

Stay or Go Back? The Satisfaction and Motivations of Chinese Students Studying Abroad

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How to cite this article: Xinzhe, X., Valdivia-Vizarreta, P., Silva-Ríos, C., Villaseñor, K. (2023). Stay or Go Back? The Satisfaction and Motivations of Chinese Students Studying Abroad. *Revista Digital de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria*, 17(1), e1662. <https://doi.org/10.19083/ridu.2023.1662>

Received: 12/07/2022. **Revised:** 19/07/2022. **Accepted:** 08/24/2022. **Published:** 15/01/23.

Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of the study was to identify motivations for leaving and returning to the country of origin and satisfaction as factors associated with the decision-making to study abroad in a sample of Chinese students. The sample consisted of 190 Chinese students studying in western countries. A questionnaire was developed and administered. The answers to the questionnaire offered extensive information on the push & pull factors associated with the motivations to leave and return and satisfaction with the studies. The questionnaire also gathered sociodemographic information. The results provide a detailed understanding of the goals and needs of Chinese international students, conditioned by cultural, economic, educational, political, and equality factors. The main factors for Chinese students to decide whether to study abroad or return to China are cultural ones. The questionnaire may be of interest to universities and governments that wish to know the positive evaluations of the policies on the mobility of Chinese students abroad.

Keywords: student mobility; international university; higher education; motivation for studies; Chinese student.

¿Quedarse o Regresar? La Satisfacción y Motivaciones de Estudiantes Chinos que Estudian en el Extranjero

Resumen

Introducción: el incremento de estudiantes universitarios chinos en el extranjero es un fenómeno que está despertando el interés de cada vez más universidades en todo el mundo. **Objetivo:** identificar las motivaciones para abandonar y regresar al país de origen y la satisfacción como factores asociados a la decisión de estudiar en el extranjero en una muestra de estudiantes chinos. **Método:** una muestra conformada por 190 estudiantes chinos que estudiaban en países occidentales. Se elaboró y administró un cuestionario. Las respuestas al cuestionario ofrecieron amplia información sobre los factores *push & pull* asociados a las motivaciones para irse y volver y a la satisfacción con los estudios. El cuestionario también recoge información sociodemográfica. **Resultados:** proporcionan una comprensión detallada de los objetivos y necesidades de los estudiantes

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internacionales chinos, limitados por factores culturales, económicos, educativos, políticos y de igualdad. **Discusión:** los principales factores para que los estudiantes chinos decidan quedarse en el extranjero o regresar a China son de naturaleza cultural. El cuestionario puede ser de interés para las universidades y los gobiernos que deseen conocer las valoraciones positivas de las políticas de movilidad de los estudiantes chinos en el extranjero.

Palabras clave: movilidad estudiantil; universidad internacional; enseñanza superior; motivación; estudiante internacional.

Introduction

In a globalizing education, it is becoming increasingly popular for students to pursue higher education studies abroad (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). On the one hand, internationalization has become an institutional imperative for universities around the world (Jones & Killick, 2013), and, on the other hand, people not only aim to study, but also to experience a way of life (Luchilo, 2006). The reasons for student mobility are diverse, for example personal interests and abilities, family finances, politics, and even sociocultural and ideological factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). International mobility is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon, with a wide and varied web of interpretations (Herrera Rubalcaba & Arjona Garrido, 2020).

In general, students who leave their home country to study abroad are classified as international students (IS) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2014). Specifically, in China, to be considered an IS it's required to have studied abroad for more than one academic year and to have a formal education degree (Du, 2016).

The number of ISs increased from two million in 1998 to 5.3 million in 2017 (OECD, 2019). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019), more than 100 countries accept Chinese ISs. In 2018, there were 703,500 Chinese students worldwide.

This rapid growth motivates the interest of this study, as it is important for universities to know the motivations for leaving, the motivations for returning to China or not, as well as the satisfaction of studying abroad. In addition to the results, we hope to provide a tool to understand the experience and motivations of Chinese ISs and thus offer continuous improvements.

Motivations for Studying Abroad

These can be diverse, ranging from personal circumstances, the socioeconomic and political situation in the countries of origin and destination, life-stage planning, etc. (Li et al., 2020). This study takes as a reference the Push & Pull model, proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), which is the most widely used to analyze IS mobility motivation. This model analyzes the factors from two perspectives: the driving forces, such as economic and social factors in the home country, and the attracting forces, such as the reputation and quality of universities in the host country.

For Gbollie and Gong (2020) the Push & Pull model should analyze motivation and attraction in the countries of origin and destination from both an endogenous and exogenous perspective. Regarding endogenous factors, there traditionally stands out the perception of ISs as precursor immigrants who try to adapt as best as possible to the host society. For those students who do not intend to emigrate, studying abroad is a desirable tool for their personal growth. On the other hand, the evolution of the global market has allowed ISs to be perceived as highly competitive prospects, i.e., as people who possess better intercultural communication skills and a better understanding of foreign markets (Bermúdez, 2015; Center for China & Globalization, 2018).

