

Introduction

As international markets grow and change, the volume and patterns of international student mobility have likewise shifted (Fok, 2007; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012; Wei, 2012), particularly as a result of the liberalisation of trade and services (Wei, 2012). Students flows have historically been from ‘East to West’ and from ‘South to North’ (Kuznetsov & Kuznetsova, 2011; Lee, 2014; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2011); that is to say, from the developing economies to the more ‘established powerhouses’ of higher education (most commonly the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany, and France) (Nachatar Singh, Schapper, & Jack, 2014). Recently this trend has shown signs of waning, with regional centres absorbing many students who may otherwise have followed the established trend (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Choudaha, 2017). This study focuses on two of the most prominent of these areas, namely the Republic of China (ROC, hereafter referred to as ‘Taiwan’) and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR, hereafter referred to as ‘Hong Kong’) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Both of these jurisdictions have expended significant effort and financial resources to improve their higher education system and attract international students. The purpose of this paper is to explore the factors which influence internationally mobile students’ decision-making regarding their choice to study Hong Kong and Taiwan. The study aims to use an inductive process to provide some insight into the following:

1. What are the major motivational factors which pull outwardly-mobile foreign postgraduate students towards pursuing their studies in Hong Kong, or Taiwan?
2. To what extent do these motivational factors overlap between these two jurisdictions?

To begin to address this issue, this paper will conduct a pilot study to explore the factors which influence internationally mobile students’ decision-making regarding their choice to study Hong Kong or Taiwan. As there is no current research which covers this particular area, this study will also add to the existing body of research both regarding these two jurisdictions,

1 but also mobile student decision-making more broadly. The aim is to apply the existing models
2 to this under-studied geographical region to attempt to determine the extent to which the
3 existing factors identified through the literature apply to this context, as well as to uncover any
4 which may not currently have been identified. This information would be crucial to researchers,
5 policymakers, and other stakeholders interested in what motivates students to study in these
6 regions in general, and in these two jurisdictions in particular, and how these influences interact
7 to guide students' decisions. This research has implications not merely for an academic
8 understanding of students' motivation and decision-making, but also for how best to focus
9 efforts related to effectively attracting international students.

10 **Background**

11 Despite their similarities, both Hong Kong and Taiwan are shaped by their unique historical
12 experiences, approaches, and make-up with regards to attracting international students
13 (Jackson, 2014). The most common countries-of-origin within the Taiwanese student
14 population are (in order of size) Malaysia (28.4%), Vietnam (15.8%), Indonesia (10.8%), India
15 (5.2%), and Japan (5.2%) (MOE, 2017), whereas the most common in Hong Kong are South
16 Korea (23.2%), Malaysia (9.4%), India (8.4%), Indonesia (7.4%), Pakistan (3.7%) (UGC,
17 2015). While these two lists may appear similar, the broader patterns of diversity differ
18 somewhat between the two jurisdictions (see Table 1). Both jurisdictions are heavily reliant on
19 Asia for their international student recruitment, although Taiwan appears to be more diversified.
20 This is despite Hong Kong being arguably geographically better situated, being between South-
21 East Asia and East Asia, as well as being closer to India, which is currently the second largest
22 global source of outbound students (UNESCO, 2015).

Table 1 - Breakdown of non-local student population by continent, 2014/15
(by headcount, as and as a percentage of the non-Chinese, international student population)

	Hong Kong ¹	Taiwan ²
Africa	86 (2.43%)	769 (4.32%)

Asia	2,830 (79.94%)	14,327 (80.54%)
Central & South America	35 (0.99%)	1,194 (6.71%)
Europe	406 (11.47%)	721 (4.05%)
North America[#]	160 (4.52%)	512 (2.88%)
Oceania	23 (0.65%)	265 (1.49%)

[#] Defined by the Hong Kong University Grants Committee as comprising the United States and Canada only, all others to be included in 'Central & South America'

¹ (University Grants Committee, 2015)

² (Ministry of Education, 2017)

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Hong Kong

3 Internationalisation has been a core component of the Hong Kong higher education system
4 since its establishment, although its meaning and focus have changed significantly. During the
5 British colonial period (1843-1997), higher education served as a way to 'anglicise' the local
6 population (Fok, 2007). More recently, the Hong Kong government has identified attracting
7 'high quality' foreign talent, particularly in research, as one of the most important goals of its
8 higher education policy, in keeping with the territory's aim of becoming an 'education hub'
9 (Cheng et al., 2009; Cheung, 2012; Legislative Council Panel on Education, 2014; University
10 Grants Committee (UGC), 2010), and utilise internationalisation to improve local institutional
11 quality (Fok, 2007). At present however, although Hong Kong is host to a relatively large
12 number of non-local students (the official term used in Hong Kong) the majority are drawn
13 from Mainland China (see Table 1 - University Enrolment Figures).

