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The Travel Behaviour of Chinese International Students in Higher Education in Norway

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Master (Msc) in International Hotel and Tourism Leadership

The Travel Behaviour of Chinese International Students in Higher Education in Norway



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Stavanger, 15th June 2016

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ABSTRACT

Understanding tourist behaviour is one of the fundamental aspects of tourism industry and business operators. For tourism organisations, “such types of knowledge will provide tourism organisations with invaluable market intelligence which can be reflected in the organisation’s marketing strategy” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 898). Within tourism consumer behaviour research, many segments remain largely under-researched (Cohen et al., 2014). One of these segments is international students.

The number of international students in Norway has tripled in the recent years. Many are attracted by Norway as a country of study due to its free education system as well as its image as a modern and safe country with great nature. An increasing number of studies on internationals’ students travel behaviour have certainly provided additional knowledge about such segment. However, there are currently no known studies on international students and their travel behaviour in Norway. This study is the first known study focusing on the travel behaviour of international students in Norway. Specifically, Chinese international students were chosen for this study due to the growing and increasing market of Chinese tourists in Norway. Therefore, understanding their travel behaviour is important in order to provide tourism products and attractions, which can satisfy their needs. Additionally, it can also be argued that studies of Chinese international students are able to provide insights into the needs and preferences of the emerging conventional Chinese tourist market (Hughes, Wang, & Shu, 2015), even though they are considered as two markets.

The overall aim of this research is “to explore the travel behaviour of Chinese international students in Norway as means to understand their needs and travel related preferences”. A qualitative methodology approach was employed and semi-structured interviews served as the

main the research instrument. The participants of this study were Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Norway. Data analysis was conducted on the basis of a thematic analysis of transcribed interviews.

The findings indicate that while Norway was not chosen as a study country in the first place, the respondents were all amazed and fascinated by the Norwegian nature and environment. They only travelled to the more popular places due to time and budget contradicts, which is consistent with previous findings. Lack of time is also due to voluntary paid-employment in addition to academic commitment. However, lack of companionship was not considered as a barrier as a majority of respondents preferred to either travel alone or in very small groups. This contradicts with previous literatures. There are further contradictions with the previous findings, as they preferred to travel by plane rather than private cars and trains as well as preferring cheap and budget accommodation rather than hotels.

Another important task of this study was to identify the willingness of the Chinese international students market to the recommend Norway to family and friends to visit Norway as a holiday destination. While they would recommend Norway as a holiday destination, they were more reluctant to recommend Norway as a study destination. The reason for such is due to the educational system, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The respondents participated did not experience significant travel barriers in general. Nevertheless, a most important finding and contradiction with previous literature is that it was assumed that Chinese international students mostly prefer sightseeing when travelling in the study country. This study revealed that whilst a majority of respondents did state sightseeing as the most popular activity, the reason is that they do not know how to undertake adventure

and nature tourism activities nor were they aware of where to find information about such activities. There were thus no lack of interests in adventure and nature-based tourism activities, but travel barriers consist of lack of information and lack of equipment as well as the perception of risk due to lack of perceived skills prevented them to undertake such activities.

For tourism operators that wish to target such segment, the findings provide great knowledge for operators to develop products and services to cater to the needs and preferences of this segment. The knowledge acquired about the travel behaviour of Chinese international students can also be beneficial to understand the conventional Chinese tourist segment in Norway. More detailed and comprehensive studies, which use the longitudinal approaches, may be beneficial to contribute further to the body of knowledge.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Consumer behaviour is one of the most researched areas in the tourism field (Cohen et al., 2014). However, the existing studies on consumer behaviour in tourism are largely fragmented. Furthermore, there are also many segments, which are under-researched. One of these segments is international students, which as a distinct group of travellers have received scant attention in the literature. Compared with the travel behaviour of the general groups of tourists, there are overall limited studies concerning international students and their travel behaviours. Although many of the existing studies do focus on international students of Asian nations as they represent the largest group of international students, a majority of such studies as well as consumer behaviour in general are largely quantitative in nature (Cohen et al., 2014). Thus, they are unable to explore relevant topics in-depth. Additionally, such studies also tend to focus on international students in countries such as the UK (United Kingdom), the US (United States) and Australia, which represent the top three English speaking countries for international students to undertake their education. It is also therefore logical that a majority of existing studies into international students and their travel behaviour mainly focuses on the context of these study countries. Nevertheless, as travel behaviour, needs and preferences will vary depending on the students' nationality, ethnicity and cultural background as well as their country of study (Chadee & Cutler, 1996), the result of existing studies cannot be applied to understand Chinese international students' travel behaviour in Norway.