Another endogenous perspective on mobility focuses on upper middle-class families, who value the possibilities of mobility as a trip that enriches their children's life experiences and allows them to try different cultures. There are also ISs hoping to reinforce their political aspirations by studying abroad. Some Chinese students believe that studying abroad will increase China's influence in the world and thereby change prejudices toward

China (Zheng, 2010). On the other hand, the Chinese government has also encouraged more young people to study abroad to improve State capacity through knowledge transfer (Mok et al., 2021).

Exogenous reasons include, first, the scarcity and unequal distribution of resources for higher education (UNESCO, 2019). In China, there are only 42 universities that are in the QS National University Rankings. Each year, less than 2.5% of Chinese students gain access to these universities considered to be the best. This has resulted in a large number of families willing paying for their children to study abroad in hopes that they will have a top-quality higher education (Gbollie & Gong, 2020). Second, there is bilingual education, meaning that many countries, whose official language is not English, offer courses in that language at their universities to attract more ISs (UNESCO, 2019). Third, the existing colonial relationship between countries is leveraged to increase communication and international mobility, meaning the affinity in terms of culture, language, and history between the colonies and the West foster cooperation, especially academic and interinstitutional relations (Camino Esturo, 2017).

Fourth, the economic benefits that ISs bring have led universities in other countries to develop various projects to attract them (Li F. et al., 2020). For example, the United States, England, and Australia stand out, as they generate huge economic profits from the fees paid by ISs, becoming one of their largest industries (UNESCO, 2019). Among other attraction strategies, some universities cooperate in establishing bilateral institutions in other countries by offering specific visas to ISs to help them find a job.

Factors Associated with the Return or Non-Return of International Students

The factors associated with the return or non-return of international students can be classified into five categories:

- a. *Economic factor.* International mobility for education purposes is essentially an act of intellectual capital exchange (Li F. et al., 2020). ISs want to improve their lives by developing their linguistic, intercultural, and academic skills. Therefore, the

possibility of improving their economic situation is an important criterion when making the decision. This is reinforced by global migration trends. It has been shown that countries with more stable and prosperous societies, higher welfare, better education, and good health care are more attractive for ISs (Dao et al., 2021). However, when there is an economic crisis, foreign students, researchers, and academics may prefer to return to their home countries (Herrera Rubalcaba & Garrido, 2020).

- b. *Political factor.* Immigration policies (Gbollie & Gong, 2020) are strongly associated with ISs' decisions to return or not, and changes depend on the ruling party at the time (Riaño et al., 2018). The United States, as the world's largest immigration country, has elaborate immigration policies that allow the best ISs to stay and work in the United States legally. In contrast, England, which attracts ISs due to the excellent quality of its higher education, has a strict immigration policy that makes these students decide to return home or go to other countries (Riaño et al., 2018). At the same time, China, as a home country, also has policies to motivate ISs to return. For example, China's Thousand Talents Program has recruited more than 8,000 scholars from privileged universities between 2008 and 2017 (Li W. et al., 2020).
- c. *Cultural factor.* There are two prevailing analysis approaches. The first is the mobility within the EU based on the Erasmus program, often thought of as a long stay in other countries rather than a study trip per se (De Wit, 2010). The second refers to migration. From the perspective of international study, the student goes through several phases in the migration process (Li W. et al., 2020). According to this perspective, if ISs decide to stay in the destination country or even migrate it means that they have to leave the friendly university environment and integrate into the local culture. Such a decision includes adopting the customs and ways of thinking of the destination country and even building a new identity while

experiencing a loss of identity from the home country (Li F. et al., 2020). Education, wages, opportunities, and a better lifestyle are factors that drive highly educated people to emigrate from China (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Method

A questionnaire was developed to identify the motivations and other factors associated with the decision-making of international students from China studying in Western countries with emphasis on two moments: departure from and return to China, as well as the satisfaction of its students.

Design

A non-experimental, cross-sectional, quantitative research design with correlational scope was used.

Instrument

The questionnaire's theoretical validity relies on the contributions of Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), Cao et al. (2016), Gbollie, & Gong (2020), Li et al. (2020), and Liu et al. (2021). It was then validated through pilot testing using the cognitive interview technique (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004) with 10 Chinese students of a master's program in education research at a Spanish university.

The questionnaire has 17 items; nine single-choice items, five multiple-choice items, and three self-assessment items with Likert scales (Annex 1). The items are distributed in four blocks: 1) Sociodemographic information that allows us to observe the composition of the Chinese international student community and that also constitutes a classification criterion for further cross-sectional analysis. 2) Motivations for studying abroad and factors associated with country and university selections. 3) Satisfaction with the study abroad experience. 4) Factors for return or non-return.

Each section has "another" option, so that if the close-ended questions do not match, each respondent can include their answer.

Satisfaction with the study abroad experience

is the factor with the most questions. The 10 questions are oriented to the study abroad experience, the quality and efficiency of the course, safety and culture, prevention of COVID, self-assessment of benefits, and overall satisfaction with their experience.