Table 2 - University Enrolment Figures

2015

Total University Students	International Students (excl. Mainland Chinese)	Mainland Chinese Students
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Hong Kong^[1]	98,842 [#]	3,837 [#]	11,890 [#]
Taiwan^[2]	1,324,019 ^[3]	42,414	9,327
# Includes students in University Grants Committee-funded institutions only [1] (University Grants Committee, 2017) [2] (Ministry of Education, 2018) [3] (Ministry of Education, 2017)			

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Taiwan

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In recent years, the Taiwanese government, through the Ministry of Education (MOE), has increased the focus on global competitiveness improving the quality of education in order to attract both international students and faculty (Chang, Nyeu, & Chang, 2015; Chou & Ching, 2012). Despite this encouragement, the majority of international students, and international-student-oriented programmes, in Taiwan are focused on language education, rather than academe or research (Chou & Ching, 2012). Nevertheless, in 2016, official figures put the number of international students studying in Taiwan at 116,416 (MOE, 2018), with the largest proportion coming from South East Asia (Chou & Ching, 2012; Lee & King, 2016). Recent government policies, as well as several major targeted government initiatives, have increased the emphasis on internationalisation, either directly or through an emphasis on improving institutional performance, competitiveness, or position in international university rankings (Chang et al., 2015; Chou & Ching, 2012; Lau & Lin, 2016; Mok, 2013; UGC, 2016). The result has echoed global higher education trends; namely, the increasing influence of market competition, massification, and decentralisation of control (Chang et al., 2015; Lee, 2016a; Lee, 2016b; Pinheiro, Charles, & Jones, 2015).

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Literature Review

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Student Motivation for Going Abroad

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The paper will use the ‘push-pull’ model outlined by Altbach (1998) and used by Li & Bray (2007) as well as Chou & Ching (2012), in their analysis of the Hong Kong and Macau higher

1 education environments as a basis, and incorporate more recent findings from scholars in the
2 field, to frame the examination of the factors which have influenced the students. The '*push-*
3 *pull*' model refers to the distinction between, and combination of, factors which drive students
4 to study outside of their home country (*push*) and factors which draw students towards a
5 particular host country (*pull*) (Abubakar, Shanka, & Muuka, 2010; Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016;
6 Chen, 2007; Cheng et al., 2009; Lee, 2014; Levatino, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Neill,
7 2010; Wilkins et al., 2011). The influence of these factors on students' decision-making can be
8 further categorised into '*factors influencing student decision to study overseas*', '*knowledge*
9 *and awareness of the host country*', '*recommendations from friends and relatives*', '*cost issues*',
10 '*environment*', and '*social links and geographic proximity*' (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017;
11 Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The *push-pull* model has been identified by scholars as one of the
12 'principle' theoretical models for contextualising and examining international student decision-
13 making (Larbi & Fu. 2017). Use of this model in the contexts of Hong Kong and Taiwan will
14 also go some way towards alleviating the skew towards more traditional centres of higher
15 education, such as the United States, and the United Kingdom (Larbi & Fu. 2017) by applying
16 it to two less well-studied study destinations. Furthermore, the author is not aware of any
17 current research which focuses on these two jurisdictions, and therefore this paper hopes to add
18 some meaningful insight to the existing body of research.

19 Ahmad and Buchanan (2016) argue that, in preceding literature, '*push*' factors have been
20 determined largely by the shortcomings of the students' home market; that there are needs or
21 wants which the home market is unable to fulfil in terms of their higher education (Mazzarol
22 and Soutar, 2002). Once 'pushed', scholars have theorised that internationally mobile students
23 have a tendency to gravitate towards those host environments which are high in terms of
24 development (Kondakci, Bedenlier, & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Nyahoho, 2011; Stein & de
25 Andreotti, 2015; Yemini & Cohen, 2016). There are suggestions, however, that as global
26 differences and patterns of development shift, the established routes of international student

1 mobility will change (Kondakci et al., 2018; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a; Wilkins & Huisman,
 2 2011b).

