, 310011, China.

Received: March 29, 2016 Accepted: April 22, 2016 Online Published: April 29, 2016

doi:10.11114/jets.v4i8.1499

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i8.1499>

Abstract

In the recent years, there has been a rise in the number of Western students who are studying in China. Governments in China, and in other Western nations are expanding relations because China is currently developing world-class higher education institutions (Hennock, 2012). The present study explores motivations, deterrents and benefits of studying abroad in China. Questionnaires were distributed to 285 overseas students and findings suggest that Western students rated their overall experiences favorably, while only the majority of participants rated their academic experience as above. Findings also reveal that other related academic factors such as the Chinese university administration support was somewhat below neutral. Finally, findings also suggest that a strong motivation to study in China is receiving a grant or scholarship, and students' favorite aspects from the experience were the people, the food and the culture. Implications and further directions for the study will be discussed.

Keywords: study abroad, China, western students, motivations and deterrents to study abroad, international exchange, cultural exchange

1. Introduction

As Chinese students head West, little is known about who is heading East. According to a report by the Institution of International Education (2008), there is a goal to greatly increase the number of foreign studying in China, but there has been little research exploring what exchange students are doing in China and how their experiences are (Belyavina, 2013). This current research expands on motivations and benefits of study abroad and aims to examine specific motivations that could impact American and Europeans students' choice to study in China. Understanding what motivates students to study in China and what they recognize as the benefits, will give higher education institutions information that can be used to support and encourage future students to study there. Therefore, for the purpose of this research investigation we intend to answer the following questions:

- What are the major factors in student's decisions to study in China? What are the benefits that strongly attract students to study in China?
- How do the availability of scholarships, China's history and traditional culture, interest in the language, and the country's recent rise and booming economy affect the choice to study in China?
- What aspects of their study in China experience prove to be the most fulfilling and beneficial?

This study also seeks to understand Western students in China, research the most compelling motivations that encouraged them to study in China and the actual benefits they experience. Student's demographic factors and details of their study (i.e., location, living, and program type) will also be analyzed to better understand study abroad trends in China.

1.1 Literature Review

The importance of study abroad has been long been established. Educators, governments, and business leaders have all realized the necessity for young people to have global experience (Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program,

2005; Mc Giffert, 2011). Study abroad programs provide college students' increased global competence, broadened horizons and chance to learn new cultures and languages. Unfortunately, less than 1% of American college students study abroad (Smith & Mitry, 2008). In fact, studying overseas has become a government priority with the U.S. Senate declaring 2006 as the "Year of Study Abroad." At the same time, the Lincoln Commission set a goal to have one million students studying abroad by 2017 (Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005).

The European Union's Erasmus program allows 2.3 million EU students to study abroad throughout Europe and now supports over 220,000 annual student exchanges. Furthermore, the EU provides many opportunities for its students to study in Europe and it hopes to also expand the number of students sent overseas (Life Long Learning Programme, 2011).

Not only does sending more students abroad greatly benefit the US and EU governments but it also benefits American and EU students. To stay competitive in today's globalized world, students must make extra efforts to bridge gaps in global knowledge, foreign language and international relations. According to CEA Global Education (2011), studying abroad can significantly enhance a student's formal education and improve their future employment opportunities (CEA Global Education, 2011; Smith & Mitry, 2008).

1.2 Government Commitment

The United States and China are deeply invested in strengthening their relationships with one another. This partnership is supported by the People to People's Exchange plans to create closer ties by recruiting more Americans to study in China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2012). In Mainland China (excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan), a world-class higher education system is being built through the creation of partnerships with foreign universities and generous scholarships to attract international students. In recent reports by the Ministry of Education (2012), China is hoping to enroll half-a-million foreign students by 2020 and plans to do this by funding international students (Hennock, 2012; Goodman, 2011). According to a recent *Open Doors* report, the 26,000 Americans studying in China give it rank as the 5th most popular study abroad destination for American students and ranked first outside of Western Europe (Belyavina, 2013).

University leaders and political figures are committed to building People-to-People's Exchange specifically the 100,000 Strong Initiative¹. In accordance with this government plan, China and the United States have pledged to increase Americans studying in China. The Chinese government has provided over 20,000 scholarships to students and the 100,000 Strong Initiative has received over 15 million dollars from the private sector (Consulate General of the United States, 2012; Mc Giffert, 2011; U.S. Department of State, 2012). According to China's Ministry of Education's (MOE, 2012) there has already been a significant rise in American student enrollments, but there has been little follow up research to investigate the success of the program.

China and the EU member states have the High People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) partnership to increase bilateral higher education exchanges. According to Hui (2013), there are more than 35,000 EU students who study in China and the Chinese government offers more than 30,000 scholarships to EU students (EU-China Policy Dialogues Support Facility, 2013). Understanding the motivations and reasons why Western students are choosing to study is beneficial. It is also necessary to understand the actual outcomes of these exchange students' experiences support the 100,000 Strong Initiative, the CPE and the HPPD programs, but more importantly is the benefit to the Chinese universities who need greater insight in Western students.