Participant

The selection criteria for the non-probabilistic sample were: 1) students who had studied or were studying in higher education programs abroad after 2010. 2) Students who have studied abroad in the last 10 years, given that the motivation to study abroad is closely associated with the circumstances of the time. 3) Students whose destination are countries in Europe, North America, and Oceania, which are called Western countries in China.

Based on these criteria, 31 subjects were excluded because they were studying in non-Western countries (15 in Japan, 1 in South Korea, 8 in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and 7 in Singapore) and 10 subjects, during the validation phase. Finally, 190 of the 231 completed questionnaires were analyzed.

Of the 190 responses, 83.7% of respondents were female. About the country of destination, 33% of the respondent's study in the United States, 20% in the United Kingdom, 12% in Australia, and 11% in Canada, that is, 76% of the respondent's study in Anglophone countries, indicating that Anglophone countries are the preferred destinations for Chinese students.

From the total, 90% of students are self-financed. The rest receive public funding, such as scholarships from the Chinese Scholarship Council or university scholarships.

On the level of studies, 88 of the respondents (46%) were undergraduate students, 82 (44%) were master's students, 14 were doctoral students (7%), and 6 were language students (3%).

With respect to length of stay, it was observed that the majority of respondents (62.1%) study abroad for less than three years. Since many of the respondents have not yet completed their studies abroad, this data is insufficient to determine the average length of stay.

Procedures

In accordance with the provisions of the Ethics Committee of our university, informed consent was requested from each participant for data protection and analysis, and the anonymity of the participants was maintained.

Participants were invited to participate on the Chinese public forum platform *Douban*, which has more than 55 million users and a wide acceptance among Chinese youth.

The questionnaire was conducted between April and June 2020 on the Chinese electronic questionnaire platform *Tencent Form*.

All data were imported into Microsoft Excel for coding and analyzed with SPSS 24.0. The Chi-square test was applied to contrast the observed frequencies with the expected frequencies according to the null hypothesis. The Kruskal Wallis test, a nonparametric one-factor analysis of variance test, was also used to detect differences in the distribution location.

Results

Sociodemographic information was analyzed descriptively, and the five variables were gender, country of destination, form of financing, educational level, and duration of stay abroad.

Motivations

The major motivation for Chinese ISs to study abroad is to broaden their personal and educational experiences. Descriptive analysis (Figure 1) indicates that 67.6% of the respondents acknowledge that they study abroad to broaden their international horizons. The second motivation is to receive high quality education (55.9%). The third motivation, “to enrich life experience,” was selected by 88 respondents (49.2%). The fourth motivation was “to avoid the pressure of the Chinese university entrance examination (*Gaokao*),” selected by 64 respondents (35.8%).

Figure 1 also shows that 26.3% of respondents intend to migrate, a relatively low percentage because mobility for the purpose of education is considered a precursor to migration ([Bermudez, 2015](#)).

When we talk about the criteria for the selection of the country of study, the quality of education is the most selected factor (Figure 2). This criterion was chosen by 75.8% of the respondents. This concern for the quality of education is also reflected in the criteria for choosing the university. Chinese students prefer universities that have a high world rank, which they consider to be evidence of the educational quality of the university, and thus of its training capacity. In addition to this factor, these students

Figure 1.
Motivation to Study Abroad

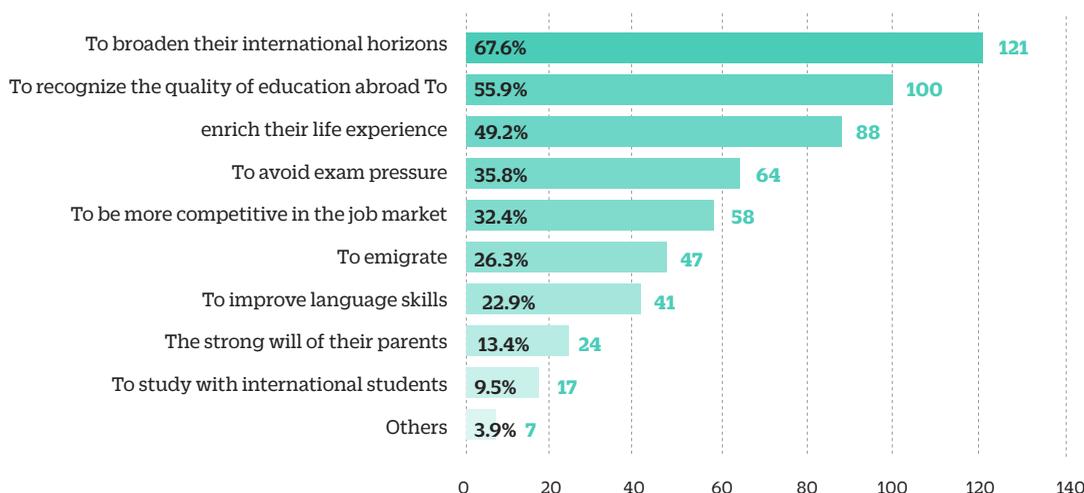
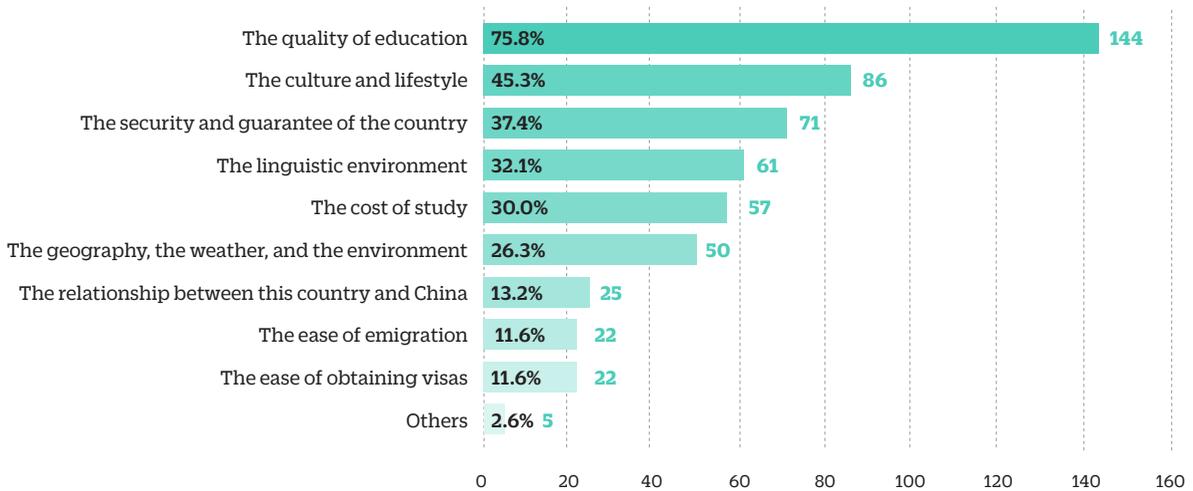