Norway as a study country for international students is quite different from many other countries. For instance, Norway is one of the few countries in the world that offers higher education to international students of any nations without tuition fee. Although Norway does

not attract as many international students as the UK, the US and Australia, Norway's free education system certainly attracts a fair share of international students. For instance in the recent years, the number of international students in Norway has tripled (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013).

1.1 Justification of the study

Understanding tourist or consumer behaviour is one of the fundamental aspects of tourism industry and business operators. For tourism organisations, "such types of knowledge will provide tourism organisations with invaluable market intelligence which can be reflected in the organisation's marketing strategy" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 898). Within tourism consumer behaviour research, they are mostly dominated by key concepts such as motivation, decision-making and satisfactions whereas other areas and segments remain largely under-researched (Cohen et al., 2014). One of these segments is the segment of international students.

The market of international students is a relatively new phenomenon in comparison with the conventional market of tourists, which has been recognised by few academics (Weaver, 2004). Evidently, international students undertaking studies in study countries would also embark on tourism related activities and travelling during their time of study. Their contribution has traditionally been overlooked as the tourist commission has underestimated their significance to the tourism industry, as they do not fall under the category of tourist (Chen, Dwyer & Firth, 2015; Shu & Scott, 2014). Traditionally, few studies have focused on international students as a distinctive market in tourism as this market has been relatively small in comparison to other conventional tourist markets (Shanka & Taylor, 2002; Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). As a result, tourism organisations and operators have not spent substantial resources when comes to marketing to target such market.

In the recent years however, there has been an increasing number of studies on international students due to the recognition of their contribution to the tourism industry (Glover, 2011). For instance, international students for certain undertake holiday in the country of study during and on completion of their study (Gardiner, King, & Wilkins, 2013; Weaver, 2004). In addition, family and friends would also visit international students in their country of study. While such body of research is emerging (Brown, 2009; Gardiner et al., 2013; Glover, 2011; Kakyom Kim, Jogaratnam, & Noh, 2006; Varasteh, Marzuki, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015; Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009), the tourism industry has yet to consider international students as a distinct market (Gardiner et al., 2013).

An increasing number of studies on international students, thereby Chinese international students, have certainly provided additional knowledge about such segment. However, there are no known studies on international students and their travel behaviour in Norway. This study will be the first study focusing on international students in Norway. Specifically, Chinese international students were chosen for this study due to the growing and increasing market of Chinese tourists in Norway. The latest studies also indicate that Chinese tourists are the highest spenders in Norway, which indicates that they are an important market for the Norwegian tourism industry (Iversen, Løge, Jakobsen, & Sandvik, 2014). This also suggests that Norway is increasingly becoming a popular tourist destination for Chinese travellers. Therefore, understanding their travel behaviour is important in order to provide tourism products and attractions, which can satisfy their needs. It can also be argued that studies of Chinese international students are able to provide insights into the needs, preferences and perceptions of the emerging conventional Chinese tourist market (Hughes et al., 2015), even though they are considered as two markets. Similarly, Keating and Godfrey (2013) emphasise that Chinese international students are similar to other conventional Chinese travellers in

terms of activity preferences. Hence, supporting the argument that the market of Chinese international students may provide valuable insights into the needs of other Chinese conventional tourists. Nevertheless, although they are argued to be similar in many travel behaviour and characteristics, the Chinese international student market is not the same as the conventional Chinese tourist market due to their length of stay, purpose and preference. For instance, Chinese international students are motivated firstly by education, followed by travel (King & Gardiner, 2015).