1.3 Motivations to Study Abroad

For the purpose of this study, motivation has been defined as factors that influence a person's decision to study abroad (Jolibert & Baumgartner, 1997). Research on motivations to study abroad addresses why students do or do not choose to study overseas. The decision to study abroad encompasses the student considering both the positive and negative aspects and their feelings towards the push and pull factors associated with study abroad (Doyle, et al., 2009; Goel, De Jong, & Schnusenberg, 2010; Salisbury, Umbach, & Paulsen, 2009). In Sanchez, Fornerino and Zhang's (2006) study, it was determined that some motivations for choosing to study abroad was to: 1) search for a new experience 2) improve a professional situation 3) improve social situation 4) search for liberty/ pleasure and 5) learn other languages. However, some barriers that prevent students from studying abroad may be: 1) familial barriers 2) financial barriers 3) psychological barrier and 4) social barriers. Research into study abroad motivations and barriers have also examined "push-pull" factors that international students consider in their decision to study abroad. These factors include: 1) knowledge and awareness of the host country 2) referrals and personal recommendations made about the study destination 3) costs both monetary (such as fees, living expenses, travel) and social (such as level of crime and safety or negative outcomes such as discrimination or racism) 4) environment including both physical climate and natural environment (plants, animals, air quality and scenery) 5) geography such as proximity of the host country to the home country and 6) social link such as whether family or friends have studied or lived there (Mazzarol & Soutat, 2002). However, other

researchers have found that receiving a scholarship, participating in a program with a group of classmates and being able to study in English are the top three most attractive aspects of studying abroad, while studying in a language other than English and worrying about not staying on an academic track to graduate are factors related to one's decision to not to study abroad (Doyle, et al 2009). The present study intends to explore these factors within a Chinese context.

1.4 Benefits of Study in China

Studying in China can offer numerous benefits to the students in areas ranging from language development to increasing their cross-cultural knowledge. These benefits are different for every student and can vary depending on the exact study abroad location. Research suggests potential benefits of studying abroad serve as motivations (Doyle et al, 2009). Returning students have reported having global experience, greater cultural awareness, personal growth, establishment of future higher education opportunities, career attainment, travel, second language development, eye opening experiences, strong friendships with locals and experience in a globalizing society as benefits from their time spent studying abroad (CEA Global Education, 2011; Doyle, et al., 2009; Dwyer & Peters, 2000; Smith & Mitry, 2008). It could be said that one of the most compelling benefits to studying in China is because China is a fast growing economic power. The 21st century has been named "The Pacific Century." In fact, Asia is growing in importance to Western nations' economic well-being and global security, and more specifically, China is currently the 2nd largest economy in the world (McGiffert, 2011; Xinyu, 2011). According to Ogden (2006), there is a lack of American professionals with Asia experience and this experience is vital for US firms looking for access to a fast growing market with more than a billion potential consumers. In fact, the world's most spoken language is also the fastest growing foreign language offered in schools as the number of students choosing to learn Mandarin Chinese is the fastest growing compared to other languages (EU students.Eu, 2012). Another benefit of studying in China is firsthand experience of a rich culture that dates back 5,000 years (Xinyu, 2011). Though these diverse benefits are clearly part of the motivation for students to select study abroad programs based in China, further analysis of the decision process is needed.

In summary, this research intends to analyze the motivations to study abroad in China and to understand current Western students' experiences in China. This study intends to examine what factors, motivators and benefits students find most appealing to them during their study in China.

2. Methodology

The present study collected both qualitative and quantitative data about Western students who have studied or are currently studying in China. Convenient and snowball sampling were used to recruit subjects. An online survey was the main source of data for this research. The distribution of the survey was posted on several social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and expat forums. In addition, the survey was sent to contacts at numerous study abroad offices who helped forward the survey on to students.

2.1 Materials

The survey instrument was comprised of demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, college major, residency, time and location of study in China, prior abroad experience, etc.) as well scales that measured motivations, concerns, push-pull factors, benefits of studying abroad, and questions about students' overall experience. Motivation items (5 Likert scale questions) were derived from Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang (2006) study. Benefits of studying abroad (10 likert scale items) and concerns of studying abroad (4 Likert scale items) were taken from Doyle et al. (2009). Push-pull factors (8 Likert scale items) were based on Mazzarol and Soutat (2002). Finally, Smith and Mitry's (2008) study and the *IEE Passport to China* (2011) provided specific China study abroad benefits regarding students' experience. Participants marked their feelings of how strong the motivations and certain factors were in their decision to study in China as well as to rate the benefits of their experience. In addition, open-ended questions were provided so individuals could expand on their experience.

2.2 Ethical Considerations

Subject's participation in this survey was completely voluntary and they were able to withdraw from the research survey at any time. The subjects answered the survey anonymously. The survey had no risk involved.

2.3 Participants and Demographic Details

The participants (N= 295) who responded to the survey consisted of 76% American (N=225) and 24% (N=70) citizens of the European Union representing 18 different countries. The sample made up of 74% (n=219) of participants who had previously studied in China and 26% (n=76) of participants who were currently studying in China at the time of taking the survey. There were n=117 (58%) male and n=124 (42%) female participants.

Participants were asked to describe which race/ ethnicity they identified as. The answers provided in the survey were; American Indian/ Native American, Asian, Black/ African American, Hispanic/ Latino, White/ Caucasian, Pacific

Islander and Other (Arabs and south Asians). The category of “Other” was included so participants did not feel limited by one choice and to include. In fact, 4.4% (n=13) of the participants selected Other and elaborated with categories such as: human, multiethnic, Taiwanese American, Middle Eastern, etc. Answers that clearly fit into another category were recoded, e.g. “Taiwanese American” was recategorized as Asian. The frequency of subjects’ identities is listed in *Figure 1.1*. If subjects marked more than one category they were listed as multiethnic. It is important to note that subjects with Asian descent were the second largest group to study in China following Caucasians.