Figure 2.
Criteria for Selecting the Country of Destination



pay much attention to the quality of life abroad.

When choosing a destination, 45.3% of respondents considered the culture and lifestyle of the host country as the main criterion, while 37.4% selected the safety of that country. This emphasis on local quality of life is also reflected in the choice of university. Chinese students are very concerned about the location of the university because they want to live in a convenient and safe environment. Among the respondents, 30% considered the cost of studying abroad, which represents a significant expense even for upper-middle class families.

Satisfaction

Overall, ISs are satisfied after the self-assessment of their study abroad experience. The mean of Chinese students' satisfaction about their study abroad experiences is 3.88, and the mode is 4 (Figure 3). That is, more than half of the respondents are satisfied with their experiences abroad and only six respondents are dissatisfied with their studies.

The results of the various questions in that dimension reflect that 44.4% of respondents would recommend studying abroad and that 49.6% intended to continue studying abroad or to return abroad in the future.

More than half of the students consider that they have achieved their goal of studying abroad or have met their expectations. However, in the self-evaluation of the efficiency of their study abroad, 11.6% gave a negative rating to the study abroad experience.

Return Motivations

The decision to return or not after finishing their studies abroad is also a very important part of the international student mobility research. Students who have returned and want to return represent 51.6%, while 30% of the respondents have stayed abroad or are preparing to stay—a rather high percentage considering that 18.4% have not yet made a decision in this regard.

Through nonparametric analysis, we can analyze whether sociodemographic variables (gender, destination country, education level, time abroad, and satisfaction) are associated with Chinese students' decision to return to their home country.

As shown in Table 1, the chi-square value of the variables of gender (0.04), country of destination (0.02), and duration of stay of ISs abroad (0.01) are lower than the p-value (0.05), i.e., these three variables are associated with ISs' decision to return.

Figure 3.
Satisfaction with the Study Abroad Experience

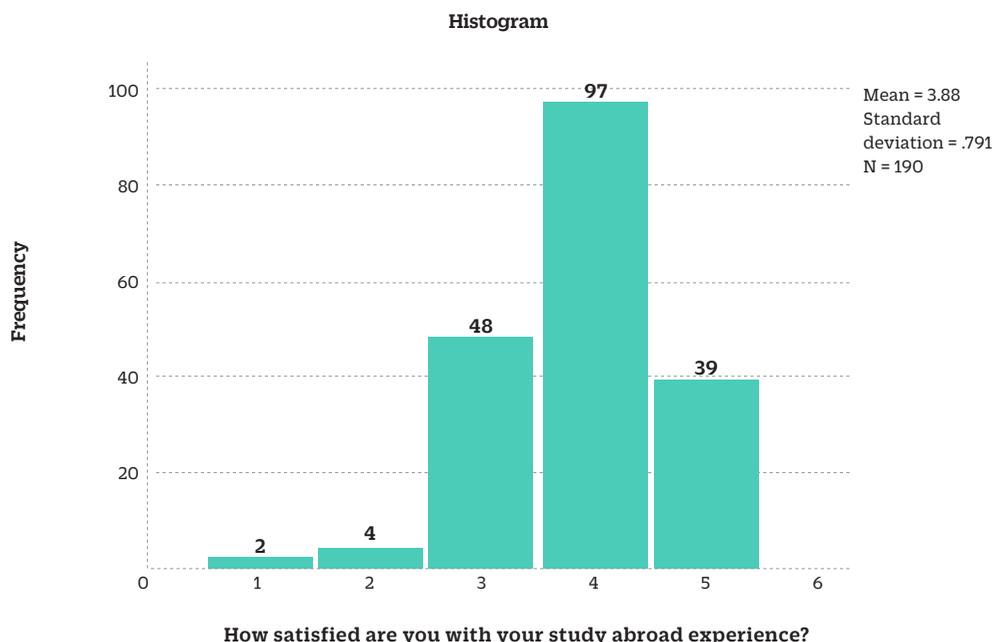


Table 1.
Decision to Return according to Gender, Country of Destination, and Length of Stay Variables