3 Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) note that the *pull* factors which influence international student
 4 decision-making vary greatly between countries. As high-development, high-skilled
 5 environments, both Hong Kong and Taiwan demonstrate attractive prospects for international
 6 students (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Chang, 2015; Cornell University INSEAD and WIPO,
 7 2018; Kim, 2016; Schwab, 2018). Kondakci, et al (2018) argue that there is a need to determine
 8 the relationship between international student mobility in less-established higher education
 9 destinations and the forces which impact their decision. It is, therefore, necessary to examine
 10 the existing literature and determine the factors which are cited as influencing the decisions of
 11 internationally-mobile students. The *push-pull* model provides a useful framework for
 12 achieving this aim. A literature review was conducted to determine the factors which had been
 13 identified in the literature at the time of the research design by conducting a Boolean search
 14 through a meta-search-engine of 1,417 journal databases. The results were limited to peer-
 15 reviewed texts to which the author had institutional access. Searches were conducted using the
 16 terms “international student”, “decision making”, “Hong Kong”, “Taiwan”, “higher education”,
 17 and “university”. Major works were also found through an examination of the key sources
 18 relied upon by these papers. A summary of the results can be seen in Table 2 - List of
 19 Motivating Factors.

Table 3 - List of Motivating Factors

Decision to study overseas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Cultural experience ^{4, 6} ✎ Desire for international experience ^{2, 4} ✎ Increased earning potential ⁵ ✎ Intention to migrate ^{1, 4, 6} ✎ Language / region - specific study ³ ✎ Political interests ³ ✎ Stepping stone to global career ⁶
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Knowledge and awareness of the host country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Availability of information ⁵ ✎ Degree of personal freedom ⁶ ✎ Law and order ^{2, 6} ✎ Political stability ^{2, 6}
Recommendations from friends and relatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Industry reputation ⁴ ✎ Parents / relatives recommended ^{1, 3, 5, 7} ✎ Reputation of institution ^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6}
Cost issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Availability of scholarships ^{2, 3, 5, 6} ✎ Entry qualifications accepted ^{4, 5} ✎ Established population of overseas students ^{3, 5} ✎ Job opportunities ^{3, 5} ✎ Lower fees ⁵ ✎ Lower cost of living ^{3, 5} ✎ Safe (low crime) environment ^{1, 5, 6}
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Access to international networks / contacts ⁶ ✎ Availability of a particular programme ⁵ ✎ Environmental factors ^{3, 5} ✎ Technological / research infrastructure ^{2, 5, 6}
Social links and geographic proximity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Cultural links with home country ^{3, 5} ✎ Geographic proximity ⁵ ✎ Friends / relatives live there ⁵
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016) 2. (Altbach, 1998) 3. (Chou & Ching, 2012) 4. (Li & Bray, 2007) 5. (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) 6. (Ng, 2012) 7. (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011b) 	

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Methodology

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As this research seeks to add to the existing body of literature on the variety of factors which influence international students' destination choice, a similar research design to those used by previous researchers in the field was selected (Ahmad, Buchanan, & Ahmad, 2016; Nachatar Singh, Schapper, & Jack 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011b). A series of interviews were conducted with international students in both jurisdictions to gather qualitative data on the students' decision-making process. Questions were structured to gather key demographic information, followed by a series of open-ended questions intended to elicit information from

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1 respondents. As has been done in previous studies (Ahmad, Buchanan, & Ahmad, 2016),
2 questions were deliberately broad in order to allow participants to share any and all information
3 they felt was relevant to the subject of the research, such as “What were the most important
4 considerations for you when selecting your course/institution/country of study?” and “Why
5 were these factors important to your decision to study in Hong Kong/Taiwan?” The interviews
6 were conducted exclusively by the author. Ethical approval was granted by the University of
7 Hong Kong’s Faculty of Education’s Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Interview sessions
8 were recorded, and audio records were transcribed into text to allow for accurate codification
9 and analysis. Written notes were also taken during the interview as appropriate.

10 **Sampling**

11 The ‘call for participants’ was disseminated through three channels: official university
12 departments and organisations (such as international student affairs offices), inter-institutional
13 groups (such as the Foundation for International Cooperation in Higher Education of Taiwan
14 (FICHET)), and student-run organisations (such as student unions and international student
15 social groups on social media). A total of 26 institutions were contacted, of which, 12 agreed
16 to disseminate the ‘call for participants’ message to their students. Respondents were able to
17 contact the researcher directly through email, allowing them to ‘opt in’ to participate in the
18 study. Every respondent was asked some pre-screening questions to clarify their suitability to
19 participate, i.e. their nationality, level of study, etc. Students were also sent an Informed
20 Consent Form for their reference. Of those who responded to the original ‘call for participants’,
21 who met the criteria for inclusion in the study, and who agreed to participate after receiving
22 the consent form, none were excluded. The total number of participants for the study was 23;
23 a detailed breakdown can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 4 – Profile of student respondents used in study