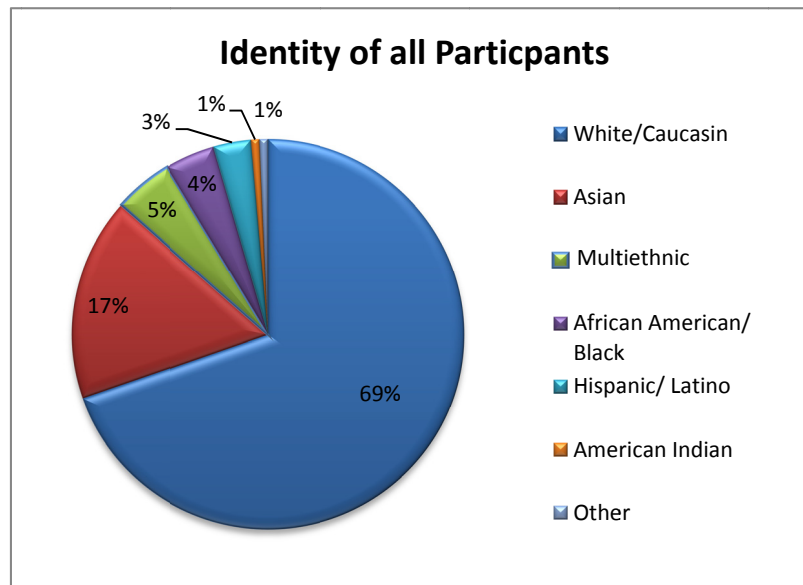


Figure 1.1 Identity of all participants

Note: (N=295)

2.3.1 Age & Student Standing

The participants’ ages ranged from 13 to 47 and mean is 20.9 ($SD=3.8$). In this study, 69% of the students were undergraduates which supports IIE’s finding of “the vast majority of U.S. students participating in education abroad activities in China in 2011 were undergraduate students pursuing Bachelor’s degrees, making up more than 76 percent of all reported students” (Belyavina, 2013, p. 21). Figure 1.2 shows the student standing breakdown when they studied in China.

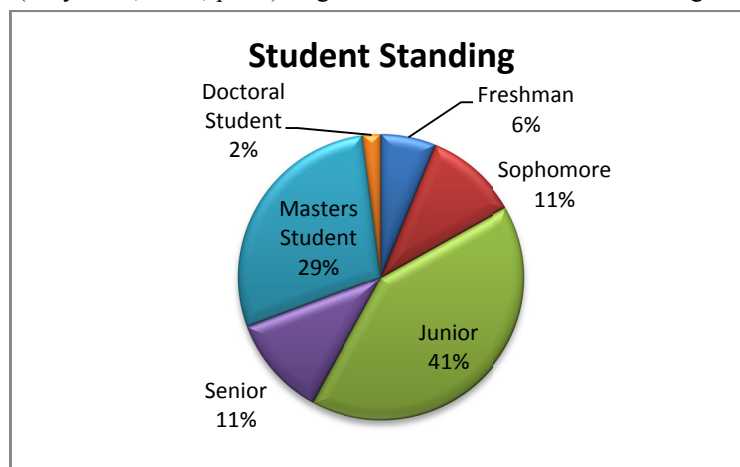


Figure 1.2. Student standing when participants studied in China

Note: (N=295)

Of the American participants, only 26% had previously studied abroad, while 47% of the European participants had. Of all the respondents with previous study abroad experience, 45% had studied abroad in Europe, 16% had previously studied in China, and 13% had studied in an Asia country other than China. Figure 1.3 shows the prior abroad experience of participants.

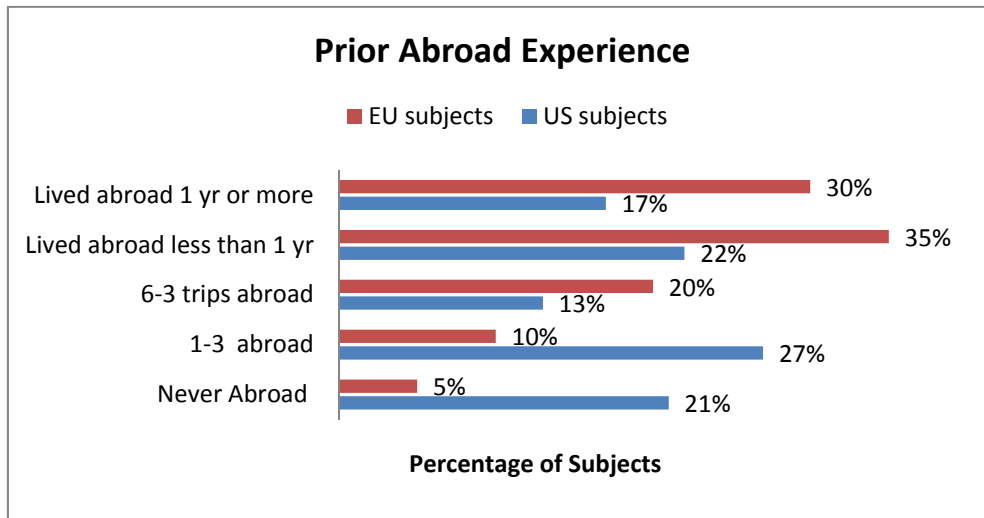


Figure 1.3. The prior abroad experience by citizenship

Note: US participants N= 225, EU Participants N= 70

Participants had studied at 62 different Chinese universities, and four Western universities that offered online classes while living in China. The sample’s location of study includes: Beijing (28%) and Shanghai (28%) while other students studied in Zhejiang Province (15%), Sichuan, Guangdong, Yunnan, (3% each) and Hong Kong (4%). Beijing and Shanghai tend to attract the most Western students; this could be due either to the number of available universities in each city or their higher profile on the world stage. Based on the data, 69% of the respondents studied in China beginning in 2011 or more recently, providing a good representation of recent opinion of Western students studying in China. Fifty-eight percent (n=166) of the respondents studied in China through their home university or an affiliated university program, while 19% (n=56) of the respondents studied in China through a study abroad company or program, 18% (n=50) reported that they applied to study in China directly to the Chinese school and “Other” was chosen by 5% (n=15) of the respondents.