The Chinese international students market also contribute further to the local tourism industry by encouraging visits from friends and family from China to Norway as well as recommending other potentials Chinese students to choose Norway as a country to undertake their higher education. As discussed, one of the main contributions of international students to the local tourism industry consists of the visiting-friends-and-relatives (VFR) market segment. Studies from the UK, US, Australia as well as New Zealand have indicate that inviting family members or friends from China to visit them in the study country is also popular among Chinese international students (Li & Stoldolska, 2006). Thus, Chinese international students attract a sizable (VFR) market segment for different destinations in the study country (Chen et al., 2015; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Liu & Ryan, 2011). Such contributions indicate that Chinese international students are potentially an important market segment for the Norwegian tourism industry, which is not usually recognised by a country's tourist commission. Hence, understanding Chinese international students and their travel behaviour is not only important to understand this market segment, but also because they have the potential to attract additional VFR market. Evidently, if Chinese international students' travel behaviour and preferences are not understood by tourism marketers, their needs might

not be satisfied. Subsequently, they may be less willing to recommend Norway as a holiday destination to their family members and friends.

While there are existing studies of Chinese international students and their travel behaviour, it cannot be assumed that the travel preferences and needs as well as perceived travel barriers of such students are the same across various study countries. This is because their motivation for choosing Norway as a country of study may be different from other countries such as the UK, the US and Australia as well as the study countries to be varied in terms of tourism products and attractions.

1.2 International students in Norway

As discussed, the number of international students in Norway has tripled in the recent years (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013). Many international students are attracted by Norway as a country of study due to its free education system but as well as its image as a modern and safe country with great nature. Exchange programs such as the ERASMUS-program, the NOMA-program and the NORDPLUS-program have also contributed to the increased number of international students (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013).

Table 1 – The largest groups of international students in Norway

| Country | Number in 2015 |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Sweden | 2185 |
| Germany | 1968 |
| Russia | 1417 |
| Denmark | 1051 |
| China | 1020 |

Source: (DBH, 2015)

The latest data indicates that there are 24.800 international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Norway (DBH, 2015). Although Chinese international students are not the largest group of international students in Norway, they are however the largest group of international students of Asian nation. Additionally as discussed, the Chinese tourist market in general is becoming an important market for the Norwegian tourism industry.

1.3 Research aim and questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the travel behaviour of Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Norway. Based on the gaps in the literature, the following research aim and questions are proposed.

The overall aim of this research is:

- To explore the travel behaviour of Chinese international students in Norway as means to understand their travel related needs and preferences.

Based on the overall research aim, three specific research questions were developed.

1. What are the key elements that can explain Chinese international students' travel behaviour, preferences and needs when they travel domestically in Norway?
2. How can Norwegian tourism operators accommodate and adapt to Chinese international students' travel related preferences and needs while limiting the barriers that may prevent them from travelling in Norway?
3. Based on their experiences in Norway, how willingly would Chinese international students recommend their family members, friends and other acquaintances to visit Norway as a tourism destination as well as a potential study country?

1.4 Methodology

Based on the nature of this study and the research aim, a qualitative research methodology was employed and primary data were gathered in form of semi-structure interviews were sought. The focus of this study was not to collect a large sample but to investigate relevant key topics in-depth.

As a qualitative approach was employed, information was not collected from a large sample but rather in-depth and comprehensive data from a smaller sample. Qualitative methodology approach allows extensive data to be collected in order to further explore of the relevant topics (Veal, 1992). An interview schedules was developed for this study based on the themes and topics in the literature (see Appendix 7.1). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the

collected data. A thorough discussion of the methodology is provided in chapter three of this thesis.

1.5 Delimitation and limitation

In any studies, delimitation is necessary. This study only focuses on Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions and therefore does not include other Chinese international students enrolled in institutions that do not offer higher education degrees such as Norwegian Folk High Schools (folkehøgskoler). This study considers Chinese international student as students of Mainland Chinese nation, hereby excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan, who have travelled to Norway to undertake studies at a Norwegian higher education institution for a limited period of time. Thus, Chinese nations who arrived in Norway as international students but have remained and currently reside in Norway are also excluded from the study.

In addition, tourist behaviour is a complex topic and due to time and resource constraints of this thesis, it is impossible to investigate every aspect of the behaviour of Chinese international tourists. Hence, this thesis focuses mainly on answering the main research aim and the subsequent three research questions. It focuses on studying tourist behaviour from a perspective that is beneficial for the tourism industry and operators to better understand this segment's travel related preferences and needs. The study does not investigate behaviour that seek to understand tourists themselves, their satisfaction and growth or from the public sectors' point of view.