Hong Kong

Taiwan

Interviews Conducted	13 May - 2 June, 2015	3 - 9 April, 2015	1
Male	8	6	
Female	4	5	
Average age	30	28.63	
List of Institutions	Public university (1)	Private university (2) Public university (5)	
List of Programmes	Taught Programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education ○ Information Technology in Education ○ Science – Geotechnical Engineering Research Programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Construction Management ○ Dentistry ○ Law ○ Education ○ Arts ○ Real Estate & Construction: Construction Technology Management ○ Policy, Administration and Social Sciences 	Taught Programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Industrial Management ○ Educational Leadership and Development ○ Asia Pacific Studies ○ Education, Leadership and Development ○ International Politics ○ Art History ○ International Human Resource Development ○ Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Masters ○ Asia-Pacific Studies Research Programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clinical Pharmacy ○ Foreign Languages & Literature (Comparative Literature) 	

2 Interview Process

3 Interviews were conducted on or near the participant's campus; the locations of the
4 interviews were determined by the interviewees. After signing the Informed Consent Form,
5 student interactions with the researcher were documented using a digital audio recorder. The
6 interviewer gathered some preliminary demographic information (age, nationality, institution
7 of study, programme of study), although, this information was not included in the data analysis
8 in order to protect participants' anonymity, as has been the case in similar research (Lanford,
9 2016). The interviewer used a series of pre-designed structured questions, as well as further
10 unstructured follow-up questions, to elicit information from respondents regarding their choice

1 of destination of study. Interviews ranged in length from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 12 minutes
2 with an average duration of approximately 32 minutes; variation resulting from the degree and
3 depth of information which students felt willing to share.

4 **Data Analysis**

5 The audio transcripts of the interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher. The
6 texts of the transcripts were read, re-read, and then analysed and overall issues were identified
7 and grouped into themes according to the factors identified through the literature. These themes
8 were then colour-coded and tabulated for each student. Transcripts were then re-reviewed to
9 identify statements made by students indicating factors which influenced students' decision-
10 making, but which had not been classified into any of the categories identified from the
11 literature, and these were also colour-coded by theme and tabulated.

12 **Interviewee Profile**

13 As the research intended to examine the motivations of internationally mobile students who
14 chose to leave their home country to study within Hong Kong or Taiwan, the research included
15 only students from outside the Greater China region. The research targeted full-time,
16 postgraduate students from outside the region (i.e., those who are not nationals of, nor are
17 permanent residents of, the PRC, the ROC, or the SARs of Hong Kong or Macau). In order to
18 gain a broad overview of the factors influencing the student population as a whole, the target
19 population is broadly defined so as not to unnecessarily exclude potentially valuable sources
20 of data. The criteria under which this report will exclude candidates are as follows:

- 21 • part-time students,
- 22 • local residents,
- 23 • students enrolled in non-award-bearing courses (e.g. students enrolled in language
24 instruction programmes),

- dual-passport holders where one of the passports corresponds to the country of study,
- students who are unable to consent to participate independently (e.g. those under 18 years of age).

The Hong Kong sample being taken entirely from one institution was not deliberate, but was a result of sampling process. As the ‘call for participants’ was more widely disseminated among students by this institution, more students from this institution responded. Respondents from other institutions, for a variety of reasons, were not able to complete a successful interview. This may introduce some bias in the findings; however, as the university in question is the largest host of international students in Hong Kong (UGC, 2014), it can still provide some insights into the non-local student population in Hong Kong. However, it may be beneficial for future studies to expand on this research to cover a wider spectrum of Hong Kong-based international students.

Findings

The results of the interviews conducted in both Hong Kong and Taiwan have been divided into two tables: those factors which were identified in through the literature (Table 5), and those which were discovered through the interviews (Table 6).

Number of participants who identified each factor by location and degree type.	Taiwan		Hong Kong		Factor Count
	Research	Taught	Research	Taught	
	Total		Total		
Cultural experience	1	6	5	2	14
Desire for international experience	-	3	4	3	10
Language / region - specific study	-	6	-	-	6
Political interests	-	4	-	1	5

	Intention to migrate	-	1	1	2	1	3
	Stepping stone to global career	-	-	1	2	1	2
	Increased earning potential	-	-	-	1	1	1
Knowledge and awareness of the host country	Availability of a particular programme	1	5	4	7	3	13
	Availability of information	1	6	1	3	2	10
	Degree of personal freedom	-	3	2	2	-	5
	Law and order	-	1	-	-	-	1
	Political stability	-	1	-	-	-	1
	Reputation of institution	-	6	8	11	3	17
	Parents / friends and relatives recommended	1	6	2	4	2	11
Recommendations from friends and relatives	Industry reputation	-	2	2	3	1	5
	Availability of scholarships	2	8	8	10	2	20
Cost issues	Entry qualifications accepted	1	5	4	6	2	12
	Lower cost of living	-	6	3	5	2	11
	Established population of overseas students	-	5	3	5	2	10
	Safe (low crime) environment	-	6	2	4	2	10
	Lower fees	-	1	2	3	1	4
	Job opportunities	-	1	1	1	-	2
	Environmental factors	-	4	5	7	2	11
Environment	Technological / research infrastructure	1	3	3	4	1	8
	Access to international networks / contacts	-	2	2	3	1	5