3. Data Analysis

The present study is an exploratory study that intends to examine Western student motivations and benefits of studying in China. Data will be analyzed quantitatively with some supporting qualitative data from open-ended responses. In the data, univariate analysis (ANOVA) is used to examine single variables and provide descriptive statistics. Finally, in order to determine relationships between two factors, bivariate correlations will be reported.

3.1 The Study in China Experience

Respondents answered Likert scale questions (1=terrible; 4=neutral; 7=excellent) on their overall experience, academic experience, cultural experience and social experience. The results indicate that respondents' experiences in China were all favorable with the cultural experience ranking the highest with a (M=6.19, SD=0.98), overall experience (M=6.14, SD=0.88), social experience (M=5.98, SD=1.15) and academic experience (M=5.07, SD=1.49). Correlation analyses indicate significant relationships with all variables and can be seen in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Correlations of experience

N=285	1	2	3	4
1. Overall Experience	-			
2. Social Experience	.51**	-		
3. Academic Experience	.46**	.20**	-	
4. Cultural Experience	.49**	.39**	.42**	-

*p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Evaluating the data by the study experiences to the location of residence can be found in Table 1.2. Mean values of the participants’ experiences are displayed in accordance with their study location. When comparing participants in the study, those who studied in Beijing and Hong Kong appeared to have highest means of rating their experience and students in Zhejiang Province and Shanghai had the lowest. Running ANOVAs tests for each of these factors found a significant difference between location and overall experience $F(5,279)=3.72, p<.01$ and location and academic experience $F(5,279) 5.68, p<.001$.

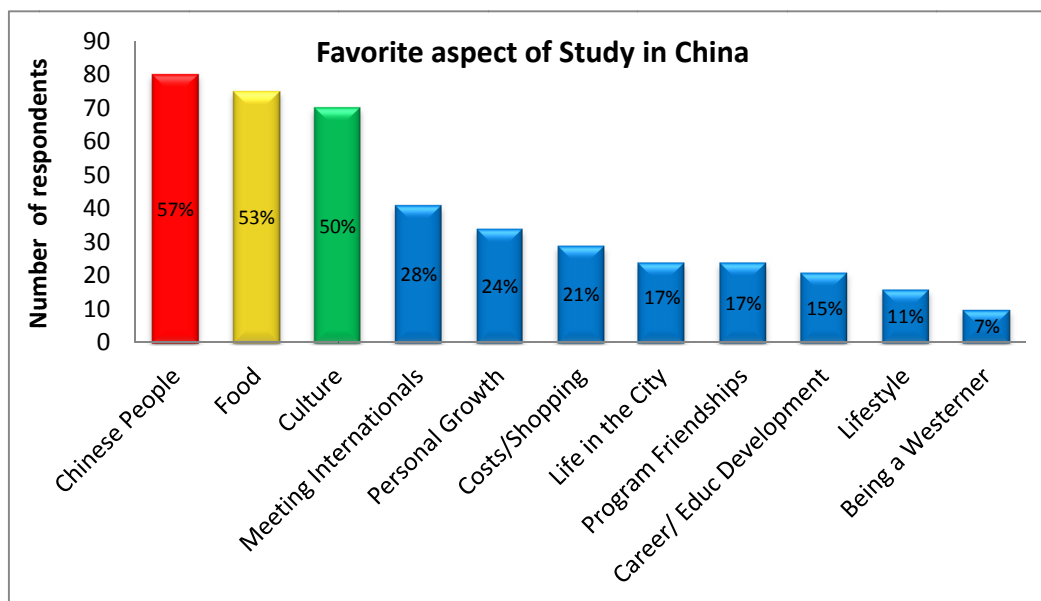
Table 1.2. Location and Experience

Location	Sample	%	Overall	Cultural	Social	Academic
Beijing	n=80	28%	6.40(.82)	6.29(.92)	6.13(1.12)	5.53(1.26)
Shanghai	n=80	28%	6.05(.81)	6.10(.87)	5.94(1.15)	4.95(1.41)
Zhejiang	n=43	15%	5.77(.78)	5.84(1.17)	5.744(1.11)	4.19(1.74)
Hong Kong	n=11	4%	6.45(.93)	6.18(1.47)	6.55(1.04)	4.63(1.75)
Other China	n=70	25%	6.11(1.0)	6.39(.89)	5.91(1.21)	5.31(1.39)

Note: N=285. Means of scores (SD). Likert Scale used, 1= Terrible, 4= Neutral, 7=Wonderful

