

A Semi-systematic Review of Historical Motives for Chinese Student Enrollment in Western Tertiary Level Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Over the past decade, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of tertiary-level students from China studying abroad, especially in Western countries. However, the history of Chinese students in the West dates back to the mid-1800s. The aim of this paper was to produce a semi-systematic review of relevant literature to understand how over time, historical events have influenced motives for Chinese student to study in the West. Results were that motives may be generally classified as the opportunity a) to acquire wealth and stature at home; b) to permanently relocate to the West; and c) for exposure to new perspectives, ideas, and experiences. Most motives resulted from historical events negatively affecting the Chinese economic, cultural, and educational systems. In addition, safety was another important factor since the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which popularized alternative destinations outside the West. Some researchers have argued that Chinese students were gradually turning to alternative destinations even before the pandemic. Suggested topics for future research include changes in perceived importance of university rankings, reasons for choosing alternative study destinations, and whether student expectations were met after enrolling in traditional Western or alternative tertiary study destinations.

Keywords: Chinese international students, Chinese history, Motives, Studying abroad, Tertiary education, Preferences

Introduction

Current students or recent graduates in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia would have likely come across many Chinese international students at their campuses. The same cannot be said for their parents' generation and certainly not for their grandparents' generation, as their large presence is quite recent. For example, in 2010, the number of Chinese international students throughout American higher education institutions was 157,558, and by 2015, that number almost doubled (Statista, 2018). Universities in the United Kingdom also experienced a 34 percent upsurge in Chinese student numbers from 89,540 in 2014 to 120,385 in 2019 (Jeffreys, 2020). A report by the American Congressional Research Service (2019) stated that on average, from 1979 to 2018, China's real annual domestic product (GDP) grew by 9.5 percent and doubled every eight years. This also helped to bring around 800 million people out of poverty. China's middle classes also expanded significantly in this period (Li, 2006), which would help to explain how more self-funded students have since been able to study abroad. Nevertheless, this observation alone does not explain why so many chose to enroll at institutions in Western countries. Moreover, while these recent numbers are unprecedented, Chinese students have been studying in the West for over a century and a half. Therefore, this paper will explore the historical and current motives for studying in the West among tertiary-level students from mainland China, and the circumstances behind those motives.

When discussing earlier historical periods, general references to Chinese students refer to those from the mainland only. Furthermore, while the focus of this paper is on the West, which encompasses many countries, only those which are currently and historically the most significant will be discussed. Non-Western countries like Japan, which are historically significant, will also not be discussed in detail, as they fall outside the scope of this study.

Data Collection Method

A semi-systematic methodology was chosen for the data collection process in this review. As detailed by Snyder (2019), this methodology, also referred to as the "narrative review approach" (p.335), is more flexible than a purely systematic approach in which relevant research would be critically evaluated based on specific, pre-defined inclusion criteria. A semi-systematic approach, on the other hand, is suitable for literature reviews where given topics have been studied broadly in various disciplines and conceptualized in different ways over time. When using this method, the goal is to obtain an overview

of a topic, understand the various angles from which it has been studied, and synthesize the findings of those studies (Snyder 2019). The broader topic of Chinese international students in universities throughout the Western world dates back to over a century and a half ago. This paper aims to identify motives for studying in the West over time, and the literature containing such information spans many years and multiple disciplines. Thus, a semi-systematic methodology lends itself well. The data collection process carried out for this review can be divided into the following four stages:

Stage 1: Gaining a Historical Overview

In the first stage, a broad search was carried out to identify the origin of the topic and key historical events until the present day. This was done by inputting keywords and phrases into Google.com and skimming through relevant online sources including both commercial/non-academic and academic sources.

Stage 2: Detailing Origins and Key Historical Periods

After having identified the origins and milestones, each was explored in detail by inputting key phrases into academic search engines, research platforms, and libraries such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and JSTOR. During this phase, sources of interest were primarily books, academic journal articles, conference papers, and doctoral thesis papers. Reputable non-academic sources such as the content on websites of news agencies and educational institutions were also considered if relevant and difficult to find in academic publications. The secondary objective of this stage was to bookmark documents containing information about the motives of Chinese students in the West during the periods in question.

Stage 3: Identifying Motives and Preferences

For historical periods where previously-examined documents did not mention students' motives for studying in the West, further research was undertaken in both academic platforms and libraries as well as on Google.com to identify these motives. Academic and non-academic sources were prioritized and chosen in the same way as in stage 2. This stage also had a secondary objective, which was to bookmark documents discussing recent or predicted changes in historical trends relating to Chinese students' international study motives.

