Chinese Students' Motivations for Overseas versus Domestic MLIS Education: A Comparative Study between University of Tsukuba and Shanghai University

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Recently, the globalized economy and the rapid growth of developing countries have driven a large number of students to study abroad in different developed countries. To compare the factors affecting their choices, this qualitative study collected data from a series of in-depth one-on-one interviews with twelve Mainland Chinese students who were undertaking a Master's in Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree program at two different universities (namely, Shanghai University and the University of Tsukuba).

In addition to ascertaining the perceptions, perspectives, and experiences of these student participants, we used the "pull" factor framework of Everett Lee to analyze how these graduate students from Mainland China were attracted to an MLIS education in Japan and in Shanghai. Our findings indicated that university reputation was a key academic factor, while many students from diversified undergraduate disciplines were attracted to an MLIS education from a wide range of information-related industries, regardless of the destination of their education. Meanwhile, for students who were considering a destination for their overseas education, they considered the costs of living, tuition fee, geographic proximity to home country, and affinity with the Japanese culture to be factors that are important to their decision making.

Our findings may provide valuable insights for LIS educators to improve curriculum designs and practitioners to plan their human resource development, as well as ensuring future MLIS graduates' employability in the highly global competitive knowledge-driven economy.

Introduction

With the recent globalization trends and the growth of developing countries, many students from developing countries have decided to study aboard in different developed countries. According to Fang and Wang, students' choice of overseas higher education is a complicated decision-making process that is influenced by different "pull" factors in relation to individual personal characteristics, such as economic condition, academic aptitude, and future career plans and interests.[1] The motivations of students for choosing a domestic higher education can be much different from an overseas one, and these decisions are usually influenced by a variety of "pull" factors according to the theory developed by Everett Lee.[2] This theory has been widely applied to tourism, migration, and higher education research and specifically to students' study motivations and choice of a host country or a university. According to Mazzarol and Soutar, "pull" factors are those factors that attract students to leave their native countries to other cities in the same country or from their native country to overseas to pursue further education.[3] Drawing on the previous studies, we aimed at using a similar set of "pull" factors to create a conceptual framework for understanding various factors that influenced the student participants in selecting a university in a host city or country for pursuing their MLIS education (overseas versus domestic):[4]

1. Knowledge and awareness of the university, as well as its reputation;
2. General knowledge of the destination city/country where the university is located;
3. Positive attitudes toward domestic/international education in the destinations;
4. Recommendations and the influence of relatives, parents, and friends;
5. Tuition fees;
6. Environment considerations (for instance, lifestyle);
7. Geographical proximity to home;
8. Social or educational links to family or friends living in the destination country, or family or friends studying there;
9. Employment/immigration prospects after graduation;
10. Perceived higher standards of education and employment prospects;
11. Availability of scholarships for study.

Previously, a series of cross-cultural studies (both quantitative and qualitative) were carried out by the researchers to investigate graduate students at different iSchools and LIS (Library and Information Science) schools in Canada, Mainland China, Denmark, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan about their motivations in undertaking an MLIS degree program.[5] Building on this previous work, this study examines two different groups of students from Mainland China: one group studying abroad at the University of Tsukuba (UT), Japan, while another group of students remained in China, studying at Shanghai University (SHU). We compared their choices and views toward an MLIS education in the context of the current LIS-related job market in Mainland China under the rapidly changing information-driven economy. In addition, this study sought to provide further insights into students' demands for an international education from developing economies like Mainland China, in order to heighten the standing and performances of iSchools and LIS schools worldwide. The study set out to explore the common themes emerging from MLIS students' personal stories, as well as stories among these student participants who intended to enter the field of LIS and other LIS-related and non-LIS-related professions. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are students' criteria for choosing a university for their MLIS degree programs, and other sources of influence?
2. What factors do students consider when they choose a particular overseas MLIS degree program, in comparison with a domestic one in the same field?
3. What are the similarities and differences between these two groups of students (UT versus SHU) in terms of these Chinese students' career aspirations and their post-MLIS plans?

Value and Significance of the Study

Despite a large body of literature on internationalization and transnationalization of higher education worldwide, little is known about the various "pull" factors students perceive to be important when considering an MLIS education. In particular, studies that focus on examining the motivations behind Mainland Chinese students in choosing a particular MLIS program have been scarce. As such, this study contributes to the better understanding of current students of varying family and educational backgrounds in their motivational ("pull") factors in choosing an overseas MLIS education, in comparison to a domestic one. The findings of this research are expected, therefore, to be of value to current MLIS students, as well as professionals and educators who are already practicing in the field of LIS.

On the other hand, Mainland China poses significant sociocultural differences from other international student recruitment markets. In addition, because of Shanghai's unique economic, social, and political status, Mainland Chinese students competing to be admitted to SHU might have distinctively different motivations, needs, expectations, and preferences. Findings of this study may therefore provide new insights into the effectiveness of the current approaches to professional LIS education, as well as student recruitment strategies among iSchools and library schools seeking to recruit students from the Greater China region. Furthermore, findings may provide future research directions regarding the motivations, education, internship opportunities, careers, and emerging job markets of LIS in Greater China, as well as other LIS-related disciplines under the new 21st-century globalized knowledge economy. Putting aside job opportunities and employability training of MLIS graduates, iSchools and library schools that are seeking to maintain a competitive edge and wish to continue to attract competent students from Mainland China may find that there is a real need to understand the potential student recruitment markets. In short, this study provides a "snapshot" of the career inspirations, needs, preferences, and aspirations of two different groups of MLIS students from Mainland China.