3.2 Favorite Aspect of Study in China

Of the 285 participants, 141 reported their three favorite aspects of study in China. This was an open ended qualitative question. Their answers were coded to eleven categories as displayed below in *Figure 1.4*. The most popular three answers of the respondents' favorite thing while in China were; the Chinese people, the food, and the culture. Each of these top three answers was listed by over half of the respondents. This qualitative data supports the quantitative findings that proved high results rating of the experiences studying in China, especially in the areas of overall experience, social experience and cultural experience since interacting with Chinese people, eating the food and experiencing the culture are all aspects of the overall, social, and cultural experience. When comparing the means of location to ratings of respondents finding the Chinese people friendly those who studied in "Other" places of China ($M=4.15$, $SD=.91$) and in Beijing ($M=4.10$, $SD=.90$) rated their agreement with this statement to be the strongest, followed by Zhejiang ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.06$), Shanghai ($M=3.71$, $SD=1.03$) and lastly Hong Kong ($M=3.56$, $SD=1.13$). Running an ANOVA with this question and location it proved a significant difference $F(4,276)=2.90$, $p<.05$. The percentages represent the frequency of respondents who listed each answer as one of their three favorite aspects of study in China.



Note: N=141.

Figure 1.4 Participants' favorite aspect of study in China

3.3 Financial Factors

Participants were asked how they financed their study in China experience and how important receiving a scholarship or grant was towards their decision to study in China. Results indicate that 44% ($n=129$) of respondents financed their study through scholarships or loans and 24% ($n=69$) used scholarships or loans combined with another payment method. This means that 68% of the participants in this survey received money to study in China.

Next, participants were asked to rate the importance of receiving a grant or scholarship in their decision to study in China. The comparison between the importance between those who received a grant and those who did not is displayed in *Figure 1.5*. Running a between groups *t*-test revealed that subjects who received a scholarship or grant ($M=3.08$, $SD=2.69$) and those who did not ($M=1.48$, $SD=0.25$) showed a significant result $t(321)=15.42$, $p<0.01$. The result indicated those who did receive a grant or scholarship to study in China was extremely important in their decision. Around 75% of them marked a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale.

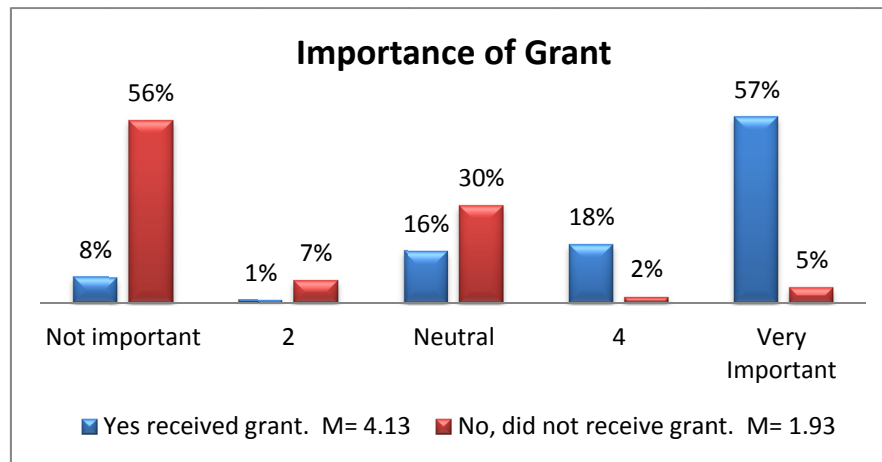


Figure 1.5 The importance of receiving a grant

Note: Percentages display the frequency of each answer per group. Yes (N=142), No (N=130)

3.4 Motivations

Participants were asked to rate if they were motivated to study in China because of the following: 1) greater cultural awareness, 2) future professional advancement, 3) opportunity to travel, 4) create friendships, 5) greater personal growth, 6) learn the Chinese language, and 7) contribute to a globalizing society (as in Doyle, et al., 2009 and Salisbury, et al., 2009). According to Table 1.3, all factors were mainly positive with the most motivating factors being greater personal growth ($M=4.60$), opportunity to travel ($M=4.44$), and future professional advancement ($M=4.44$). Participants also agreed that they were motivated for greater cultural awareness and learning the Chinese language to a slightly lesser degree. The motivations to create new friendships and contribute to the global society were closer to neutral. Table 1.3. Motivations to Study in China

Motivation Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
For greater cultural awareness	4.37	0.89
For future professional advancement	4.44	0.89
For the opportunity travel	4.44	0.95
To create friendships	3.41	1.08
For greater personal growth	4.6	0.67
To learn the Chinese language	4.36	1.08
To contribute to the global society	3.91	1.09

Note: (N=295) Likert Scale (1-5) 1= Strongly Disagree, 3= Neutral, 5= Strongly Agree.

Comparing motivation factors between US citizens and EU citizens revealed some significant differences. The EU respondents ($n=69$) were more motivated to study Chinese ($M=4.58$, $SD=.85$) than the US respondents ($n=224$, $M=4.30$, $SD=1.13$) as shown in $t(291)=-1.934$, $p<.05$. When comparing the motivation to contribute to the global society there was also a statistically significant difference $t(293)=2.75$, $p<.05$. The US respondents ($n=225$) average score was ($M=4.01$, $SD=1.07$), while the EU respondents ($n=70$) were lower at ($M=3.60$, $SD=1.11$). Overall, language development appeared to be of greater interest for EU students while US students were more motivated to contribute to the global society.

In open ended questions, participants were able to further express their feelings of personal growth, many respondents wrote that they were excited for the challenge of China, to live and explore a culture and country different than their own.

“I was looking for an adventure and definitely found it. While anyone can survive in Paris or Barcelona, it seemed like every other international student I met was always open to trying new things, meeting new people and eating whatever was put in front of us” (Male, USA, University of Hong Kong, 2011).