Social links and geographic proximity	Geographic proximity	1	3	5	2	11
	Cultural links with home country	-	-	2	3	5
	Friends / relatives live there	1	-	2	1	4
		1		3		

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Table 6 – New Factors Identified from Participants

Number of participants who identified each factor by location and degree type.	Taiwan		Hong Kong		Factor Count
	Research	Taught	Research	Taught	
Communication with participant	1	4	6	2	13
Quality of academic staff	2	3	6	1	12
Programme coverage	-	5	2	3	10
Opinion of peers	-	5	4	-	9
Research interest	-	1	5	1	7
Lifestyle considerations	-	1	3	2	6
Opinion of superiors	-	1	5	-	6
Quality of research community	-	-	4	2	6
Duration of programme	-	1	2	-	3
Political links with home country	-	2	1	-	3
Ability to complete the course	-	1	-	-	1

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The most frequently cited factors related to the ability of students to cover the financial cost of their studies. Students also frequently cited gaining new experiences frequently, as well as the opinion of family and friends. Factors which were related to students' intentions after graduation appeared to be less frequently cited.

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Using the broad groupings identified from the literature, '*recommendations from friends and relatives*' and '*cost issues*' were the most commonly cited (48% and 43% of respondents, respectively), compared to '*environment*' (35%), '*social links and geographic proximity*'

1 (29%), *'knowledge and awareness of the host country'* (26%), and *'decision to study overseas'*
2 (25%). This may suggest that the *pull* of the particular jurisdictions was more at the forefront
3 of students' minds when reflecting on their decision-making process.

4 Regarding the *'factors influencing student decision to study overseas'*, *'cultural*
5 *experience'* (14) was the most frequently cited and was mentioned by both Hong Kong and
6 Taiwan-based respondents. Students based in Hong Kong more frequently cited *'desire for*
7 *international experience'* (10), whereas students in Taiwan more frequently cited *'language /*
8 *region-specific study'* (6) and *'political interests'* (5). Less frequently cited were factors such
9 as *'intention to migrate'* (3), *'stepping stone to global career'* (2), and *'increased earning*
10 *potential'* (1).

11 The common factors which students cited as impacting their *'knowledge and awareness*
12 *of host country'* were *'availability of a particular programme'* (13), and the *'availability of*
13 *information'* (10). The *'availability of information'* was frequently cited by those interviewed
14 in Taiwan; although, it was usually seen as an obstacle, rather than a *'pull'* factor. Information
15 in many areas was described as being difficult to locate, or outdated. Some students made the
16 comment that more complete information appeared to be provided through Chinese-language
17 channels but was less readily available in English. In Hong Kong, this was not as commonly
18 cited, but this may be because the institution included in the research was English-medium.
19 The *'study in Taiwan'* online portal (FICHET, 2015) was cited as a particularly valuable
20 resource, however the Hong Kong equivalent (Study in Hong Kong) was not mentioned by any
21 of the participants. Other systemic factors, such as *'degree of personal freedom'* (5), *'law and*
22 *order'* (1), and *'political stability'* (1) were less frequent, and more commonly cited among
23 respondents in Taiwan. However, this could be a reflection of the environments from which
24 the students came; that is to say a reflection of the *'push'* factors, rather than a difference
25 between the two jurisdictions, which both enjoy a very high degree of political and social
26 stability (Chen, 2016; Cheng et al., 2009; Lee & King, 2016; Ng, 2012).

1 Among the factors which comprised the ‘*recommendations from friends and relatives*’,
2 ‘*reputation of institution*’ (17) was among the most frequently cited factors in this study. This
3 is consistent with the findings of previous studies which have argued that students are unlikely
4 to consider alternatives which provide an education to international students which is not highly
5 regarded internationally (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). ‘*Parents / relatives recommended*’ (11)
6 was cited by respondents in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, although it was more frequent in the
7 latter. This was often used to fill information gaps which were important for the respondent.
8 ‘*Industry reputation*’ (5) was also cited in both jurisdictions, albeit less frequently. Students
9 reported having either first-hand recommendations from industry sources, or having to rely on
10 secondary sources of information, such as university rankings.