Literature Review
Motivations for Choosing a Career in LIS

Library and Information Science (LIS) is essentially a branch of knowledge and profession in the field of communication and information studies, combining both library science and information science.[6] Library Schools and iSchools offer Master of Library and Information degree (MLIS) programs with the aim of preparing graduate students with the necessary knowledge and practical skills required for taking on careers as LIS professionals, working in a variety of LIS professional settings and positions. Career decisions are motivated in part by people's internal values but also are influenced strongly by innumerable external forces perceived in the context of their lives.[7] The authors of that study carried out a questionnaire

survey to explore various social, cultural, economic, and educational factors, as well as other personal and professional reasons that influenced students in choosing a career in LIS. In that study, a total number of 175 self-completed questionnaires were collected from the four different universities: Shanghai University, University of British Columbia, the University of Hong Kong, and University of Tsukuba. Findings of this study reveal that students from different universities had different career motivations as well as aspirations, due to the distinctively different job markets and socioeconomic environments in each region. The above study did not focus on examining whether the respondents were either native or foreign students. Hence, it was impossible to compare the differences in motivation between the local and foreign MLIS students. Further, a cross-national and cross-cultural comparative survey study was conducted to examine the career and learning motivations of MLIS students at universities located in four different countries: the University of Hong Kong, National Taiwan Normal University, Peking University, and University of Copenhagen.[8] Findings of this study indicated that the core intrinsic-extrinsic factors for a majority of the student participants at all four universities when selecting a career in LIS includes: (1) "want to stay competitive in the library field," (2) "allows opportunities to transfer my skills and knowledge to library work," and (3) "being interested in LIS." Meanwhile, Lo et al. reported that there has been an increasing number of second-career librarians emerging from many other non–LIS-related professions in both Hong Kong and Canada over the years.[9] Findings of this qualitative study indicated that many of these students were currently pursuing their MLIS degrees at the University of Hong Kong and the University of British Columbia for career-advancement reasons. Because of their prior non–LIS-related professional experiences, expertise, knowledge, and skills, they had the potential to make significant contributions to the LIS profession. It is also interesting to note that quite a number of interview participants of this study had previous careers (such as lawyer, engineer, or banker) that would normally have higher income or high social status, in comparison to the regular LIS profession.

Study Framework: Push Model as Motivation Framework for Students Studying Overseas

As mentioned earlier, the push-pull conceptual model developed by Lee has been commonly used in a variety of migration studies, because it is a widely accepted mechanism used for explaining the phenomenon of cross-border people flows, as well as their relations to the decision making of individuals or families. Recently, the push-pull model has been used for examining various factors that influenced students' choices of overseas education destinations under different sociocultural contexts.[10] Findings of these studies indicate that both push and pull factors were considerable external driving forces that directly influence students' behaviors, their choices, and, most importantly, their decision-making process of choosing a destination for their overseas education. Meanwhile, students' demographic profile, for example, their socioeconomic status, study level, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspiration also play influential roles in terms of shaping the outcomes of students' decisions. Hung et al. identified three factors that motivate Mainland Chinese students to study abroad: (1) the possibility of future employment opportunities after graduation; (2) high quality of education; and (3) competitive lower tuition fees and cost of living.[11] Despite the body of literature available, studies using the pull factor model for examining the motivations behind Chinese students in choosing an MLIS education are almost nonexistent.

Development of Chinese Society and LIS

In 1978, the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping made a top-down strategic decision to send more than 3,000 students and scholars to study aboard, with the aim of rebuilding from Communist China from ruins after the decade-long anti-intellectual and antitraditional Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).[12] Since then, the number of Mainland Chinese students going overseas to study rapidly increased. In 2007, it was reported that there were more than 700,000 Chinese students and scholars studying in 108 different countries and regions worldwide.[13] The number of international Chinese students continued to grow. According to UNESCO, a total number of 712,157 Chinese students went overseas to study at tertiary level in 2012, which constitutes the single largest and fastest-growing body of international students in the world.[14]

Globalization of communications, knowledge, and skilled labor continue to transform the concepts, establishments, practices, and expectations of higher education around the world, and Mainland China is no exception.[15] The modernization efforts and various social reforms, together with opening up to the outside world, China as a rising world power has transformed the highly centralized-controlled communist economy into a modernized market-oriented economy.[16] Such reforms together with the pursuit of rapid growths in a globalized economy have created significant impacts on China's higher education system and its developments.[17] Meanwhile, Mainland China has been gradually transitioning from the "world's factory" for low-end products to a "manufacturing power" for high-end technology, innovation, and services. According to Chen, because of the rapidly evolving knowledge-based economy, China needs to transform billions of unskilled laborers into a talented high-value labor force that possesses professional knowledge and skills to provide services in the global digital economy, such as IT, software, international finance and banking, digital marketing, and customer relationship management.[18]

To fill the shortage of professionals in various industries, thousands of students from Mainland China have become the major source of overseas students among universities around the world.[19] Meanwhile, with the sustained economic developments taking place in Mainland China, it has become more affordable for Chinese families to send their children to study aboard—particularly for the emerging urban middle class.[20] With sustained economic developments in Mainland China, going abroad to study in Japan has become more affordable for an increasing number of Chinese families, especially because of the foreign currency exchange rates in recent years.

The number of public libraries in Mainland China has increased drastically in the recent decade, which in turn created the momentum for an increasing number of young people pursuing LIS education at both bachelor's and master's degree levels.[21] Furthermore, rapid economic growth, together with the political stability in recent years and the developments of the national social welfare system, has led to an impressive growth and improvement in LIS-related services and positions in a variety of academic and public libraries in Mainland China and in other information organizations such as archives, museums, and art galleries.[22] Such significant achievements include wide applications of IT and digital technologies among libraries, constructions of new library buildings, improvements of library services and resources for end-users, introduction of new automated library systems, and new and modern management approaches being brought to LIS practices. These new professional practices have allowed for greater LIS employment opportunities in Mainland China, eventually leading to further developments of LIS education and quality research in the past decade.[23]

While political tensions over their unresolved territorial disputes, national and energy security between China and Japan have never disappeared, the number of Chinese students migrating to Japan to pursue a higher education has never diminished even under such unstable diplomatic and economic conditions. Ironically, "Since the mid-1980s, Japan has witnessed a boom in students coming from China."[24] According to Nippon.com, "Chinese students at one point had made up around 60% of all international students in Japan."[25] In fact, it was reported that in 2017, the number of Chinese students studying in Japan totaled 107,260, which is nearly 10,000 more than in the previous year.[26] As a result, Mainland China remains the top source of international students in Japan, accounting for 40.2 percent of the total foreign student population in the Country of Sunrise. At prestigious national universities in Japan such as the University of Tsukuba (UT), students from Mainland China make up the largest contingent of foreign student population. Among this group of Mainland Chinese students studying in at UT, some of them chose to major in Library and Information Science (LIS), with reasons ranging from personal interests to practical professional needs, as well as China's blooming IT industries.