“I had studied Chinese in High School though I did not learn much, but I decided the [sic] China was not only the cheaper option out of the different places to go it seemed as if it would be the most challenging. I wanted to challenge myself in hopes of personal growth” (Female, USA, Fudan University, Shanghai, 2012).

The feelings above exemplify that study in China was a gateway for adventure, a way to test one’s ability, to learn more about Chinese culture, society and language.

3.5 Factors in Decision to Study in China

Factors in living or studying abroad can either motivate or deter participants from studying abroad. Respondents were presented with seven factors that affect the decision to study abroad and asked whether this deterred or motivated their choice to study in China (Mazzarol & Soutat, 2002). For each factor all means and standard deviations are provided in the *Table 1.4* below. Most factors resulted with neutrality on the side of motivation, but the concerns about the physical environment proved to be mainly a deterrent. Feelings about the physical environment of China are represented in the *Table 1.5*, showing that the subjects in Hong Kong were the least deterred by the physical environment.

Table 1.4. Factors in decision to study in China

Factors	<i>M</i>
Prior Knowledge of China	3.76
Referrals & Comments from Family & Friends	3.44
Financial Costs	3.55
Social Costs	3.32
Physical Environment	2.66
Social Environment	3.56
Location of China to Home Country	3.24
Social Links I have in China	3.31

Note: (N=295) Likert Scale (1-5) 1= Strongly Deterred, 3= Neutral, 5= Strongly Motivated.

In open-ended responses, many respondents shared that they experienced problems with the high amounts of pollution. One student stated, “after studying abroad in China for nine months, the greatest deterrent to return to China and live there for an extended period of time was the air quality” (Male, Beijing Normal University, 2011).

Table 1.5. Deterrent of physical environment according to location

Physical Environment	Sample	Percent of sample	<i>M</i>
Beijing	N= 82	29%	2.6
Shanghai	N=79	28%	2.6
Zhejiang	N=41	14%	2.59
Hong Kong	N=11	4%	3.09
Other China	N=73	25%	2.79

Note: (N=286) Likert Scale (1-5) 1= Deterred, 3= Neutral, 5= Motivated

3.6 Concerns of Study in China In the Survey, Participants Rated Their Level of Concern for Factors That Are the Main Concerns in the Study Abroad Experience

All means, standard deviation and modes are included in the *Table 1.6* below.

Table 1.6. Concerns of studying in China

Items	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mode</i>
Leaving friends and family	291	2.55	1.37	1
Living where the native language is not your own	295	2.22	1.28	1
Living accommodations	294	2.78	1.32	3
Staying in an academic track while abroad	270	3.11	1.47	3

Note N= 295. Likert Scale (1-5) 1=Not Concerned, 3= Neutral, 5= Very Concerned

When questioned if participants were concerned about staying on an academic track while studying in China, “N/A” was also an option for participants who may not be enrolled in school in their own country or are doing a full degree in China, 8% (n=24) of participants chose “N/A”. The concern of leaving family and friends and living in a country where the native language is not your own was not very concerning for the majority, yet concerns of the living accommodation and staying on academic track proved to be of concern for some of the participants. The mean answer for concern of staying on an academic track appeared more neutral.

3.7 Benefits

Studying abroad is perceived to provide many benefits. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with factors that are associated as benefits of study abroad. All means are provided for the factors in *Table 1.7*. With the exception of Chinese universities providing good management support systems, all of benefits were positive. According to the findings, it appears that studying in China greatly benefits students in Chinese language development and also allows students to pursue their cultural interest, while enjoying both the food and Chinese people. It appears that many respondents believed this experience would also be beneficial on their resume ($M=4.49$, $SD=.80$) and will help them work or live internationally in the future ($M=4.63$, $SD=.68$). Respondents were more neutral in their belief that they received a benefit of being able to study school subjects they could not at home ($M=3.40$ $SD=1.41$), and that they felt the Chinese government policy encourages Western students to study there ($M=3.44$ $SD=1.00$). It appears that benefits to study in China could be considered as professional development (i.e. experience will look good on resume, help to

work internationally in the future) or cultural (i.e. meeting the Chinese people and eating the food) all received a mean score over 4, as seen in *Table 1.7*. In one respondent's opened ended answers, many of these different benefits are voiced.

"Studying there is invaluable for anyone planning to have a career that intersects with China in any way. Trade, politics, education, manufacturing and international law all will continue to be affected by the U.S. relationship with China. Issues pertaining to globalization will only continue to effect American policies and priorities and anyone wanting to be in the know and effective in the future must study overseas" (Male, Beijing University, 2009).

Table 1.7. Benefits of studying in China

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experience with the Chinese language	4.59	.82
Help to live or work internationally in future	4.63	.68
Experience will look good on resume	4.49	.78
Able to pursue cultural interest	4.41	.86
Study school subjects not available in my home university	3.4	1.41
Chinese govt. policy encourages Western students to study here	3.44	1.01
The Economy provides opportunities for Western students	4.04	.87
Chinese institutions offer good management/ support systems	2.76	.80
The Chinese people were friendly	4.00	.98
The food was delicious	4.12	.81

Note: (N=295). Likert Scale (1-5) 1= Strongly Disagree, 3= Neutral, 5= Strongly Agree

A frequently mentioned benefit for studying in China is exposure to the Mandarin Chinese language, 90% of the respondents reported they studied and improved their Mandarin Chinese while in China. Overall participants found this to be a favorable benefit from their experience ($M= 4.59$) with 73% ($n=213$) of respondents strongly agreeing (5). Furthermore, another interesting finding shows that EU respondents ($n=69$) rated the benefit of language experience ($M=4.77$, $SD=.55$) higher than US respondents ($n=224$, $M=4.54$, $SD=.88$) ($t(291)= -2.07$, $p< .05$). One male student from Concordia University in 2011 mentioned, "This language is a gateway to understanding an entire society and civilization of an ancient people".