Any research will have certain limitations. Limitations may exist in the literature view, the chosen methodology and the interpretation of the result. Limitation in regards to the

methodology and the chosen method is further discussed in chapter three. In regards to general limitations, the study did not differentiate between Chinese students who study in Norway on exchange programs for one or two semesters and students who complete their entire degrees in Norway. As the length of stay for these students vary, their travel behaviour and preference may also vary. As it was troublesome to locate Chinese international students in Norway for this study, such differentiation was not emphasised. However, attempts have been made to identify some different characteristics in regards to the various demographic backgrounds of the respondents.

Furthermore, due to time and resource constraints as mentioned, it was not possible to recruit respondents from all over Norway. The respondents were generally recruited from areas, which are within close proximity of where the researchers were based. This serves as a limitation as it can be difficult to generalise the findings to all Chinese international students in Norway.

1.6 The structure of this thesis

The structure of this thesis consists of five chapters, which starts with the introduction as well as the justification and significance of the study. This is followed by the literature review that reviews the existing studies on international students as well as Chinese international students in particular. Furthermore, there is a chapter on research methodology followed by the results and discussion of the findings. The thesis concludes with a concluding chapter. The content of each chapter is summarised below.

Chapter One introduces the study, the overall research aim and the subsequent three questions as well as the significance of the study and its potential contribution. In addition, this chapter introduces briefly the chosen research methodology and approach to data analysis.

In the next chapter of literature view, it focuses on the existing studies as well as the gaps of such studies. It investigates the overall theories concerning international students, their contribution to the tourism industry in the study country as well as their travel behaviour. Specially, the travel behaviour of Chinese international students is discussed. The chapter concludes with a proposed conceptual framework based on the literature.

Chapter Three contains discussion and explanation of the chosen methodology in details as well as the research process and procedure in selecting participants as respondents. It also justifies the reason for using a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, this chapter explains the thematic analysis approach to analyse the collected data.

Chapter Four discusses the results and findings in relation to the relevant literature discussed in Chapter Two. Since, the researchers of this study have adopted a qualitative approach, the results and discussion is merged as one chapter. It also concludes with an illustration of a further developed conceptual framework, which is based on the framework illustrated in Chapter Two, but combined with the findings of this study.

The concluding Chapter Five summarises the findings of this thesis as well as discusses the findings in regards to the research aim and subsequent three research questions. This chapter

also highlights both theoretical and practical implications as well as provides suggestions for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature review

The structure of this chapter is based on the key theories to be discussed in this paper. It firstly starts defining and understanding what is meant by tourist behaviour and the importance of understanding such. International students as a distinct segment are also explored. Furthermore, the significance of the market of international students to the study country's tourism industry is discussed. Such contributions consist of direct and in-direct contributions, where both are explored in details. International students' preferred activities, the ways they plan their holiday, the type of accommodation, food and transport are chosen as part of their travel preferences and needs are also explored. This chapter highlights the current gaps and limitations of the literature.

2.1 Understanding tourist behaviour

In the field of marketing, understanding consumers and their behaviour is one of the important tasks in order to provide products and services that satisfy the needs and wants of the consumer. Essentially, Solomon (1996) explains that consumer behaviour is the decisions, activities, ideas or experiences that satisfy a consumer's needs and wants. Similarly, understanding consumer behaviour involves exploring consumer's activities, which are directly "involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision processes that precede and follow these actions" (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1968, p. 4). Despite being one of the most studied areas in the field of tourism management and marketing and tourism, there are a lack of comprehensive literature reviews on concepts and models relevant to understand consumer behaviour in tourism (Cohen et al., 2014).

On another note, Pearce (2005) explains that a consumer can be defined as a person who is involved in the process of purchasing goods and services. While there are there many similarities between a consumer and a tourist, the main difference is that a consumer or consumption is not concerned with sustainability and environmental practices. Hence, consumer behaviour is not the same as tourist behaviour due to the sustainability issue (Moscardo, 1999). Tourist behaviour and activities can also be broken down into several phases (Table 2), which do not exist in the general consumer behaviour for the purchase of a consumer good (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966).

Table 2 – Phases of tourist behaviour and activities

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Phase One: | Anticipation or pre-purchase |
| Phase Two: | A travel to the site |
| Phase Three: | An onsite experience |
| Phase Four: | A return travel component |
| Phase Five: | An extended recall and recollection stage |

Source: Clawson and Knetsch (1966)

As indicated in the table, tourist behaviour and activities involves travelling to the site and the onsite experiences. The site can also be referred to as a place or destination, which does not exist in the purchase of a consumer good. Thus, the essential elements in tourist behaviour is about travelling to somewhere and such travel experiences enable the tourist to experience something unique and intangible as well as provide an opportunity for the tourist to learn, explore, view, feel, hear, absorb and sense (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966; Pearce, 2005).