On the other hand, Shanghai is the current commercial and financial center of Mainland China. Since the rapid redevelopments began in the 1990s, Shanghai has often been described as the "showpiece" of Mainland China's booming economy.[27] Such notions could be reflected in the drastic shift to Shanghai's knowledge-based economy that is increasingly driven by innovation, technology, and, more important, brainpower, plus other shared knowledge of workforces. Under this new knowledge-based economy for employment and social development, "people must continually educate themselves, upgrade their skills, and reorient themselves to new realities."[28] Such rapid societal changes driven by this new information-driven and knowledge-based economy, together with other technological innovations, demographic shifts in this rising world power have put IT and other LIS professionals in greater demand than in the past decade. Hence, pursuing a graduate education in LIS has become a popular and yet feasible option among many Chinese young people who are seeking career pathways, including librarianship and cultural heritage, data science, and information interaction and design.

For many years, the Faculty of Library, Information & Media Science at the University of Tsukuba (UT) has been the leading institution of higher education in Japan, offering programs in LIS at both undergraduate and graduate levels. It is one of the two iSchool members in Japan offering a full-time master's degree program in LIS, which can be counted toward the first half of the PhD program. Every year, the long-standing reputation and the large population of academic staff have also attracted a large number of students from Mainland China to come to UT to undertake different types of LIS-related degree programs at various academic levels. Table 1 shows that Mainland Chinese students make up 68 percent of the total foreign student population there.

Whereas for SHU, because of Shanghai City's thriving information-driven economy, together with the university's constant high ranking (within China) and its affiliation with Project 211, SHU has become one of the top choices among many students in Mainland China when considering a graduate degree program in LIS.[29] Project 211 was initiated by the Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China in 1995 with the aim of raising the teaching and research standards of high-level universities, thereby cultivating strategies for enhancing the socioeconomic growths in China. Today, China has a total number of 116 higher education institutions, about 6 percent of which have been designated as Project institutions for having met certain scientific, technical, and human resources standards and offering advanced

degree programs. Founded in 1978, the School of Library, Information & Archives at Shanghai University (SHU) currently offers master's degree and doctoral degree programs in the following four disciplines: (1) Archival Studies; (2) Information Studies; (3) Library Studies; and (4) Information Resources Management. Table 1 details information about the total LIS student population (at different study levels) at both UT and SHU.

TABLE 1
Total LIS Student Population of UT and SHU
Academic Year (2016/17) *(data as of May 2018)*

Study Levels	UT			SHU	
	Total Student Population	Total No. of Foreign Students *(including Chinese students)*	Total No. of Chinese Students	Total Student Population	Total No. of Foreign Students
Bachelor's Level	471	10	8	131	0
Master's Level	124	27	21	251	0
Doctoral Level	79	8	2	24	0
Total	674	45	31	406	0

Research Methods

This study intends to be exploratory in nature to reveal a different, richer type of research data, which a quantitative questionnaire survey cannot provide. The qualitative interview method was chosen for illustrating the underlying reasons for individual student participants' actions and decisions, as well as their experiences. Such natural and free conversational-style interviews also enable maximum flexibility for more open, spontaneous, and instant exchanges of ideas as well as follow-up questions, thereby allowing "unexpected" responses to emerge.[30] Therefore, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was considered appropriate for the aims and setting of this study.

Data Collection

The design of this study was modeled after our previous work: that is, using semistructured face-to-face and online interviews (via Skype) to establish a pattern of motivations, and career interests across 12 student participants at two different universities (UT and SHU). Given the limited manpower and resources available for this study, the researchers at the two universities arrived at a common consent that a sample of 12 interview participants was found to be feasible and reasonable. A total of 12 participants was anticipated to be basically adequate, as no new themes and major ideas emerged toward the end of this interview process.[31] Each interview was approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length, conducted over a two-week period. Interviews were the only data-gathering method used in this study. Students' participation in this qualitative study was, of course, entirely voluntary. Each interview contained approximately 10 questions (see appendix for details).

Students from MLIS courses were represented during the period of academic year 2015 to 2016. All participants were asked the same set of open-ended questions, with the aim of maintaining a certain level of consistency throughout the interview data. The idea was to identify common threads among all student participants' answers. These questions dealt with

the participants' own family and educational backgrounds, current occupational status, career aspirations, and their criteria for choosing a university for their MLIS education, and so on. Email invitations were written to the respective participants to seek permission for conducting the research interviews, explaining the purpose and nature of the study, as well as outlining the approximate duration of the interviews, and so on. Permission was also sought for digital voice-recording of the interview sessions. The recorded interviews were then transcribed accordingly. As the interview questions were designed to address our research questions systematically, we performed the coding according to the reply to each group of interview questions, which naturally formed common themes based on our research questions.