Stage 4: Identifying Changing Trends

A final search through both academic and non-academic sources was conducted to find discussions about changing trends as they related to decisions and preferences among Chinese students intending to study in Western countries. Once again, sources were prioritized and chosen in the same way as in the previous two stages.

Literature Review

Key Historical Periods and Events

The First Graduates from Western Universities

Students from mainland China have been studying in Western countries since the mid-1800s. Even from the earliest cohorts, returned students referred to as liuxuesheng in Chinese, played important roles in China's modernization and subsequent development throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Huang, 2002). Among the most famous were pioneers Wong Fun (also known as Huang Kuan) and Yung Wing (also known as Rong Hong). Wong Fun was a medical student, who graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1855 and made history as the first Chinese student who graduated from an institution in Europe. Similarly, Yung Wing graduated from Yale University in 1854 (Zhou, 2017) as the first Chinese student to ever graduate from an American university.

When Dr. Wong Fun arrived back in China after completing his studies, he opened a dispensary in Hong Kong, mentored several Chinese Western medics, and conducted the first embryotomy in China in 1860 (Zhuhai Municipal Government, 2019). He also oversaw the opening of Lingnan University Medical College at the Canton Hospital in Guangzhou where he taught anatomy, physiology, surgery, and served as the institution's deputy chief and later, the acting director (Zhuhai Municipal Government, 2019). Similarly, after returning from the United States, Yung Wing helped to establish the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) in 1872. The CEM was a program that allowed Chinese students to study overseas to learn about Western technology and bring that knowledge back to China where it could be implemented to strengthen and modernize the country (Huang, 2002). Over the next four years, 120 boys were sent to the United States as part of this program (CT Humanities, 2020). In 1881, the Chinese government put an end to it by recalling the students back to China. The main reason for the recall according to Huang (2002), was that the students were becoming overly acculturated to their host

culture at the expense of knowing their traditional Chinese values, language, and history, which they were expected to learn concurrently. Nevertheless, these students went on to make their mark in history. Some of them returned to the United States, but most stayed in China, and they adopted various professions. Zheng Tingxiang was among those who returned to the United States in 1883, invented the Jann coupling railway cars, and helped to design the Brooklyn Bridge (Huang, 2002). Those who remained in China were reportedly treated with suspicion upon their return, and little value was recognized in the cultural capital they had acquired from their experiences abroad. However, over the years, they gained recognition and respect for their deeds and accomplishments, which included commanding naval warships during the Sino-French and Sino-Japanese wars in which seven of them sacrificed their lives (Huang, 2002).

Early to Mid-1900s

In 1900, the Open-Door Policy had just been initiated where students in China at the time were granted scholarships to study in the United States (Wang, 1994). The most well-known was the Boxer indemnity scholarship implemented in 1908 (Han, 1993). In this program, students were to be educated in the United States using surplus funds from the Boxer Indemnity paid by China as reparations for American losses suffered during the 1900 Boxer Uprising in Beijing where foreign diplomats were targeted (Hunt, 1972). While intended as a gesture of goodwill on part of the United States, many in China questioned its hypocrisy due to its simultaneous implementation with the Chinese exclusion policy from 1882. The policy restricted migration and employment of Chinese people mainly because of strong opposition from American workers who did not want competition in the labor market. It was a controversial topic among Americans because educators and merchants advocated the idea of giving Chinese students a period of practical training after graduating whereas immigration officials opposed it because it would undermine existing policy (Wang 1994). Wang (1994) believed that merchants and educators, who advocated for Chinese students to receive training, primarily did so out of self-interest. He explained how they hoped that those students would later help the United States to pursue commercial interests in China to become more competitive against other European nations with financial interests in China.