Moreover, tourist behaviour can be studied from many points of views as illustrated in Figure 1 and the importance of studying tourist behaviour is explained.

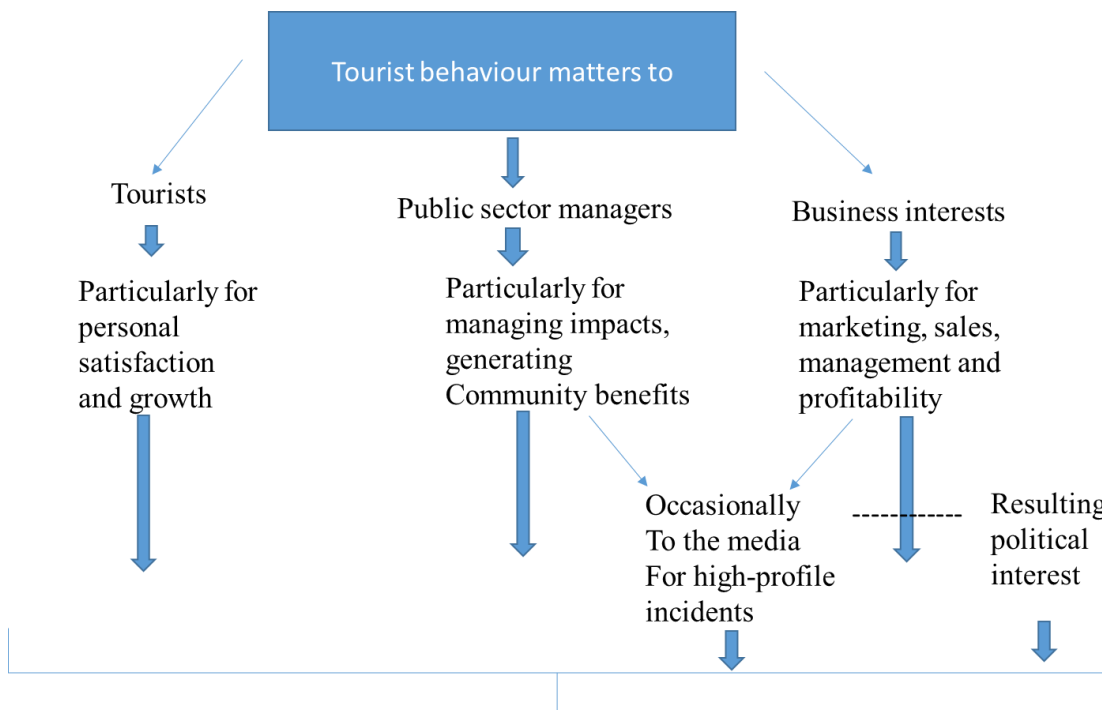


Figure 1 – To whom does tourist behaviour matter?

Adapted from Pearce (2005, p. 5)

The figure indicates that studies on tourist behaviour can be focused on the tourists themselves and the achievement and experience that they gain from partaking travelling and tourism activities. Furthermore, studying tourist behaviour can also benefit the public sectors as they can better manage community benefits. The final benefit of studying tourist behaviour is the interest of business managers such as tourism operators (Pearce, 2005). As discussed, on the basis on the research aim and questions, this paper is concerned with tourist behaviour in order to understand their travel related preferences and needs in regards to business interests. By understanding such travel behaviour, Norwegian tourism operators can accommodate and adapt to Chinese international students' travel related preferences and

needs while limiting the travel barriers. Thus, this thesis focuses on studying tourist behaviour for the sake of business interests rather than investigating behaviour that seek to understand tourists themselves, their satisfaction and growth and from the public sector's point of view.

Furthermore, Cohen et al., (2014) explain that the reason for largely fragment studies on tourist behaviour is due to the complicity of the subject. They have provided a figure to explain such complexity as illustrated in Figure 2.