Limitations

Although both universities (SHU and UT) are renowned for offering LIS programs of high standards in their respective regions, this study focused on two universities (that is to say, only one university was selected from each respective region); hence, the findings of the research cannot be generalized to all Mainland Chinese students' views toward overseas MLIS education, in comparison to its domestic counterpart. Further studies would be needed on students at other library schools or iSchools in both China and Japan that offer LIS programs at different study levels. Another limitation lies in the choice of the research method. Although qualitative interviews allow richer and more detailed information in understanding the incentives behind individuals to pursue a specific opportunity, it would not provide further insights into individual participants' experiences on a large scale.[32] In addition, all interviewees participated in this study on a voluntary basis. Hence, the researchers assumed that they must have been willing to contribute and were at ease in discussing the topics at hand. For this reason, student participants' responses might not have been entirely neutral or representative of the student populations under investigation.[33] Therefore, participants who agreed to take part in this research should be assumed to be particularly motivated, eager, and confident to share their personal experiences and opinions (that is to say, including their educational and family backgrounds, as well as other personal information, for example, their career aspirations, and the like). As a result, these interview participants might not necessarily represent a "typical" respondent but may be only one small spectrum of motivation.[34] Furthermore, there are many alternative ways to study the motivations of individuals to choose an MLIS degree program or a university. However, this study was based solely on qualitative interviews with two very small groups of MLIS students enrolled at SHU and UT. In other words, the student participants were chosen for pragmatic reasons (convenience sampling), because of the researchers' affiliations and professional connections with SHU and UT.

Results and Analysis

This section presents and analyzes the data gathered from the one-on-one semistructured face-to-face and Skype interviews. The central research question focused on the perceptions and expectations of the two groups of Chinese students (UT versus SHU) toward a domestic MLIS education in comparison to an overseas one. One of the valuable aspects of the semistructured interview is that it allowed the necessary space and flexibility for a variety of viewpoints from the student participants to be aired. Themes emerging from the interview data included the following four categories: demographics (such as personal and family factors), academic factors, nonacademic factors, and career aspirations, and so on.

Demographics of Student Respondents at Both SHU and UT

The average age of interview participants at both universities (SHU and UT) was 25 years. Participants at both universities were also asked about which universities in China they obtained their undergraduate degrees from, as well as their academic majors. At SHU, two (female) participants pursued their first (bachelor's) degrees in Archival Science, while the remaining four male participants obtained their bachelor's degrees in other academic disciplines: Computer Science, Information Systems, IT and Financial Economics respectively (see table 2). On the other hand, a majority of participants at UT were female. All six UT participants studied Japanese Language as their undergraduate majors at a traditional college or at a comprehensive university in Mainland China, prior to coming to Japan. Among these six UT MLIS students, two female participants undertook Software Engineering and Japanese Language as a double major while they were studying toward their undergraduate degrees at the same Dalian Jiaotong University (see table 3). Furthermore, the majority of respondents at both SHU and UT indicated that they did not have a job or very much working experience prior to entering the MLIS program. In other words, a majority of them (at both SHU and UT) enrolled in the MLIS program immediately after completing their bachelor's degrees in a variety of other non–LIS-related field—a finding that is supportive to a previous cross-national questionnaire survey study carried out by the researchers.[35]

	Age	Gender	Place of Origin	Highest Degree(S) Obtained before Undertaking MLIS	University from Which University Was Earned	Professional Working Experiences	LIS-Related Working Experiences
TABLE 2 MLIS Student Participants at Shanghai University							
Participant A	24	Female	Hebei Province, China	BA in Archival Science	Hebei University	No	No
Participant B	24	Female	Unknown	BA in Archival Science	Soochow University	No	No
Participant C	24	Male	Unknown	BA in Computer Science & IT	Binzhou University	No	No
Participant D	24	Male	Unknown	BA in Information & Systems Management	Shanghai University	No	No
Participant E	30	Male	Shandong Province, China	BA in IT & Systems Management	Shandong University of Finance & Economics	No	No
Participant F	27	Male	Shandong Province, China	BA in Financial Economics	Unknown	Yes	No

	Age	Gender	Place of Origin	Highest Degree(S) Obtained before Undertaking MLIS	University from Which University Was Earned	Professional Working Experiences	LIS-Related Working Experiences
				TABLE 3 **MLIS Student Participants at the University of Tsukuba**			
Participant G	23	Male	Shanghai, China	BA in Japanese Language	Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute	No	No
Participant H	24	Female	Jiangxi Province, China	BA in Japanese Language	Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute	No	No
Participant I	24	Female	Heilong Jiang, China	BA in Japanese Language & Software Engineering	Dalian Jiaotong University	No	No
Participant J	24	Female	Heilong Jiang, China	BA in Japanese Language & Software Engineering	Dalian Jiaotong University	No	No
Participant K	26	Female	Weihaiwei, Shandong Province, China	BA in Japanese Language	Nankai University	Yes	No
Participant L	24	Female	Fuzhou, China	BA in Japanese Language	Fuzhou Unviersity	No	No

Academic Factors in Selecting a University for an MLIS Education

Student participants at both SHU and UT indicated that the high ranking and reputation of a university was one of the most important criteria for choosing a university for their MLIS education. For example, student participants were well aware that UT is one of the best national universities in Japan, and it was ranked ninth among all universities in Japan.[36] In addition, the perceived high quality of teaching was another major factor influencing these Chinese students to choose UT for their MLIS education (see table 4). Meanwhile, students at SHU indicated that their university is considered one of the most prestigious research-intensive, comprehensive universities in Mainland China. Furthermore, SHU is listed among the Project 211 top national universities in China. According to the student participants, the university's status and prestige led them to choose SHU to undertake their MLIS degree program. Student participants at both UT and SHU recognized that graduating from a reputable university (regardless in China or Japan) can put them in good stead for an easier or more promising career ahead (see table 4).

Regarding the choice of LIS as their major at the master's level, a closely related undergraduate degree is a common reason for both student groups. According to Participants A and B (female SHU respondents who majored in Archival Science for their undergraduate degrees),

"Although Archival Science and Library Science are distinctively different from each other in terms of professional practices, … at the same time, these two professions are closely related to each other, as traditionally, library science has also included archival science components."