Despite the Chinese Exclusion Act, the number of students from China in American higher education institutions gradually increased after 1908 except for the World War II period when there was a brief decline. In 1914, there were also 10 female

students added to the indemnity group for the first time, which included Chen Hengzhe (Sophia Chen), who went on to graduate from the University of Chicago and became the first woman professor at Beijing (Wang 1994). Similarly, in Britain, there were only about 35 students in 1900, but in 1908, 140 state-sponsored students arrived in London (Benton & Edmund Terence Gomez, 2007). By the eve of World War I, this number had increased to more than 350. Around three-quarters of these students were financially supporting themselves while the rest were state-sponsored (Benton & Edmund Terence Gomez, 2007). Moreover, according to Han (1993), between 1919 and 1949, At least 16,000 Chinese students received their education from American universities. By the end of 1949, there were over 4,900 registered students from China, but those who were being assisted financially by the former Nationalist government had their funding cut off when the Communist government took power. Then, when the Korean War broke out, China and the United States found themselves on opposing sides, and consequently, the United States government prevented Chinese students from leaving the country out of fear that their acquired knowledge would be used to aid their enemy (Han, 1993). Moreover, between the years 1966 and 1972, which were the first six years of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese students were completely forbidden from studying abroad, and foreign students were not able to study in China during this time (Neubauer & Kuroda, 2012).

In addition to the United States and Britain, a wave of Chinese students also made their way to study in France in the early 1900s as part of the Work-Study Movement founded by Li Shizeng, who was the son of a Grand Councilor, tutor to the Tongzhi Emperor, as well as a prominent enthusiast of anarchism and critic of Manchu rule. He had the chance to study chemistry and biology in France, graduated in 1905, and opened a bean-curd factory in 1908 near Paris where he employed Chinese workers. This scheme differed from prior overseas study programs in that it was less costly, open to a broader segment of the Chinese population, and emphasized social equality, the value of hard work, frugality as well as correcting various bad habits in Chinese society at that time (Bailey, 1988). From 1912 to 1913, around 100 student workers arrived to partake in the program before it was temporarily halted for political reasons and due to the outbreak of the First World War. A couple of years later, the initiative resumed and received recognition as well as financial support from various prominent individuals and groups in China (Bailey, 1988). By 1920, a peak number of 1,600 students had been studying in France under the scheme, and among them were several future Marxist elites,

intellectuals, and leaders including Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping as well as the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (Junmian, 2011). The ideas promoted in the Work-Study Movement were also influential in the May Fourth Movement, which was a major event in China's modern history. The May Fourth Movement was triggered by Japan being given control over China's territories by the allied forces after Germany was defeated in the First World War (Panda, 2011). This fueled strong nationalistic sentiment among many youths and intellectuals in China, resulting in mass protests against the government on May 4th of 1919. Part of the anger from this movement was also directed at (outdated) elements of traditional Chinese ethics and culture, which many believed had caused China to fall behind Western countries and Japan (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019).

In the early years of the 20th century, a new wave of Chinese students was also sent to Germany to study in various disciplines including law, government, economics, natural sciences, and medicine. This came after the boxer rebellion when the Qing Government and other Chinese intellectuals observed progress in Germany as well as Japan (Meng, 2003), and sought to emulate their advances. The first Chinese student to obtain a Ph.D. was Li Fuji, who received a Ph.D. in physics at the University of Bonn, and by 1911, a total of six Chinese students had received Ph.D.s in Germany (Meng, 2003). However, by this time, the Xinhai Revolution had begun, and around half of the 110 students in Germany returned to China at the request of their local governments or after an appeal made by leader Sun Yat-sen, who played a key role in ending the Qing dynasty (Meng, 2003).

Post-Reform to 2019

It was not until after the Cultural Revolution that the number of outbound Chinese students to the West began to increase more substantially. The damage caused to the education system during the Cultural Revolution played a major part in Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping's decision to restore U.S China relations and send students abroad as part of a wider plan to reform the country's economy. This process started with 52 scholars being sent to study in the United States. They were sent to absorb as much knowledge in their respective fields as possible and bring that knowledge back to China (Li, 2017). In Britain, the education secretary also made an agreement in 1978 that resulted in 500 inbound Chinese students arriving to study at various universities, technical colleges, and language centers. Before this, there may have been only a few dozen Chinese students there (Wang, n.d.). Diplomatic relations between Australia and China were established

in 1975, which led to the arrival of the first five Chinese students in Australia that year. However, it was not until the 1980s, after the reform, that Chinese students began arriving in Australia in relatively large numbers (Wilson et al., 2012). Another event that would likely have had an impact on the number of Chinese students traveling to the West for tertiary education was a policy in 1999, which resulted in the mass expansion of domestic tertiary education in China (Qiang, 2017). From the late 1970s until the end of 2015, the total number of Chinese students sent to study abroad reached around 4.04 million with an average yearly increasing rate of 19.06 percent (Cheng et al., 2017). In 2018 alone, the total number of Chinese tertiary-level students studying abroad reached 993,367. Of these, 333,935 were studying in the United States, 143,323 in Australia, and 107,813 in the United Kingdom, which were the top three destinations for Chinese students that year (UNESCO, 2019).