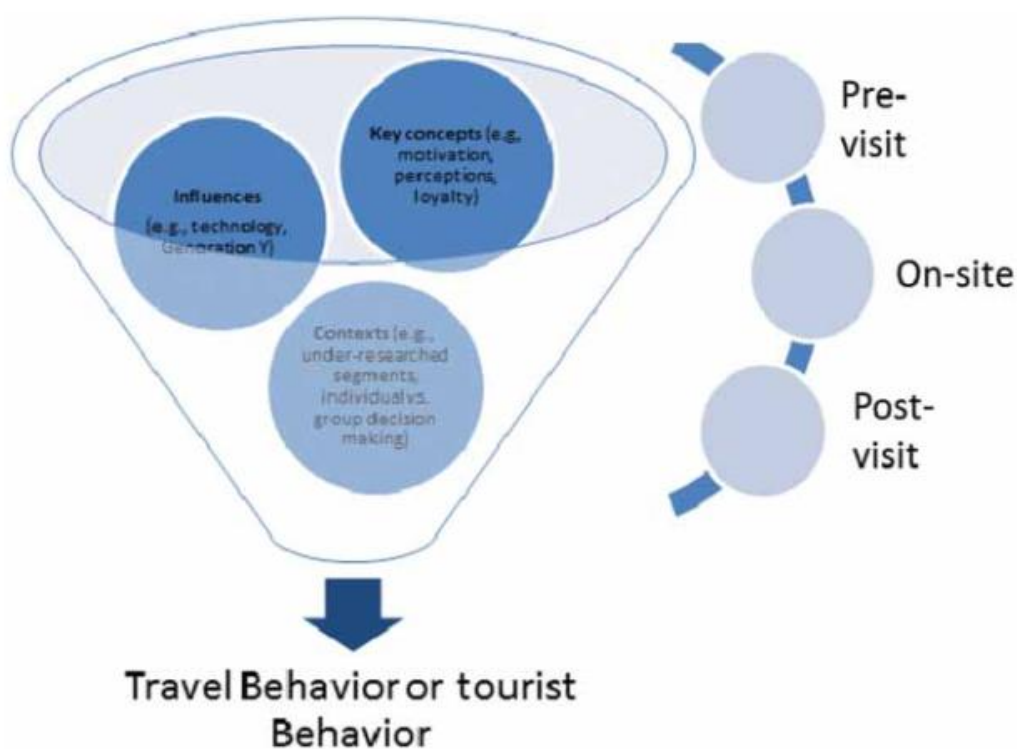


Figure 2 - Conceptual model of link between concepts, influences and research contexts

Source: Cohen et al. (2014, p. 873)

Travel behaviour can for instance be studied based on different stages of the travel. Pre-visit involve the information search related behaviour, on-site involves the actual behaviour when they undertake travelling and post-visit behaviour may involve word-of-mouth

recommendation to family and friends (Cohen et al., 2014; Frias, Rodriguez, & Castaneda, 2008). Additionally, technology and other demographic background, who they travel with versus travelling alone as well as other key concepts such as motivation, perception and loyalty influence tourist behaviour (Cohen et al., 2014). As discussed, the existing research into tourist behaviour is largely fragmented. This is attributed by a scarcity of holistic approaches to understand their behaviour or processes. As travel behaviour is argued to be a continuous process, relevant concepts and issues cannot always be analysed separately (Mill & Morrison, 2002). As indicated in Figure 3, one interesting area within tourist behaviour is the behaviour of under-researched segments or groups (Cohen et al., 2014). This is also the focus of this study as it concentrates on the under-researched segment of international students.

2.1.1 Behaviour influenced by tourist typology

Just like consumer behaviour from the general marketing, researchers studying tourist behaviour have to consider the different types of tourists and their different needs and preferences. Hence, segmenting tourist markets into specific groups will enable destinations and tourism operators to cater to the specific needs and wants of such particular group (Woodside & Martin, 2008). Evidentially, tourists can be grouped into various categories and types, and their travel behaviour including tourism sites and destination preferences, mode of accommodation and transportation and other travel related activities, is naturally influenced by the type of tourist they are. Generally, Cohen (1972) provides four main categories of tourists consisting of mass tourists, individual mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter. Mass tourists are concerned with package holidays and strict itinerary while the individual mass tourist are occupied with unique experiences and less strict with itinerary and package tours.