| | Chi-square test | | | |
|-------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| | Gender | Country of destination | Education level | Time |
| Value | 6.415 | abroad | 11.341 | 16.889 |
| df | 2 | 18 | 6 | 6 |
| | 0.040 | 0.019 | 0.078 | 0.010 |

More specifically, on the gender variable, female Chinese students are more willing to stay abroad while male students are more willing to return to China. On the destination country variable, students studying in the United States and Canada have more intention to stay, unlike those studying in European countries, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, who prefer to return to China. On the length of stay of ISs abroad, the longer they live abroad, the more likely they are to stay.

The chi-square value of education level is 0.08, which slightly exceeds the p-value (0.05). In this

sense, the variable of education level and mobility after graduation are two independent variables—education level is not significantly associated with mobility once studies abroad are finished.

The last one is the satisfaction variable, which served as a scale variable and where the T-student test was used. After calculating the Kruskal Wallis test (10.555), we obtained a value of 0.005 ($p < 0.05$), which means that the satisfaction variable and the students' mobility variable are dependent on each other. That is, the higher the satisfaction, the more likely they are to stay abroad.

Figure 5.
Motivations for Returning to China

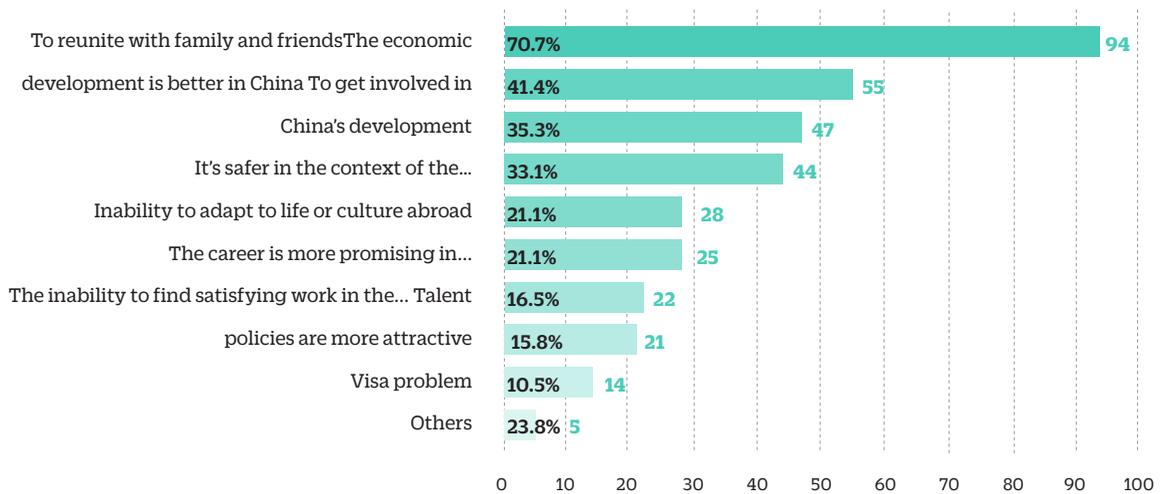
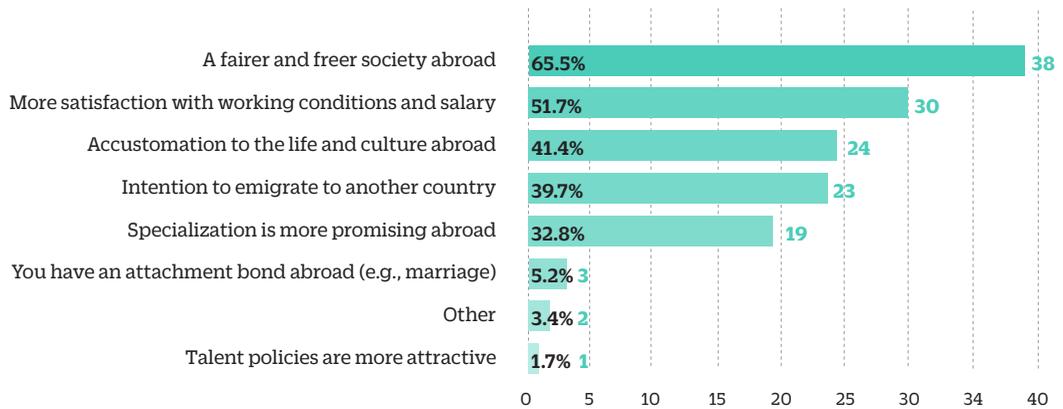


Figure 6.
Motivations for Staying Abroad



Therefore, the data collected suggest that gender, destination country, length of stay abroad, and satisfaction with their experience abroad may be factors strongly associated with Chinese students' mobility.