Motives for Studying in the West

Historical Motives (Pre-2000)

Yǒng Wíng's motive to study in the United States was his interest in Western-style learning (Yáo, 2014) while the boys from the CEM partook in the program because they were promised official ranks upon returning (Bi, 2018). Similarly, the students who were provided with Boxer Indemnity Scholarships also partook because studying overseas in their time was seen as a potential route to wealth and power (Bi, 2018). Those who partook in the Work-Study Movement in France had varying motives for doing so. Some were inspired by the labor-revering ideology while others simply sought the opportunity to study and have a way to pay for it. An example of the latter was Chen Yì, who became foreign minister in the 1950s (Bailey, 1988). Between 1950 and 1980, most of the students in the United States were either from Taiwan or Hong Kong and were primarily motivated by the opportunity to permanently stay there (Bi, 2018). Apath to residency was also a major factor in mainland Chinese students' decisions to study abroad in the 80s and 90s. According to Liu (2009), from the mid-1980s until at least 1999, most students were self-funded and did not return to China after completing their studies. This largely stemmed from a lack of career opportunities and upward mobility in places of work. In the early post-reform years, there was also social discrimination against professionals and intellectuals. These were sentiments that lingered from the Cultural Revolution, which at the time, suppressed their status in Chinese society (Liu, 2009). Those with academic motives also found Western education appealing.

Nianqing (1998) discussed how such motives largely resulted from problems in China's education system. This was illustrated in the following statement:

A flighty, superficial mental state (fu zao xinli) has emerged in academic circles; some professors busy themselves getting involved in "hot points" (re dian: vogueish undertakings), down-to-earth basic research is ignored, and teaching has become a "sideline occupation" for some professors. Today, the mentor system (duoshi zhi) in postgraduate education in China has become a mere formality, and the students hardly ever see their mentors. Nor is much of anything new presented in classrooms, so the students get a feeling of being deceived. Hence education of postgraduates and doctoral candidates in China has lost its attraction for college students who have ambitions to engage scientific research (p.81).

Contemporary Motives (Post-2000)

Education Quality. From the year 2000 to 2019, the perceived superior quality of education at foreign universities had continued to be one of the most frequently identified and highly prioritized motives for Chinese students to study abroad, especially in Western countries. This also relates to the earlier mention of the 1999 policy, which saw a mass expansion of tertiary education in China. According to Qiang (2017), with the rapid expansion came criticism over a decline in the quality of teaching and learning. While Qiang directly attributed the deterioration of educational quality to the mass expansion, Nianqing's (1998) paper would suggest this issue pre-dated the policy. Zhai et al. (2019) also emphasized this phenomenon by claiming that the appeal in international education grew due to the devaluation of higher education degrees in China following the massification of higher education. This was further intensified by the competition among Chinese high school graduates for acceptance into China's top universities, who were ultimately seeking ways to distinguish themselves for future employment in China. Yang's (2007) study involving 65 surveyed students identified acquiring an internationally recognized qualification from studying abroad as the most significant motivating factor. This was respectively followed by difficulty in gaining entry into Chinese higher education institutions and the prospect of obtaining permanent residency in the host country. In a study conducted by Chao et al. (2017) involving 128 Chinese students, most survey respondents indicated that the quality of education overseas was one of the two most important factors in their decision to study abroad.

Cheng et al. (2017) also undertook a study involving 3,001 students at 18 high schools located in Beijing, Shenzhen, and Chengdu. Like Chao et al., they concluded that quality of education was one of the two key determinants in students' decisions to study abroad. Moreover, Cheng et al. claimed that quality of education was a key factor influencing students from both privileged and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, but a lack of financial capability was understandably a major deterrent for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, Ping et al. (2020) also concluded that Chinese students and their parents' belief in better-quality education was a major factor in their decision to study abroad.