TABLE 4 Academic Factors in Choosing Universities and MLIS as a Major		
Themes	**Coding**	
	SHU	**UT**
Relevance to Undergraduate Major	Archival Science (2), no prerequisite of BA majors	Information retrieval, software development, Japanese double major (2), Japanese Language (4)
Personal Interests	Being interested in LIS (6)	Interested in the Japanese Language and culture (6)
Importance of Ranking and Reputation of the Universities Chosen	Famous (2), good reputation (2), high ranking, rich resources available, 211 University, top 100 Chinese universities, receive special funding.	Well-known in China, famous in both Japan and China (2), top-ranking national university in Japan (6)
Reputation and Quality of Teaching Staff	High competencies and reputation of teaching staff (x6)	Largest LIS faculty in Japan (staff size and student population) (6), rigorous scholarship of Japanese professors and higher education in Japan
Note: numbers in parentheses indicate multiple similar responses.		

Nonacademic Factors Motivated Students in Choosing Their University Education

With reference to other personal factors that motivated these student participants in pursuing an MLIS education and their choices of universities, several UT participants were recommended by their immediate family members, friends, or relatives to pursue a graduate degree in Japan. The reason for this is that they had friends, family members, or relatives already studying and/or living in Japan (see table 5). It is also interesting to note that the reason for going to Japan for an overseas education was that Japan is close to China geographically, these Chinese students could therefore go home easily and more frequently. In addition, UT's tuition fee is relatively lower, because it is a national university. Furthermore, overseas students are allowed to do part-time jobs in Japan, which enabled them to earn money to cover their daily expenses (see table 5). Whereas for the SHU participants, interview results reveal that many of them grew up and went to universities in much smaller and less-prosperous provincial cities (in comparison to Shanghai) in China. According to Participant C, "I chose to attend SHU, mainly because of its prestige. But, I also wanted to experience a college life in a completely different setting from my small, provincial hometown, which is located in the northern part of China. SHU is situated in the heart of Shanghai, and it is China's undisputed business capital." In addition to SHU's reputation, another major reason behind students' choice of university was because of Shanghai's blooming economy and diversity as a cosmopolitan city, as well as being the center of international economy, finance, trade, shipping, technology, culture, and much more. In other words, these students saw the opportunity of studying at SHU as a way to rid them of their provincial ways (see table 4). For a majority of the UT participants,

it was the powerful appeal of Japanese pop culture that motivated them to major in Japanese Language when they were studying their undergraduate degrees in Mainland China. Despite that all the UT participants were able to speak English fluently, because of their desire to improve their Japanese language skills, in addition to their keen interests and affinity with the Japanese culture, they chose Japan as a study destination (see table 5).

TABLE 5 Nonacademic Factors in Choosing Universities and Study Destinations		
Themes	**Coding**	
	SHU	**UT**
Influence of Friends and Relatives	Friends' influence (2), parents' and family members' encouragement (2), learning to live away from family	Parents' and family members' encouragement, relatives' suggestions
Cultural Factors	Shanghai is a very inclusive big city	Experience authentic Japanese culture (6), advantage of Japanese language capability, practice Japanese language skills (6), overseas graduates have an advantage in China job market
Location Factor	Shanghai is a prosperous cosmopolitan city, convenient access	Japan is close to China, easy to go home
Economical and Other Factors	Not yet ready to join the competitive working world; learn more about myself and my full potential via graduate education.	Not ready to join the workforce just yet (5), relatively lower tuition fees (compared to private universities) (6), many scholarships available at UT (2), part-time jobs permitted, earn money to cover daily expenses, depreciation of the Japanese Yen (2), much less expensive than studying in USA/UK (2)
Note: numbers in parentheses indicate multiple similar responses.		

Career Perspectives for Pursuing an MLIS Education

Interestingly, although participants at both UT and SHU were studying for an MLIS degree, only a few of them (on both sides) were interested in pursuing a career in librarianship, despite a majority of them expressing positive views toward the job nature and environment of library work. Interview results reveal that many UT participants expressed a keen interest in either looking for employment in Japan or finding jobs that would allow them to make use of their Japanese language skills after earning their MLIS degrees from UT (see table 6). On the other hand, several student participants chose to undertake their graduate studies at SHU, with the hope of expunging their provincial outlooks. When the SHU participants were asked about their post-MLIS plans, several SHU participants were aiming for a career in librarianship. They referred to the stable nature of library work that is less competitive, in comparison to working in other corporations or banking/financial sectors. As participants A and B explained, "Undertaking a MLIS program at SHU would enable me to expand my professional skills, as well as enhancing my employability, without having to convert from my primary area of study to a completely new discipline. After earning my MLIS, I could find work either in an archive or in a library, or even archival work inside a library."

However, for the remaining four male SHU students (Participants C, D, E, and F), three of them had a background in Information Systems or IT, while the other one had an undergraduate degree in Financial and Economics. Interestingly, none of them expressed an interest in a librarianship career. On the contrary, they indicated they "would like work in the banking, financial securities sector/other financial bodies, where I could apply my IT/LIS knowledge for financial data analysis, and data curation/management, etc.," or "venture for a career in software developments. The SHU graduates, in general, have a very good reputation in many different industries." Several SHU student participants also explained, "There are extensive resources and opportunities accompanied with the fact SHU is situated in the heart of Shanghai—China's current largest city, financial capital and cultural hub. Many young people would even call Shanghai the heart of, and key to China's future." In addition, Participant F stated, "The very fact that SHU is located in the heart of Shanghai could open so many doors, for example, valuable internship experiences, unique paid summer jobs, as well as different mentorship opportunities, and so on. The possibilities are simply limitless!"