The explorer do have some travel plans or itinerary but prefers to travel independently by avoiding other tourists while drifters are the total opposite of mass tourists.

Conventional tourists can also be categorised as city tourists, adventure tourists and cultural tourists (Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001; Stylianou-Lambert, 2011). In the recent years, other types of niche market have also emerged including backpacker tourism, wine and tourism, event tourism, dark tourism, medical tourism, volunteer tourism and cruise tourism (Chen & Chen, 2011; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Hyde & S., 2011; Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001; White & Thompson, 2009; Ye, Qiu, & Yuen, 2011).

This study is not particular concerned with categorising the typology of tourists into the usual categories as discussed above as the focus is on Chinese international students as a tourist market. However, it can be argued that international and Chinese international students as tourist segments may display some travel behaviour, needs and preferences similar to various typologies of conventional tourists as discussed. The next section explores international students as a tourist market, which is distinctive from conventional tourists, youth and the general student markets.

2.2 International student as tourist market

Comparing to other mainstream and conventional tourist markets, the market of international students has been relatively less studied and their contribution to the tourism industry is largely ignored. The reason that they have been overlooked is because tourist commissions have either underestimated their significance to the tourism industry or have neglected the market because they do not fall under the category of tourist (Weaver, 2004). Supporting such

a notion, Leiper and Hunt (1998) indicate that the market of international students has usually been ignored by the tourism industry. This is due to the fact that international students in the past have been considered as a small market compared to other tourist markets. It can also be assumed that youth travellers such as international students have previously been grouped as similar to the market of backpack travellers rather than a separate market (Shanka, Ali-Knight, & Pope, 2002; Shanka & Taylor, 2002). In a more recent study, Gardiner et al. (2013) similarly argue that a lack of research effort is because the market of international students has been considered as insignificant compared with other larger tourist markets.

While the market of international students has in the past been regarded as relatively insignificant and small in size, studies such as Leiper and Hunt (1998) also confirm that they contribute a significant amount of the total tourist related expenditure. Students and education have been largely ignored by tourism organisations and operators in the past as they were not typically linked to the tourism industry (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). Hence, less tourism and promotional efforts are directed at such market. However, Weaver and Oppermann (2000) further argue that such market is estimated to one of the highest spenders per capita. Similarly, Marklein (2002) suggests that in the US for instance, the size of the international student market was about four per cent of all higher education students, but they contributed to an estimated expenditure of US\$12 billion annually. It can also be assumed that such contribution has further increased in the recent years.

Furthermore, while some tourism researchers have recognised the size of the international students markets, they still receive less attention by industry operators and practitioners alike because the youth market in general is regarded as less profitable and usually linked with

travelling on budget constraints (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Frost & Shanka, 1999). For such reasons, tourism operators are more interested in other more profitable markets.

One of the reasons that international students have not previously been identified as a separate market is that a majority of higher education students fall under the youth population category. Consisting of students of 18-30 years old, such group of youth market share the similar background, cultural, educational and financial situation (Davies & Lea, 1995). Nevertheless, further investigation confirms that the youth population also consists of various markets. For instance, there is a clear difference between full-time higher education students and young people in full-time employment. This is because higher education students tend to have much lower income than young people in full-employment. On the other hand, higher education students would logically have more leisure time than those who are fully employed (Davies & Lea, 1995; Prichard & Morgan, 1996). For such reasons, it is incorrect to consider the youth market as one homogenous group and their travel behaviour may also not be comparable (Carr, 2003). Hence, higher education students should be categorised as an own distinctive group. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that there are some overlaps between higher education students and the youth market in general (Carr, 2003; Huang & Tian, 2013; Shanka et al., 2002). Figure 3 provides an illustration of the different distinctive segments within the youth travel market. As indicated, besides being different from other tourists, international students are also distinctly differently from the general youth market, who are the target of many youth travel campaigns and efforts.