Experience, Perspective, and Status. From a purely economic point of view, graduating from a reputable university abroad can be looked upon favorably by potential employers, which brings better job prospects and higher monetary returns. However, aside from financial gains, many also seek to acquire and develop soft skills to elevate their social status, expand their social network and develop themselves for personal satisfaction (Zhai et al., 2019). Therefore, in addition to the economic component of human capital, Zhai et al. (2019) also discussed cultural, social, and symbolic capitals, which reflect one's knowledge, lifestyle, tastes, and associations. All these qualities can yield non-tangible but highly desirable benefits. In studies by Chao et al. (2017) and Cheng et al. (2017), the other factors that were identified as key drivers of motives to study abroad were the development of a new perspective of their own country and experiencing another culture as well as developing a global perspective respectively. Some authors like Li et al. (2020) had argued that an enriching life experience has already surpassed or matched education quality in its level of importance.

Destination Choice

Gong & Huybers' (2015) study revealed three main factors, which influenced Chinese students' choice of destination country when choosing to study abroad. These were safety conditions in the country, a university's global rank according to prominent ranking organizations, and the overall quality of education in the destination country. Zhai et al (2019) identified entry requirements, educational reputation and symbolic capital, employment and future career prospects, host country environment, and social connections as the main factors influencing the choice of destination. Austin and Shen's (2016) study also revealed a combination of factors, which influenced students' decision to study in the United States. These were "perception of U.S. educational institutions, the

support from the family, the rankings in the U.S. universities, the competitive advantage of a U.S. education, the opportunity to work in the U.S., and the desire for a permanent life in the United States” (p.734). While Yang’s (2007) respondents identified an internationally recognized education as their most significant factor for studying abroad, almost all respondents identified the prospect of residency resulting from Australia’s skilled migration policy as a critical factor for choosing Australia as their destination of choice. Conversely, Zwart (2013) performed a study, in which the results showed the ranking of the university and cost of living as well as tuition to be the most important factors in choosing a destination with the least important factor being the possibility to immigrate to the host country. Finally, Cebolla-Boado et al. (2017) discovered that prestige influenced by a university’s rank was the main factor in determining students’ choice of universities in the United Kingdom. The authors even stated, “Chinese students appear to value attending a ‘prestigious’ institution as an end in itself rather than a mere means to an end” (p.11-12). They discovered that social interactions with current students and alumni also affected their choice, but intensive marketing campaigns did not. Finally, Mok et al. (2020) referred to a study by Austin and Shen (2016), which claimed that students chose to study in the United States because employers tended to prefer recruiting employees returning from there, as they were perceived to have had more opportunities to enhance creativity and develop critical thinking.

Recent Developments, Changing Trends, and Projections

Like many other industries, higher education has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, Educational Institutions around the world were forced to adopt online platforms to facilitate teaching and learning due to campus closures and travel restrictions. For some institutions, these rapid transformations produced desirable outcomes and would have also confirmed the effectiveness of certain good practices (Crawford et al., 2020) while others would have experienced the opposite. Mok et al. (2020) attributed Chinese students changing or canceling their international study plans to health and safety concerns as well as travel restrictions. Health and safety have become major new priorities, whose importance has increased notably since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mok et al. claimed that East Asian countries had better pandemic control, were safer, and would become the new major destinations for international students after the COVID-19 situation. Their conclusion was based on a study involving 2,739 students who responded to a survey asking whether they

would continue studying abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic and if so, what their top five study destinations (countries) would be. Responses to the latter question revealed Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan to be among the top five destinations along with the United States and the United Kingdom. This meant Australia, despite receiving one of the largest proportions of Chinese students in previous years, did not make it in the top five destinations. One noteworthy limitation of this study was the inclusion of respondents from Hong Kong in addition to those from mainland China, which would have adversely affected the representation of mainland Chinese students. However, in an article, just two months before the release of Mok et al.'s publication, Li et al. (2020) referred to a different survey originating from the Chinese media outlet Global Times, where Australia was still deemed the most popular study destination of eight different countries which included Japan, the United Kingdom and, Singapore among others.

Some other studies would suggest that preferences began changing before the impact of COVID-19. The World Bank Group (2020) released a report which referenced a British Council survey completed by 11,000 Chinese students in the United Kingdom before the outbreak of the pandemic. They were asked about their future study plans, and 13 percent of respondents stated that they did not intend to complete their studies while around 40 percent stated that they were still undecided. The publication also referred to multiple other studies by reputable institutions and organizations, who all predicted a decline in the number of students traveling to current major destination countries for higher education (which include the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia) as well as a decline in international student mobility globally. Finally, MacGregor (2019) referenced a study by the consultancy Education Rethink, which also concluded that Chinese student numbers in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia were declining due to the growing popularity of alternative destinations in both Asia and Europe which offered better value for money. Some of these countries included Japan, South Korea, Germany, and the Netherlands. This report also came out before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some Southeast Asian countries have also seen growth in mainland Chinese student numbers over the past decade. Two notable countries in this subregion are Thailand and Malaysia, which according to the most recent data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021), hosted 11,800 and 11,713 Chinese international students respectively. However, these numbers are lower than in the years preceding COVID-19. In the case of Malaysia, there were 14,854 international students in 2017, which was