TABLE 6		
Career Aspirations and Perspectives		
Themes	**Coding**	
	SHU	**UT**
Career Goals and Aspirations Related to Libraries	Serve readers, provide lifelong learning, combine IT knowledge with library work, meet users' needs, provide better technical services, enjoy serving the public and different types of people, meet library development, enjoy serving the public and different types of people	Library-related work in USA/New Zealand; improve professionalism of librarians in China by giving them workshops and training, passing on the positive attitudes, good professional practices and knowledge when I return to China; introduce library user education (best practices) to China and other overseas countries
General Career Goals and Aspirations	Work driven by information and IT, applying IT/LIS knowledge for financial data analysis, data curation/management, banking, financial securities sector, other financial bodies, starting position does not matter at this point, get to higher managerial positions later via hard work, archival work in government	No concrete career plans yet, improve Japanese skills, improve English skills, gain overseas studying and working experiences for better employability, NOT work in a library, prefer software company work, want to find work in Japan to stay for a few years and then return to China (3), IT or food development
Perceptions Toward Job Prospects, Employability and Job Security	Library job more stable (2); MLIS enables me to get a job with higher starting point (2); MLIS is a professional degree, but entry qualifications are less demanding than other professions; LIS is a very practical profession (2); MLIS degree would enable more options in choosing a profession. (2); MLIS would improve my employability, thereby giving me more options (2)	Library work has similar salary/pay scale to that of civil servants; career path is slow and limited, but not having to worry about making a living; most librarians are civil servants in China; civil servant work is known for its stability

TABLE 6 Career Aspirations and Perspectives		
Themes	**Coding**	
	SHU	**UT**
Potential Job Market/ Market Trends after Graduation	Many employment opportunities in LIS in China (2); LIS has a lot of potential for development in China; many job areas that IT and LIS-related skills and knowledge can be applied; network technology/IT has demand in job market; LIS is in line with the current developments of China as an information-driven society; IT and LIS skills are indispensable for staying competitive at work	IT is a big trend; libraries will depend a great deal on people with IT skills; people are not just using the library space for reading or the hardware; libraries would need people with foreign language skills like us (Japanese); LIS is a relatively new profession in China; only 6 universities in China offer LIS (all Project 211 universities) meaning LIS work is important and has great demand; digital library services are still underdeveloped in China as compared with Japan; LIS profession in China is underdeveloped
Perceptions Toward LIS Work—Job Nature and Working Environment	Job nature very suitable for women; women-oriented profession; not so competitive like other businesses; comfortable working environment inside a library; job pressure not so high; library is attractive place, very friendly staff; cultural place; peaceful and quiet working environment	A sense of "professionalism" in LIS work; LIS is a respected profession; enjoy the library atmosphere (x2)
Preferred Library Types	Public libraries and/or archives, corporate archives, corporate enterprises, state-run/central government enterprises, corporate bodies, public libraries	Corporate work, academic libraries (2), front-line library work that allows me to engage with end-users and the outside world, music libraries, libraries that allow me to make use of my Japanese skills, public libraries
Preferred Areas of Library Work	Reader services, administrative and managerial work, mid-level managerial position	Administrative management positions, readers services (2), books and acquisitions; not necessarily to pursue work related to LIS (2)
Note: numbers in parentheses indicate multiple similar responses.		

Discussion

In this section, we discuss in detail the similarities and differences between these two groups of Mainland Chinese students (UT versus SHU) to explore the different factors behind their decisions to go overseas for education, in the view of the "pull" factor theoretical framework.

Nonacademic Motivations of Studying Abroad

As there has been much study on academic motivations of studying aboard, we focus on the

discussion of nonacademic factors. The interview results reveal that these students were attracted to study overseas for four main nonacademic reasons: (1) recommendations from family and friends; (2) affordable tuition and other economic factors; (3) location factors; and (4) cultural factors. The importance of family or a friend's recommendation to an overseas study destination choice can be an important source of referral.[37] In other words, word-of-mouth and "the 'social links' that emerge when a student has family or friends who have studied is another important influence on destination choice."[38] The authors also highlighted that "the cost of an overseas education can be measured through direct and other indirect factors. For example, in addition to the direct cost of fees and living expenses, students need to consider whether they can work part-time."[39] Many host countries like Japan offer students the right to undertake part-time work under their student visas. According to several UT participants, "Since UT is one of the national universities in Japan, the tuition is therefore much cheaper than other private universities. Eventually, I was admitted, so I decided to go to UT. They also offered me scholarships. Attending university in the U.S. or Canada would cost me and my family a lot more than in Japan. Besides, as a student in Japan, I can do part-time job to support my daily expenses" (see table 5).

Mazzarol and Soutar also noted that "geographic proximity from the source to the host country may also be an important influence."[40] As Participant L explained, "Japan's close proximity to China is another major advantage. My parents could often come to visit me in Japan, and I could return home to see them during term breaks, that is including Chinese New Year." It is obvious that geographical proximity and the close cultural ties between the two countries were the other factors that led these UT participants to choose Japan for pursuing their overseas MLIS education. In short, home and family can remain relatively close, while the students could still experience an overseas education at a reputable university like UT. At the same time, without having to pay high tuition fees like other private universities in Japan turned out to be an advantage for these UT students to undertake an MLIS education in Japan.

Cultural Factors Attracting Young Students

While US and Western modern culture attracts students worldwide, Japanese culture has similar strong attraction to young students worldwide, especially with the Chinese and Japanese language having many common characteristics.[41] Students' choice of a particular country as a study destination appears to be influenced by the country's reputation.[42] In other words, "the better knowledge or awareness a student has of a particular host country, the more likely they will select it as a study destination."[43] As one participant states, "When I was still an undergraduate student, I already decided to go to Japan for my postgraduate education, and to improve my Japanese language skills… at that time, I was very interested in Japanese culture, for example, Japanese food, TV dramas, fashion, movies, Japanese pop music, idols." In other words, being able to undertake a graduate degree in Japan, particularly a national university like UT with lower tuition fee has become a "dream come true" for these students, combining an overseas education (eventually leading to a professional qualification from a reputable university), practical needs, and personal interests all in one (see tables 4 and 5). As pointed out by Futao Huang, Professor at Hiroshima University's Research Institute for Higher Education, the number of Chinese students studying abroad in Japan can only continue to rise. "If there are no limitations to the number of incoming Chinese students," says Huang, "I assume there will be more and more Chinese students coming to Japan."[44]