11 Among the ‘*cost issues*’ cited by students, ‘*availability of scholarships*’ (20) was the
12 most commonly cited factor from the results, and ‘*lower cost of living*’ (11) was also frequently
13 cited. However, ‘*lower fees*’ (4), and ‘*job opportunities*’ (2) were far less frequently cited.
14 Several respondents stated that study would have been impossible without financial support
15 and many students began their information search by seeking available scholarships. This
16 factor also appears to have had an impact on the make-up of the student body in these respective
17 jurisdictions, as Hong Kong does not provide much, if any, support for taught-postgraduate
18 programmes, whereas such support is available in Taiwan for selected programmes. As a result,
19 the sample was much more taught-programme-focused in Taiwan. Furthermore, this finding
20 deviates somewhat from the existing research which suggests that the availability of part-time
21 work is more significant for students than is financial support or fees (James-MacEachern &
22 Yun, 2017; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

23 Among the ‘*environment*’ factors which students reported, the most common was the
24 environment itself (‘*environmental factors*’; 11), followed by ‘*technological / research*
25 ‘*infrastructure*’ (8), and ‘*access to international networks / contacts*’ (5). ‘*Environmental*

1 *factors*' appear to have been more front-of-mind among interviewees in Hong Kong, while the
2 remaining factors were more evenly distributed.

3 Finally, '*social links and geographic proximity*' was among the least mentioned categories.
4 '*Geographic proximity*' (11) was more frequently cited by respondents in Hong Kong, which
5 may be a result of Hong Kong's position as a transport hub, and land border with mainland
6 China. '*Cultural links with home country*' was cited exclusively by Hong Kong-based
7 respondents, suggesting a higher degree of international connectedness in Hong Kong.
8 Students also cited the drawing power of family residing in the host jurisdiction ('*friends /*
9 *relatives live there*'; 4).

10 **Further Factors**

11 In consolidating the various factors discerned from the literature, the research conducted
12 revealed a number of gaps in the coverage of the literature. Several factors were identified
13 through the interview process which were not covered in the previous research gathered for
14 this paper. The factors uncovered through this research are outlined below with relevant
15 excerpts from the interview transcripts to give some illustrative examples of the context.

16 **Communication with participant**

17 Students from all groups cited communication with the institution as important for their
18 decision-making. This referred not to published information about programmes and
19 opportunities, as has been identified in previous research, but the responsiveness of
20 communication, the perceived attitude, and the depth of those responses, when students reached
21 out for information.

22 "[...] *my first choice was Hong Kong, but when I wrote to these people at [that*
23 *university] in the [relevant] department, I was just astonished by their attitude. It*
24 *was so standoffish. It was something like 'we hear you but we don't care'. So, I tried*
25 *[my current institution]."*

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- Taiwan PhD student

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“[My supervisor] *communicated very well with me as prospective student. For*

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him, obviously it makes sense, it's a recruiting strategy. [...] And so, he was on the

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ball with communication”

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- Hong Kong PhD student

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Quality of academic staff

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Respondents also cited the quality of the academic staff (as distinct from the programme),

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as measured by the research output generated by academics, and the recognition from other

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academics, or industry professionals. Participants cited university websites, journal databases,

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and their existing network of contacts as the most common sources of information when

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determining the quality of academic staff.

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“For the PhD level it's very much about the professors who are there. So, are

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these professors who are renowned in their field of study, whatever it is. And, do I

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have similar interests? That's what would matter. It actually wouldn't necessarily

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matter if the university itself was world-renowned, as long as I was working with

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professors that were world-renowned.”

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- Hong Kong PhD student

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Programme coverage

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Students highlighted the importance of a broad base from which they could diversify their

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studies; or the appeal of the particular courses which made up a particular programme, and the

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degree to which those courses aligned with the students' own interests, research, and career

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aspirations.

1 As may be expected, this was reported more often among research students than it was
2 among taught degree students, as well as more commonly reported in Hong Kong than in
3 Taiwan.

4 **Lifestyle considerations**

5 Respondents also cited the type of lifestyle available, which included opportunities to
6 engage socially with other students, the support for student associations, as well as the
7 accommodation of religious practices, or the acceptance of sexual minorities.

8 *“I don't want to be spending three to four semesters just studying. I want to know*
9 *what are the other activities. So, I did a search, and they have like sport facilities,*
10 *they have student clubs activities, which I found very very good to give my life a*
11 *balance. I can study; I have the facilities to study, and if I want to get some social*
12 *activities, they also have that.”*

13 - Taiwan Master student

14 *“Another aspect is that I'm gay and I had heard that Taiwan is basically the most*
15 *open and accepting place in all of Asia when it comes to those kinds of things.”*

16 - Taiwan Master student

17 **Opinion of superiors**

18 Among students in both jurisdictions, advice given by academic figures in their home
19 environment were also identified, although this figured more commonly among students in
20 Hong Kong (5) than Taiwan (1). This, coupled with the ‘*opinion of peers*’ identified above,
21 further demonstrates the breadth of the network students rely on when seeking out information
22 about potential study opportunities.