around triple the number in 2013 (Mingi et al., 2020), and in Thailand, there were 14,423 Chinese students by 2020, which was almost triple the number of 2009 (Siriphon & Banu, 2022). Thailand's appeal and the resulting growth in the number of Chinese students were attributable to the lower living cost and lower perceived concerns of xenophobia and discrimination compared to Western countries. Other factors, attracting Chinese students were future residency and employment opportunities resulting from increasing cultural and economic ties between China and Thailand (Siriphon & Banu, 2022). Unfortunately, the number of Chinese international students in Singapore was not available in the most recent UNESCO Institute of Statistics figures, and the remaining countries in this sub-region hosted far fewer Chinese international students than Malaysia and Thailand.

Conclusion

The literature covered in this review has revealed three overarching motives, which have influenced mainland Chinese students to study in the West over the past 170 years: the opportunity to acquire wealth and stature in China, the opportunity to permanently relocate to the West, and exposure to new perspectives, ideas, and experiences. The first of these motives has been the most frequently mentioned and most influential throughout the history of Chinese students in the West. During the 19th and 20th centuries, China experienced a variety of social, economic, and cultural changes, whose aftermath resulted in unfavorable circumstances that encouraged Chinese leaders to look outward for ways to develop their country economically, technologically, and ideologically. As a result, many individuals were drawn to Western countries by the prospect of gaining new knowledge that could be used to develop China and yield rewards of wealth and stature for them personally. Similarly, a flawed education system brought about by the Cultural Revolution and later, the massification of tertiary education led employers in China to recruit employees educated in the West, as they were believed to have developed superior creativity and critical thinking skills. This motive seems to have been consistent for students in more recent years, who had the luxury of choosing their study destinations. This can be reduced down to the fact that preferences have been mostly influenced by an institution's rank, which also reflects prestige and status. It would also largely explain the increased numbers of students in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. These countries, which have respectively been the most popular destinations are home to the largest number of institutions ranked in the top 100 with 25 in the United States, 13 in the United Kingdom, and 7 in Australia

(QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2021). The second overarching motive was the opportunity to permanently relocate to the West because of less favorable social and/or economic conditions in China. Examples of such students were those who left after the Cultural Revolution as well as those who left in the 1980s and 1990s. In more recent years, this has still been a key motive for many students, but its degree of relative importance varies across studies. Finally, Western culture, values, or specific socio-political ideas were significant motives for some students in the distant past like Yung Wing and those who partook in the Work-Study Movement. In publications relating to the middle and late 20th century, socio-political ideas were seldom mentioned as key motivating factors for Chinese students to study in the West. However, an increasingly important motive according to recent studies is the acquisition of personal experiences and new perspectives, which are similar to those of Yung Wing. Finally, the past two to three years could be indicative of a major turning point for Chinese students and their choices when it comes to studying abroad. An increasing number of academics and writers have been pointing to the growing popularity of alternative destinations, especially institutions in territories outside of the mainland like Hong Kong as well as nearby countries in East and Southeast Asia. Preferences for these destinations appear to have only been strengthened since the outbreak of COVID-19 for safety-related reasons.

Suggested Further Research

This review has revealed potentially long-lasting changes that could adversely impact institutions in some countries while presenting opportunities for others. Based on the conclusions, the following are suggested questions to be addressed in future studies, which could provide valuable insight:

- For Chinese students and their families, how important are university rankings now compared to 20 years ago?
- For hiring managers at Chinese-based companies, how important are university rankings now compared to 20 years ago?
- For Chinese students who prefer to study in alternative study destinations (East Asia, Southeast Asia, or previously less popular destinations in Europe) over historically major destinations (United States, United Kingdom, and Australia), what are their main reasons for this preference?

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- Among Chinese parents who prefer to send their children to study in alternative study destinations, what are their main reasons for this preference, and have their views about historically major destinations changed over time?
- What were Chinese students' expectations during and after their studies abroad (both at historically major destinations and alternative destinations), and how were/weren't those expectations met after the completion of their studies?

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