Career Motivations: Library Job Security versus Diversified Information Industries

Librarianship has never been known to be a high-paying occupation worldwide, and people are aware of this.[45] The student participants in this study seemed to be well aware of the limited career prospects, and also the potentially slow career progress in librarianship. Nevertheless, the less-competitive working environment, job security, and stable nature of library work all seemed to be major factors that motivated some of the student participants of this study to opt for a career in librarianship. Regardless of whether students are considering a career in librarianship or not, almost all MLIS students expressed a relatively positive view toward the library environment in general, particularly the havenlike peaceful atmosphere that facilitates formal learning and reading in solitude. An encouraging discovery in this study was that many LIS students of UT from Mainland China would like to contribute their knowledge gained from their study in Japan to improve the professionalism of librarians and introduce library best practice back to China. However, because of China's recent economic reform, the socio-cultural, economic, and information landscapes in Mainland China have become increasingly dynamic, fast-paced, uncertain, and unstable. All these are direct results of a series of major technology evolutions, economic downturns, and changing information demands occurring in China, particularly in the last decade. For this reason, these SHU student participants truly believed that there will be an increasing demand for information and IT professionals in many different areas of China's labor and financial markets, due to the country's booming finance, IT, and other services industries. Because of this changing socioeconomic and information landscape, we can expect to see an increasing number of LIS graduates in China working for different corporations and information organizations outside the traditional library and archival settings, or even starting their own information-related businesses, such as building or supporting technology infrastructure, conducting research, creating and maintaining a web presence or intranet, designing databases, assessing consumer information needs, and the like.[46]

Career Aspirations and Post-MLIS Plans

It is evident that individuals in this study had varying pathways to the MLIS degree and came from differing academic backgrounds. From this position, the decision to undertake a professional qualification in LIS could be seen as a feasible option or solution for sharpening their competitive edge, thereby enhancing their employability upon graduation. For example, interview results suggest that an overseas education in Japan was valued among the UT students as largely a "stepping stone" to better and more career options, or as a "passport" to employment with (Japanese) multinational corporations operating in China (see table 6). Graduates with academic qualifications from reputable foreign universities usually have better career prospects and brighter futures, whether they choose to return home or decide to stay on to work in the host country.[47] This is because these foreign-university graduates are perceived by both societies to have better professional knowledge and wider exposures, resulting in better employability prospects.[48] In particular, because of fast-growing global economy, an increasing number of employers worldwide see graduates with international experiences and foreign language skills as interculturally competent, assets for responding their companies' business growths on a global scale. According to Diana Tsui (Head of Global Philanthropy, Asia Pacific region at J.P. Morgan), "Many Chinese companies want to go outside of China, to become more internationalized, and management skills is an area that lacks talent and needs

to be strengthened."[49] In other words, the rapidly growing information-based and service industries have led to an increasing demand for LIS professionals to bring in knowledge and skills that would help companies to go global by carrying out exchanges and promoting cooperation for international business, cultures, and etiquette.

Hence, looking for librarianship-related work or becoming a LIS professional after graduation was really a last option for a majority of participants. According to Participant I, "I know that many of my friends graduated from universities here in Japan, and they were able to secure a job the same way as other Japanese students." As explained by Professor Gracia Liu-Farrer from Waseda University, "The linguistic, cultural, and social skills these Chinese students acquire in Japan have increasing economic utility on both sides of the East China Sea. And these Chinese create transnational connections wherever they go, whether they remain in Japan, return to China or, ultimately, work or study elsewhere."[50] In other words, the increased flow of Chinese students to Japan would turn out to be a win-win situation for both countries.

Personal Development through an Overseas Education

Asian students undertaking an international education a process of "personal metamorphosis and transformation."[51] For these Asian students, including the UT students from this study, they were making valuable self-transformative investments via an overseas education. Through overseas education in advanced countries, students from developing countries could look for new ways to view the world, including new ways of thinking as well as new skills and approaches. This leads to the global competence needed for enabling the population from developing countries in coping with the challenges of a knowledge-based economy. As explained by many scholars, beyond the social status and material benefits it accrues, an overseas higher education is also associated with ideas about self-growth, as well as gaining new experiences and outlooks.[52] In other words, creating different social and cultural experiences beyond the local is particularly important for these students in pursuit of an international education.[53]

"Pull" Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a University and Study Destination

The "pull" factors have provided a basic framework for comprehending motivations behind the student participants' choices, underlying their preferences, and how their varying backgrounds shape their decisions and actions in different sociocultural contexts. Table 7 summarizes the "pull" factors that influenced the student participants' choice of a university and study destination, which is highly relevant to explain the choices made by the respondents.

TABLE 7 Pull Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a University & Study Destination (SHU versus UT)		
	SHU	**UT**
Knowledge and awareness of the university prior to enrollment	✓	✓
Good quality and reputation of the chosen university in home country	✓	✓
International standing/reputation of the chosen university	✓	✓
Domestic standing/reputation of the chosen university	✓	✓
MLIS qualification being recognized in China	✓	✓
Value of degree in employment market	✓	✓

TABLE 7 **Pull Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a University & Study Destination** (SHU versus UT)		
	SHU	**UT**
Employment prospects in destination country/city after graduation	✓	✓
Employment + immigration prospects after graduation	Not Applicable	✓
Perceived higher standards of chosen university	✓	✓
Scholarship opportunities	Not Applicable	✓
Tuition fees	Not Applicable	✓
Recommendations and the influence of relatives, parents, friends, and so on	Not Applicable	✓
Social or educational links to family or friends living in the destination country, or family or friends studying there	✓	✓
Good knowledge of the destination city/country	✓	✓
Environment considerations (such as lifestyle)	✓	✓
Positive attitudes toward education in the destination city/country	✓	✓
Overseas education experiences	Not Applicable	✓
Japanese-speaking environment	Not Applicable	✓
Gain understanding of Japanese culture	Not Applicable	✓
Part-time employment while studying	✓	✓
Convenience to go home	✓	✓