23 *“My first weight would be given to word of mouth, because it came from my*
24 *immediate supervisor who I would say was quite credible. So, if he's giving me this*

1 extracted from the interviews in this study do suggest that further study is needed in order to
2 compile a more complete understanding of the individual factors which impact this process. In
3 terms of the model presented by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), it would also be necessary to
4 determine how to classify the new factors which have emerged.

5 Among the *push* factors identified through the research, while '*cultural experience*' was
6 widely reported by students in both locations, respondents in Hong Kong more frequently
7 reported factors related to international experience, such as '*desire for international*
8 *experience*', '*intention to migrate*', '*stepping stone to a global career*', and '*increased earning*
9 *potential*'. Respondents in Taiwan, however, reported factors which were more focused, such
10 as '*language / region-specific study*', '*political interests*'. This may suggest that Hong Kong is
11 more internationalised, or perhaps just more front-of-mind among sojourners, while those who
12 chose Taiwan more actively sought out a suitable host location. As Hong Kong has deliberately
13 positioned itself as a centre for international trade, travel, and cultural exchange, this may not
14 be surprising. Taiwan-based students reported a stronger focus on political interests, which
15 would also conform with the notion of Taiwan being a more politically active society than
16 Hong Kong (Kaeding, 2011). However, it would be interesting to determine whether this focus
17 has shifted given the recent changes in the political climate in Hong Kong. Broadly, these
18 findings would suggest a desire among international students to align their own interests, ideas,
19 and goals with their perception of the environment in any potential study destination (Chen,
20 2008).

21 Unlike some previous research (Lee, 2014), this study found that students considered the
22 opinion of family and friends as significant to their choice of study location, with
23 '*recommendations from friends and relatives*' being the second most commonly cited category.
24 '*Reputation of the institution*' was higher among Hong Kong-based respondents, whereas
25 '*parents / relatives recommended*' was higher among Taiwan-based respondents. As Hong
26 Kong-based institutions generally place higher in international university rankings

1 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2018; ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, 2016; Times Higher Education,
2 2018), this could indicate that students who choose to study in Taiwan are less inclined to be
3 influenced by the views of ‘authorities’ when selecting a location for study, which could also
4 be linked with their higher propensity to seek the opinion of peers and family rather than
5 academics. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) noted the importance of personal links with a particular
6 host destination, as well as the influence of alumni in influencing potentially mobile students,
7 which may suggest an increase in the importance of these groups in promoting Taiwan given
8 its lower international recognition compared with Hong Kong.

9 Students’ knowledge of the host country appeared to factor far more frequently among
10 respondents in Taiwan, with ‘*law and order*’ and ‘*political stability*’ reported only among these
11 students, ‘*degree of personal freedom*’, and ‘*availability of information*’ reported in both but
12 more frequently among Taiwan-based respondents. Among these factors, only ‘*availability of*
13 *a particular programme*’ was more commonly reported among respondents based in Hong
14 Kong. One interpretation of this is that both of these jurisdictions represent attractive prospects
15 for internationally-mobile students as a result of their environment (Lee, 2014), although the
16 amount of awareness of the local situation is important. This would support the notion put
17 forward by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) that the more a student is aware of a particular host
18 country, the more likely it is that they will choose to study there.

19 That ‘*cost issues*’ were the second most commonly reported category also hints at the
20 importance of financial support as a factor among the students. This is also linked to the
21 perceived, as well as actual, economic situation of the particular environment. For example,
22 Hong Kong is significantly more expensive to live in than are cities in Taiwan (see Table 7).
23 This is not a new revelation; Hong Kong had previously identified the need for financial
24 assistance for international students (Cheng et al., 2009; Lam, 2004). However, since Hong
25 Kong has not yet reached its target quota of 20% non-local students (currently 17%; UGC,
26 2018), further resources may be required to boost, and diversify the non-local student body.