Having described the factors associated with ISs decisions, we can analyze the motivations of those who decide to stay or return. In total 57.3% of respondents intend to return to China. For them (Figure 5), the biggest motivation is to reunite with their family and close friends

(Over 70%). The second motivation for returning, chosen by 41.4%, is the believe that the Chinese economy is developing better. Finally, 35.3% mentioned that they are returning to collaborate with China's development while 33.1% will return because they consider China to be a safer context in the face of COVID-19.

Figure 6 analyzes the responses of ISs who plan to stay abroad. The first motivation for staying abroad is that Western countries have fairer, freer, and more democratic societies.

65.5% of respondents expressed a preference for Western society and ideology. After the factor of freedom and fairness of the society, 51.7% of the respondents stayed abroad because of the working conditions and wages, and to avoid the 996-work policy in China (working 12 hours a day and 6 days a week). In addition, 41.4% of the respondents admit to already being used to the lifestyle abroad while 39.7% of the participants stayed abroad due to the desire to emigrate to another country. Only 5.2% of the respondents stayed abroad because they had developed an attachment bond with a foreigner.

Discussion

The instrument allowed the identification of motivations and satisfaction as factors associated with the decision-making of ISs from China studying in Western countries and is useful for all those universities and governments that have or wish to have Chinese students. The responses collected through the questionnaire allows for a detailed analysis of the relationship of openness and the ties that are being built between China and the West through the mobility of ISs. Each factor is analyzed below.

The first factor motivating students' departure is the importance of families in the decision making and their commitment to invest in their children's studies abroad. For [Liu et al. \(2021\)](#), the rapid growth in the number of Chinese ISs is since most of them are funded by their families. In that line, we can infer that there are more and more high-income families in China close to the average level of Western countries. Therefore, these families are able and willing to pay for their children to study abroad ([Li W. et al., 2020](#)). Chinese culture greatly values education. In China, salary and career advancement are closely related to one's degree. Learning ability is the most important competence for Chinese people, and the only criterion for evaluating it is the professional degree ([Stewart, 2017](#)). Therefore, parents are willing to invest a lot of money and effort for their children to obtain a degree from a recognized institution.

An interesting result is that the ratio of Chinese women who study abroad is higher. Basically, we can recognize the importance that the families give to the education of daughters. Perhaps this is due to the negative work environment for women in China that forces them to seek better education and obtain a college degree ([Zhang & Tang, 2021](#)).

The second motivating factor for Chinese ISs is going to Anglophone countries ([Ma, 2020](#)). This result is consistent with data from UNESCO, where the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada are the most popular destinations for Chinese students. They not only refer to the facilities and gratuity of higher education in these countries, but also to the fact that they have developed attractive policies for that industry. These countries exhibit their prestige, quality, and infrastructure in higher education to attract the best students from all over the world ([Gbollié & Gong, 2020](#)), and the revenue generated by these ISs and their intellectual capital can help these universities and the country keep moving forward. This model has become a positive development cycle. However, both the results of this research and the data provided by UNESCO show that the proportion of students in English-speaking countries has been decreasing year by year and that the choice of destination among Chinese students has diversified (UNESCO, 2019; [Hou et al., 2020](#)). Whether for the benefit of ISs or to improve global communication and understanding, it is expected that there will be more countries participating in the internationalization of higher education, although the established higher education of Anglo-Saxon countries is not going to disappear as an attractive alternative in the short term.

The analysis of the motivation to leave of Chinese ISs brings a new perspective to mobility research. Chinese students are very focused on the outcome of their experience, understood as obtaining a good degree from a prestigious university ([Li S., 2020](#)). In this sense, they do not have a strong desire to migrate, but to study abroad.

All of the research reviewed and our findings demonstrate that the motivation to study abroad and the criteria for selecting the destination country

are important when deciding where to study.

Countries with more educational resources and higher ranked universities are preferred by Chinese students.

The advantages of studying abroad can be summarized in four prominent motivations. The first is multiculturalism, or rather, experiencing the world. With the expansion of globalization, both China and Western countries demand people with international perspectives and intercultural communication skills (Ma, 2020). In addition, different cultures and lifestyles also offer ISs more experiences. Although receiving high-quality education is very important to Chinese students, they are still more inclined to broaden their horizons. Many of these students want to study abroad to enrich their life experience. They see studying abroad to directly be in touch with and experience the world, and, in this process, they experience personal growth and satisfaction. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also mention this situation, although they focus on the interest in Western culture and on seeing the student as a precursor to emigration.

However, given the little intention of Chinese students to emigrate (Guo & Guo, 2016), we understand this inclination as a curiosity fueled by globalization and multiculturalism. That is to say that these students have an open attitude and are interested in different cultures, not necessarily driven by the purpose of emigration, but rather by the idea of a different way of life leading to personal empowerment.