In summary, the interview results of this study suggest that, regardless whether students were undertaking an MLIS in their home country or overseas, improving employability and options for career choice were the commonly desired goal. A university's prestige, its high national and international ranking, and branding are some of the most important academic factors influencing students to choose their MLIS education, regardless of the location. Findings of this study also suggest that the vast growing finance, IT, and tech industries and developments worldwide also contribute greatly to the perceived usefulness of an LIS education to a much wider range of industries, thereby attracting a growing variety of students from various disciplines. This phenomenon calls for LIS schools to continue to develop their LIS curricula to fulfill students' diversified needs.[54]

It is highly possible that Japan will continue to be one of the most popular destinations for students from Mainland China because of the various cultural, location, and economic factors reviewed by the respondents. Political tensions between the two nations did not seem to be a major obstacle affecting their choice, as the numbers of students from Mainland China studying in Japan has continued to grow.[55] According to the respondents, this overseas education opportunity would eventually become a useful stepping stone toward a more fruitful career path, or further graduate studies in other overseas countries before possibly returning home. In addition to the academic prestige and economic attractions of an overseas postgraduate education, the initial draw for most Chinese students seemed to be their keen interest in Japanese pop culture.[56] Many of them had a fantasy of living overseas, while the interest to pursue a career in LIS seemed secondary. Furthermore, Japanese education is also a much cheaper alternative to education provided by universities based in the United States

or other Western countries. With the consolidation of curricula among LIS, archival studies, and museum management (LAM), not only can iSchools provide a broader spectrum of LAM subjects to suit students' diversified needs, it may also reduce costs due to the economy of scale.[57] As for attracting students to remain to study locally, the excellence of SHU perceived by the student participants serves as a good example. SHU is located in Shanghai, which is at the heart of China's current economic engine and culture hub, together with the employment opportunities that come with this cosmopolitan city. Such varied factors have made SHU one of the most competitive universities among the local Chinese student applicants.

Conclusion

The qualitative study was based on a series of interviews with two groups of Mainland Chinese students enrolled in full-time MLIS programs at two different universities in Asia. Findings of this study suggest that student were motivated by a combination of their career-, social-, and culture-related concerns when choosing a discipline, destination, and university for their education. Despite the technical limitations, this qualitative study has provided a more holistic understanding of how these distinctive factors influenced these student participants' decision making in terms of choosing a destination or a university for their MLIS programs in different sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, this study has allowed for a broad overview of career patterns among two groups of Mainland Chinese MLIS students while also providing a better understanding of individual personal stories, as well as their career aspirations. The results also reveal that there is no such thing as a "typical aspiring MLIS candidate." It can be concluded that the needs and criteria for selecting a university, and the decision-making process between the SHU and UT students, were dissimilar.

Student participants in this study described nonlinear patterns in terms of their family and educational backgrounds, as well as their career choices and aspirations, in addition to their post-MLIS plans. The results of this study also reveal that a majority of the students decided to pursue an MLIS education immediately after earning their undergraduate degrees in other non–LIS-related disciplines. Meanwhile, many of them had little or no prior working experiences, not to mention working experiences in a professional LIS setting. Furthermore, the student participants gave a general impression that balancing between personal interests and undertaking a graduate education with practical implications was particularly important among overseas students. Together with their diverse educational backgrounds, their foreign language skills, and their unique understanding of their favorite Japanese culture, these MLIS students would not be limited to just working for libraries or information centers, but also for other financial organizations and corporate entities that require LIS skills worldwide. However, because of the globalized new information-driven economy, it is expected that there will be an increasing demand of qualified LIS professionals in various IT and information-related industries.

This study has many important implications. For example, gaining a better understanding of various factors that are influential to current students' decision making in choosing an MLIS education (overseas versus domestic) is undoubtedly important for both iSchools and LIS schools, as well as other potential students in Asia. This could provide an opportunity for the LIS educators with useful findings, which could be used for developing curricula that could better prepare future LIS graduates for the rapidly changing and diversifying job markets and information landscapes worldwide. To improve the students' perceptions of their

future career, more internship opportunities should be offered to LIS students for their better understanding of potential workplaces and other employment opportunities worldwide. In particular, more iSchools offering LIS degrees with modernized and customized curricula should be established in Greater China to meet the ever-increasing demands.

Findings of this study may also help other MLIS students in different countries to recognize how to achieve a balance between their personal interests and their professional education in varying sociocultural and socioeconomical contexts. Furthermore, findings of this study are undoubtedly transferrable to other iSchools and LIS schools in many other educational and sociocultural contexts, as we can anticipate seeing an increase in number of Mainland Chinese students studying abroad and returning after their overseas studies. The researchers are therefore confident that this momentum of overseas Chinese students will continue in the foreseeable future. As a result, findings of this study may provide new insights into the effectiveness of the current student recruitment strategies among iSchools and LIS schools worldwide.

APPENDIX

1. Please introduce yourself, and tell me what you studied for your bachelor's degree? Was your undergraduate degree somewhat related to Library and Information Science (LIS)?
2. What motivated you to pursue a master's degree in LIS at UT/SHU?
3. What was your list of criteria in choosing a university for undertaking your MLIS degree program?
4. What was the highest degree obtained before undertaking the MLIS program? As you understand, it is common for people (especially many academic librarians in Hong Kong and North America) to have double master's degrees.
5. What is your previous/current employment status?
6. Could you also tell me about your current family status?
7. Please describe your overall impression toward the nature of LIS work, and the library environment as your future workplace.
8. How did you develop an interest in LIS work? Why do you think becoming an LIS professional would be a feasible career change option for you?
9. What kinds of working skills and professional knowledge do you currently possess that you think could contribute to your future LIS work?
10. What are your post-MLIS plans?

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