Another interesting finding is comparing the length of time in China and how they felt toward the Chinese universities management and support systems. Results show the longer Western students stayed in China, the lower their opinion regarding Chinese university management systems was (as displayed in *Table 1.8*). Students who were in China for less than one month, or 1 month to 4 months had the highest ratings while students who studied in China for more than 4 months had ratings below neutral.

Table 1.8. Length of stay in China and rating of university management systems

Length of Stay	Sample	%	Mean	SD
Less than 1 month	n=15	5%	3.67	1.11
1-4 months	n=79	28%	3.13	.95
4-7 months	n=65	23%	2.71	1.1
7-9 months	n=20	7%	2.45	0.76
1 year	n=68	24%	2.38	1.02
More than 1 year	n=35	12%	2.57	1.17

Note: N=282 Likert Scale (1-5) 1= Strongly Disagree, 3= Neutral, 5= Strongly Agree.

4. Conclusion

This study suggests that China experience in all areas of life, cultural, academic and social experiences was relatively positive. Respondents' ratings toward motivations are also all high with the strongest motivator being personal growth. As noted in past research, studying abroad can help students live and work internationally in the future (CEA Global Education, 2011; Doyle, et al., 2009; Dwyer & Peters, 2000; Smith & Mitry, 2008). From the results, it would appear that students' responses tend to be meeting goals of both US and EU governments in terms of empowering students to gain cross-cultural experience in the globalized world.

The present study tends to support the findings by Doyle, et al. (2009), that the most attractive aspects of studying abroad were being able to receive a scholarship and being able to study in English.. 75% of participants who received a scholarship or grant reported it being important in their decision to study in China. Education agencies and governments need to promote the thousands of Chinese government and private sponsored scholarships available for foreign students to study in China. With the rising number of foreign students in China, it is of extreme importance to understand the process which one adjusts (English, Zeng and Ma, 2015).

4.1 Concerns and Deterrents

In previous research, the three most concerning factors was leaving family and friends, studying in a foreign language

and worrying about not staying on an academic track to graduate (Doyle, et al., 2009). From the present findings, respondents did not report strong concerns about leaving friends and family, nor was the distance from home a deterrent. In fact, about 62% (N=183) of the participants were able to take either all or most of their classes in English showing there are many opportunities for English coursework available with studying abroad program in China. The largest concern and negative aspect of study seem to be related to academics. Participants rated their academic experience (M=5.07, SD=1.49) the lowest out of all other experiences. The students reported Chinese universities did not offer proper management systems or support (M=2.76, SD=1.08). Only 22% of respondents responded positively toward Chinese university administration. This could be an influential factor in choosing to study in China. Furthermore, it also appears that as students spend more time in China, they had a stronger dissatisfaction with the Chinese university administration, which could also be the effect of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Attracting more Western students means providing standards they are familiar with in their home higher education system. Another interesting finding pertains to respondents' favorite aspects about studying in China. The category of "Career and Education development" had few responses with only 15% of respondents mentioning it. This suggests that the educational aspect of studying in China could be examined further.

Physical environment is also seen as a large factor that may deter students to study in China. In fact, 42% of participants found this to be a concern and 18% (n=11) of the participants stated this specifically in the open-ended section that the pollution was the worst part. Air pollution is a well-established problem. In fact, the US Environmental Protection Agency (January, 2012) reported the Air Quality Index (AQI) to be 755 in Beijing. It has been suggested anything over 300 AQI is categorized as "extremely dangerous" (Rivera, 2013).

In summary, participants represented a variety of study programs in various locations in China. From the results, studying in China provides such benefits as the opportunity to learn Mandarin Chinese, gain international experience, explore cultural interests, personal growth and being able to travel. Each of these benefits were agreed upon by the majority of the participants regardless of location. Finally, it appears that all respondents enjoyed Chinese people, Chinese food and Chinese culture.

4.2 Limitations

Due to nature of this research, this sample may not represent the population of students who study in China. Future researchers should consider expanding the questionnaire to include other regions of the world for greater comparison. Participation in the survey was voluntary with no reward, so participants' feelings toward their experience might have been a factor in their decision to participate. Another limitation of the study was the wide variety of student experiences they referenced while taking the survey. Overall participants spent different amounts of time in China and studied in China during different years. Those who studied in 2007 may have had a very different experience than those who studied in China in 2012. Furthermore, all of the participants completed the survey while in China or after their study in China experience, their memory of their motivations to study in China could have been influenced by the experience through hindsight. Longitudinal research could be a possible way to examine their motivations, benefits over time and explore how students change during acculturation. Also, all participants in this survey already made the decision to study in China, so it is assumed they had some interest in China before coming. Therefore, this research lacks broader representation and a control group of students who chose not to study abroad in China or at all.