The second motivation is education. As mentioned, the distribution of educational resources is uneven around the world, with Western countries having more and better resources for higher education (Li, S. et al., 2020). Considering China's selective education system, only a very small number of students can enter university, especially prestigious ones. But overseas, Chinese students have more possibility of accessing quality universities. Similar to Vision Oversea's data (2020), the majority of those who go abroad pursue graduate education, especially master's degrees.

When analyzing satisfaction, the self-assessment result also shows that Chinese ISs

highly recognize the value of studying abroad. Furthermore, the quality of higher education in Western countries is highly regarded in China. Western universities are considered to have a high-quality teaching system with a strong academic foundation. In particular, it graduates from a QS Ranking university are considered to have a strong ability to learn and research (Ma, 2020). It should be said that the pressure of the entrance examination is relatively low in Western countries. Studying abroad has also become a way for many Chinese students to escape the brutal domestic selection process (Stewart, 2017).

Regarding return, most Chinese ISs who make the decision to return to China do so because of attachment to their family, their friends, and the lifestyle. Gatherings and family constitute a very important core of meaning in Chinese culture. As most Chinese ISs of this generation are only children, the dependency between children and parents is even stronger (Stewart, 2017; Li, W. et al., 2020). There are also the politically driven motivations of some ISs for returning to China. These students want to acquire advanced knowledge, technologies, and ideas from the West with the intention of returning and contributing to China's development.

The main motivation for ISs who decide to stay abroad is also cultural. Most of those who make this decision are attracted to the democratic, liberal, and egalitarian Western society. Although there is no absolute superiority or inferiority of different political and social systems, we must recognize that Western countries respect individual and women's human rights more than China (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). In addition, the longer an international student lives and studies abroad, the more likely they are to stay. This is largely due to the fact that the more time you live abroad, the more you integrate and adapt to the foreign society and the more you become accustomed to the Western culture and way of life.

Other reasons are the unequal distribution of educational resources and gender inequality that incline Chinese students, especially women, to go abroad. These are also related to the return to the home country. Women are more likely to

stay in the West because they experience very unfair treatment in China. Secondly, China must improve working conditions. We are not only referring to salary and job stability, but also to the organizational climate. Compared to Western countries, in China, there are long working hours, few vacations and high work pressure (BBC World, 2019).

According to Iqbak et al. (2021), education, wages, more opportunities, and a better lifestyle are the factors that determine why highly educated people migrate from China. The experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic of Chinese students in the various countries have revolve around issues such as security concerns, the importance of the English language, the intersectionality of complex policies and decision-making, and unexpected support and benefits (Xu et al., 2021). In fact, in the short term, the number of new international students enrolled may decrease significantly in the following years due to travel restrictions, political conflicts, and economic tensions.

This crisis has also had a significant impact on the decisions of ISs to either accelerate their return to China for the stability and security of being at home, to stay abroad to avoid the excessive work pressure in China, or to put their enrollment abroad on hold. The popular 996 work schedule, introduced by Jack Ma, has caused many young students to revolt as they consider the 6-day-a-week, 12-hour-a-day schedule a violation of human rights (BBC World, 2019).

With the globalization and internalization of China's education and economic development, more and more Chinese students are going abroad for higher education. ISs choose to go abroad out of interest in Western culture, due to the prestige of universities, and to broaden their horizons. When they finish their studies, they choose to return to China and live in a culture and social model that recognizes prestige above all.

On the one hand, the difference in the quality of life in China and Western countries is narrowing, so economic factors are not significantly associated with the decision of Chinese ISs to stay or return.

The educational factor plays an important role in the departure of ISs but has less impact on the

return of students after completing their studies abroad. Finally, the political factor is particularly relevant, as many of those who leave, and return do so because they want to contribute to China's progress through science and technology.

Non-returners argue that there are problems in China that need to be addressed, for example, those related to women's working and living environments.

One limitation of the study is that the sample size is small, and, therefore, there is a risk of bias in the results. On the other hand, the sample size reduces the possibility of validation of the statistically calculated results.

However, the questionnaire provides extensive information and analysis of push & pull factors and motivation in Chinese students' mobility, providing answers to the theoretical underpinning (Gbolli & Gong, 2020). This questionnaire can be supplemented with interviews to obtain answers to negative rating on the efficiency of their experience abroad, for example.

We believe that unequal gender composition is a topic that requires further study, just as the voice of local students. To further understand this matter, we suggest using this instrument with doctoral students to contrast the results with the findings of Yang et al. (2018) and Li, S. et al. (2020) in order to learn whether COVID-19 has changed the results of motivational factors in Chinese international students.