Table 7 - The Cost of Living

Hong Kong vs 4 largest cities in Taiwan by population

Indices	Taipei	Kaohsiung	Taichung	Tainan
Consumer Prices	- 19.17%	- 35.52%	- 21.23%	- 24.53%
Consumer Prices Including Rent	- 38.86%	- 61.25%	- 51.49%	- 56.40%
Rent Prices	- 59.70%	- 88.49%	- 83.52%	- 90.13%
Restaurant Prices	- 45.66%	- 55.65%	- 51.45%	- 54.14%
Groceries Prices	- 7.75%	- 29.95%	- 7.81%	- 11.82%
Local Purchasing Power	- 13.32%	- 1.27%	- 11.76%	- 13.01%
Hong Kong <i>n</i> = 442	<i>n</i> = 351	<i>n</i> = 62	<i>n</i> = 54	<i>n</i> = 26

(Reproduced from: Numbeo, 2018)

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There were similarities between the two jurisdictions in terms of other financial factors, with ‘*lower cost of living*’ being similarly cited. As can be seen in Table 7, prices are substantially lower in Taiwan than in Hong Kong (Kirkham, 2016; Mercer, 2018). This is potentially mitigated by the fact that many of the participants in Hong Kong mentioned living in the student accommodation provided on-campus. This may, however, be made more impactful as students are unable to work to supplement their income while they study. Both Hong Kong and Taiwan place a large number of restrictions on international students’ ability to work during their studies, particularly those receiving scholarships (Immigration Department, 2015; MOE, 2015). This would seem to suggest that a change in such policies may allow international students to finance their own studies to some extent, and could thereby have a positive effect on the attractiveness of the particular jurisdiction.

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Limitations

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There may have been bias introduced by virtue of the small sample size, coupled with the sampling method which necessitated students opting-in to the study. It is likely that this would skew the psychographic make-up of the research sample. The respondent body make-up in both jurisdictions was not consistent; the ratio of research-programme students to taught-

1 programme students was 2:9 in Taiwan, whereas it was 9:3 in Hong Kong. This made any
2 comparison between the two samples difficult as the factors which were determined more by
3 the nature of the degree were not evident enough from the available data. Whilst this was
4 primarily a qualitative project, it would have been useful to have some degree of quantitative
5 comparison to establish a benchmark figure for each of the components in terms of the degree
6 to which the factors were determined by the nature of the studies, rather than the differences
7 between the two jurisdictions; this could be explored through future research.

8 The exclusive use of English as the medium of communication during this research process,
9 may have introduced a degree of bias into the sample population. For example, the two largest
10 international student population in Taiwan, according to the MOE (2011), were Vietnamese
11 and Malaysian, accounting for approximately 40% of the total international student population.
12 However, no students from either of these countries were included in this research. This may
13 suggest that these students, who may possess adequate Chinese-language skills, were
14 uncomfortable engaging in English in a project such as this, and therefore were less likely to
15 respond to the call for participants than those students from countries where English is more
16 prominent.

17 **Conclusion**

18 This study has, through a qualitative study of the two jurisdictions, provided a view of both
19 the Taiwanese and Hong Kong higher education environment, as it is perceived by students
20 from overseas. Building upon previous research conducted within these jurisdictions, and using
21 the *push-pull* model to examine the salient factors (Altbach, 1998; Chou & Ching, 2012; Lee,
22 2014; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazarol & Soutar, 2002), this study aimed to determine the influential
23 factors which students considered when evaluating their study options, as well as the
24 interaction between these factors which ultimately results in their decision to select either Hong
25 Kong or Taiwan. Between these two jurisdictions, there was a high degree of overlap,

1 particularly in areas such as the environment and cultural aspects, where the two places are
2 relatively similar (Jackson, 2014). However, there was an observed difference in terms of the
3 factors related to the local lifestyle and the quality of the education provided which
4 differentiated the two locations.

5 There are, however, a number of considerations which arise from this research which carry
6 weight for academics and policy-makers with an interest in either Hong Kong or Taiwanese
7 higher education. One of the most notable would be the information available, and the degree
8 to relevant institutions are responsive to students' enquiries. Although researchers have noted
9 that both jurisdictions are highly developed and provide a high standard of education, the
10 results of this research suggest that factors such as a lack of available information (James-
11 MacEachern & Yun, 2017) and lack of opportunities to work (Ahmad, Buchanan, & Ahmad,
12 2016) may reduce the effectiveness of efforts to attract internationally mobile students.

13 What is, perhaps, most substantial from the point of view of decision-makers is the interplay
14 between these factors and how it impacts the groups of students they wish to target. The
15 evidence provided by this research suggests that factors are of differing importance depending
16 on the local environment, nature of the institutions and programmes offered, and the interests
17 of the students themselves. The research conducted for this paper demonstrates that there is
18 still a degree of uncertainty with regards to which factors have 'pushed' the internationally
19 mobile students overseas, and which factors can be harnessed to 'pull' international students
20 into the local higher education institutions.

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