4.3 Further Research

It would be of great interest to build on the research to understand students' changes over time while adjusting to China (both psychological and sociocultural). Furthermore, it would be interesting to see what variables may influence students' decisions to return home early. Research also needs to examine Western students' academic adjustment to studying in China. Some of the best insights can be gained by conducting a longitudinal study that can measure foreign students' academic success compared to local Chinese students. What types of stress or difficulties do students equally face? Further studies can also benefit from studying individuals that choose to integrate or assimilate compared to individuals who prefer to only spend time with other foreign students (as per the acculturation model by Berry, 1997). For instance, an interesting study could compare two groups of students studying where one group has a Chinese roommate and one group has a Western roommate. This type of research design can help researchers to determine if this living factor has any effect on a student's ability to learn Mandarin Chinese and adjust or improve their sociocultural adaptation. In conclusion, more investigative qualitative and quantitative studies need to be implemented to understand the experience of foreign students as well as how to encourage more students to study in the People's Republic of China.

References

Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. (2005). *Global competence & national needs: One million Americans studying abroad*. Washington DC.

- Belyavina, R. (2013). *U.S. students in China: Meeting the goal of the 100,000 Strong Initiative*. New York : Insitute of Intnerantional Education .
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied psychology*, 46(1), 5-34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- CEA Global Education . (2011, September 6). *Top 10 reasons to study abroad*. Retrieved from CEA Study Abroad Programs : <http://www.ceastudyabroadblog.com/2007/09/top-10-reasons-to-study-abroad.html>
- Consulate General of the United States. (2012, May 4). *Hong Kong and Macau* . Retrieved from Third U.S.-China Consultation on People-to-People Exchange: http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/uscn_state_2012050410.html
- Doyle, S., Gendall, P., Meyer, L., Hoek, J., Tait, C., Lynanne, M., & Looyparg, A. (2009). An investigation of factors associated with student participation in study abroad . *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(5).
- Dwyer, M., & Peters, C. (2000). *The Benefits of Study Abroad*.
- English, A. S., Zeng, Z. J., & Ma, J. H. (2015). The stress of studying in China: primary and secondary coping interaction effects. *Springer Plus*, 4(1), 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40064-015-1540-3>
- EU-China Policy Dialogues Support Facility . (2013, July 2013). *Acitivity 5: 1st Meeting of the EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchange (HEPCE)*.
- EU students.Eu. (2012). *Why is it important to learn Chinese?* Retrieved from EU Students: <http://www.eu-student.eu/why-is-it-important-to-learn-chinese/>
- Goodman, A. (2011). U.S.-China Student Exchange. *IIE Passport Study Abroad in China*, 5.
- Goel, L., De Jong, P., & Schnusenberg, O. (2010). Toward a comprehensive framework of study abroad intentions and behaviors. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 21, 248–265. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08975930.2010.526011>
- Henock, M. (2012). China Rolls Out the Welcome Mat for Foreign Students . *Chronicles in Higher Education* .
- Hui, L. (2013). *China, EU hold first-ever dialogue on higher education*. Retrieved from English. News. CN: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/culture/201304/26/c_12463047.htm
- Institute of International Education. (2011). *IEE Passport to China*.
- Jolibert, A., & Baumgartner, G. (1997). Values, motivations and personal goals: Revisited. *Psychology and Marketing*, 14(7), 675-688. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6793\(199710\)14:7<675::AID-MAR3>3.0.CO;2-D](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199710)14:7<675::AID-MAR3>3.0.CO;2-D)
- Kulacki, G. (2012). *Area Studies and Study Abroad: The Chinese Experience*. Retrieved from Frontiers: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad: <http://www.frontiersjournal.com/verify.cfm>
- Life Long Learning Programme. (2011). *Erasmus – Facts, figures & trends: The European Union support for student and staff*. Belgium: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutat, G. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513540210418403>
- McGiffert, C. (2011). 100,000 Strong: Building Strategic Trust in U.S.- Chin Relations through Education. *IIE Passport:Study Abroad in China*, 5-6.
- Ministry of Foriegn Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2012, May 4). Retrieved from Remarks by State Councilor Liu Yandong at the Third Meeting of the China-US High Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t932990.shtml>
- Ogden, A. (2006). *NAFSA.org*. Retrieved from Why Study Aroad: Highlighting reaons for non traditional destinations : http://www.nafsa.org/_file/_why_study_abroad_reasons.pdf
- Riviera, G. S. (2013). Pollution in China. *World Affairs*, 176(1), 43-50.
- Salisbury, M., Umbach, P., & Paulsen, M. (2009). Going Global: Understanding the Choice Process. *Research in Higher Education*, 119-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-008-9111-x>
- Sánchez, C., Fornerino, M., & Zhang, M. (2006). Motivations and Intent to Study Abroad Among U.S., French and Chinese Students . *Journal of Teaching International Business*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J066v18n01_03
- Smith, D., & Mityr, D. (2008). Benefits of Study Abroad and Creating Opportunities:The Case for Short-Term Programs. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching*.

- The Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange. (2012). *Open Doors 2012: International student enrollment in U.S., number of Americans studying abroad, both at record highs*. Retrieved 10 10, 2013, from http://www.alliance-exchange.org/policy_monitor/11/13/2012/open-doors-2012-international-student-enrollment-us-number-americans-study
- U.S. Department of State. (2012, May 4). 100,000 Strong Initiative fact sheet. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189305.htm>
- Xinyu, Y. (2011). Study in China: A World of Opportunity. *IIE Passport: Study Abroad in China*, 7-8.

Footnotes

The 100,000 Strong Initiative was announced on November 2009, by President Obama as an initiative to increase the number and diversity of Americans studying in China to aid the People-to-People Exchange and the foster mutual understanding between the citizens of the U.S. and China (Belyavina, 2013).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).