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Annex 1

| Dimension | Indicator/variable | Question | Type of question | Categories |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Personal information | 1. Gender | What is your gender? | Classification question | Man Woman |
| | 2. Country of destination | What is your country of destination? | Classification question | Country database |
| | 3. Financing model | Who pays the cost of studying abroad? | Classification question | Public financing Self-financed |
| | 4. Specialization | What is your field of study? | Relief question | OECD Grade Database |
| | 5. Educational level | What is the highest degree you have earned (including enrollment)? | Classification question | Undergraduate |
| | | | | Graduate |
| | | | | Master's Degree |
| | | | | Doctoral Degree |
| | 6. Time abroad | How long has you been living and studying abroad? | Classification and filter question | Less than one year |
| | | | | 1-3 years |
| 3-5 years | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 6.1 Impact of COVID | Has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your plans for study abroad? | Classification question | Yes | |
| | | | No | |
| | | | Perhaps | |
| 6.2 Impact of COVID | What are its impacts? | Direct question | I have postponed my study plan | |
| | | | I have changed the country of destination | |
| | | | I have changed university | |
| | | | I stay in China and do online classes | |
| Motivations | 7. Motivations for studying abroad | What are your motivations for study abroad? | Direct/multiple choice question | To broaden international horizons |
| | | | | To be more competitive in the labor market |
| | | | | To increase language capacity |
| | | | | To avoid examination pressure in China |
| | | | | Recognition of the quality of education abroad |
| | | | | To enrich life experience |
| | | | | To prepare for emigration |
| | | | | Strong parental intent |
| | | | | To study at a partner university, or the university offers international courses |
| | | | | Others |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Motivations | 8. Factors influencing the choice of country of destination | What factors influence your choice of international study destination? | Direct/multiple choice question | The quality of education The cost of the study The country's security and guarantee The relationship with China Culture and lifestyle Ease of obtaining a visa Geography, climate, and environment Linguistic environment If it is possible to work part-time Others |
| | 9. Factors influencing university choice | What factors influence your choice of university? | ect/multiple choice question | The overall QS rank The rank of Specialty The cost of tuition Admission requirements University facilities Recommendation from others (e.g., agency or friends) The quality of the course If there is a scholarship or funding The location of the University Others |
| Satisfaction with study abroad | 10. Experience of study abroad | In general, how satisfied are you with your study abroad experience? | Relief question | Totally dissatisfied Not very satisfied Neutral Very satisfied Extremely satisfied |
| | 11.1 Course quality | How satisfied are you with the quality of the course? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied Not very satisfied Neutral Very satisfied Extremely satisfied |
| | 11.2 Course efficiency | How satisfied are you with the course efficiency? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied Not very satisfied Neutral Very satisfied Extremely satisfied |
| | 11.3 Safety | How satisfied are you with the security when studying abroad? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied Not very satisfied Neutral Very satisfied Extremely satisfied |
| | 11.4 Culture | How satisfied are you with the culture and the gastronomy? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied Not very satisfied Neutral Very satisfied Extremely satisfied |

**Stay or Go Back? The Satisfaction and Motivations
of Chinese Students Studying Abroad**

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Satisfaction with study abroad | 11.5 COVID prevention | How satisfied are you with COVID-19 prevention? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied |
| | | | | Not very satisfied |
| | | | | Neutral |
| | | | | Very satisfied |
| | | | | Extremely satisfied |
| | 12.1 Self-assessment of benefits | Do the benefits of your study abroad meet your expectations? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied |
| | | | | Not very satisfied |
| | | | | Neutral |
| | | | | Very satisfied |
| | | | | Extremely satisfied |
| | 12.2 Self-assessment of benefits | Have your study abroad objectives been fulfilled? | Direct questions/ likert | Totally dissatisfied |
| | | | | Not very satisfied |
| | | | | Neutral |
| | | | | Very satisfied |
| | | | | Extremely satisfied |
| | 13.1 Satisfaction with your experience | Would you recommend studying abroad to your friends? | Relief question | Yes |
| | | | No | |
| | | | Perhaps | |
| 13.2 Satisfaction with your experience | Do you intend to stay abroad or to return abroad to study? | Relief question | Yes | |
| | | | No | |
| | | | Perhaps | |
| Return of international students | 14. Situation of the participants | Have you completed your studies abroad? | Filter and classification questions | Yes, I have completed them and returned to China. |
| | | | | Yes, I have completed them and stayed abroad. |
| | | | | Not yet |
| | 15. Answer to the previous question was "no" | When you complete your studies, will you go back to China? | Classification questions | Yes |
| | | | | No |
| | | | | Perhaps |
| | 16. Reasons for returning to China | What factors influence your decision to return? | Direct/multiple choice question | Economic growth is better in China |
| | | | | To reunite with family and friends |
| | | | | The career is more promising in China |
| | | | | Failure to adapt to life or culture abroad |
| | | | | More security in an emergency context |
| | | | | To focus on China's development |
| | | | | Talent policies are more attractive |
| | | | | Inability to find satisfying work abroad |
| | | | | Visa problems |
| | | | | Others |
| 17.Reasons for staying abroad. From the previous filter question. | What factors influence the decision to stay abroad? | Direct/multiple choice question | More satisfaction with working conditions and salaries. | |
| | | | Specialization is more promising abroad | |
| | | | Accustomed to life and culture abroad | |
| | | | Intention to emigrate to another country | |
| | | | Attachment bond abroad (e.g., marriage) | |
| | | | Talent policies are more attractive | |
| | | | Others | |