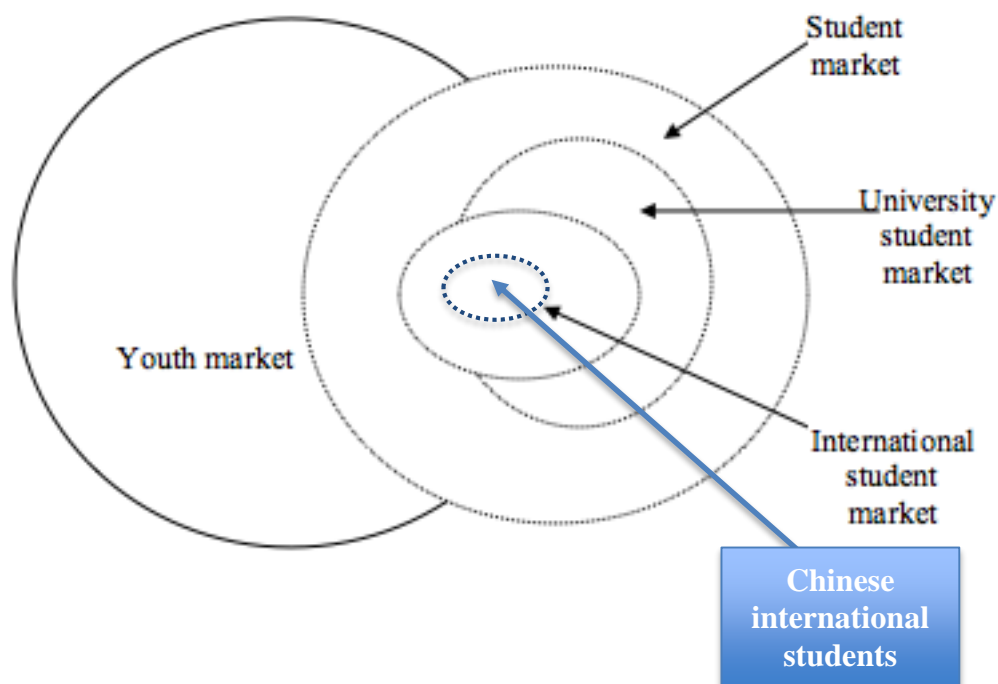


Figure 3 – International student as a distinctive group

Source: Adapted from Shanka et al. (2002)

This study does not focus on all higher education students but specifically on international students. The international students are therefore another sub-segment within the higher education student market, whereas Chinese international students are another sub-category under international students.

As discussed above, many national tourism organisations as well as local tourism organisations and operators have largely neglected the market of international students as a tourist market. Since the international student market is even smaller in Norway, it can also be assumed that there is even less focus on the international student market in Norway. Such lack of effort by the tourism industry is a mistake as Taylor, Shanka, and Pope (2004) and Weaver (2004) argue that in comparison to the conventional tourist markets, international

students remain in their study countries for a much longer period of time. Such prolonged nature of stay at their study countries would logically contribute to many economic benefits when they undertake travelling in the study countries. Additionally, their contributions can also be divided into direct and indirect, monetary and non-monetary such as creating bonds with the study country and adapting to new cultures. Such contributions are explored in the following sections.

2.2.1 Direct contributions to the tourism industry

The economic impact of the international student market in general should not be ignored due to their significance to the study country. Not all of their economic contributions are however tourism related, as in countries such as the UK, the US and Australia where international students are required to pay costly tuition fees. This by itself contributes to the economic importance to a study destination (Bywater, 1993).

When arriving in their study country, it can be argued that a majority of international students will undertake travel and tourism related activities during their stay. Weaver (2004) argues for instance that international students would travel extensively for non-educational purposes during their educational stay. The longer they remain in the study country, the more time and opportunities they will have to undertake travelling in the country. As such, all of their travel related expenditure is a direct monetary contribution to the local tourism industry (Weaver, 2004; Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). Additionally, as international students usually have more leisure times during semester breaks or end of semester breaks, they have more time to undertaking tourism related activities and thereby able to develop lasting bonds with tourism destinations, operators and providers (Field, 1999; Son, 2003). This will further encourage

them to return to the study destination for holiday purposes after graduation, contributing further to the local tourism economy (Gardiner et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2004).

As a majority of international students in general do plan to undertake some form of tourism and travel related activities, either during semesters or during the breaks, their direct contributions are evident (Weaver, 2004). Nevertheless, while international students can be considered as a lucrative market, there is little documentation of their exact spending on tourism related expenditure as many researchers and tourism operators largely neglect this market (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Weaver, 2004). The contribution by international students is not merely related to direct monetary contributions, as there are also many direct non-monetary contributions. For instance, due to their high educational qualifications and the opportunity to be exposed to the culture in the study country in a longer period, Weaver and Oppermann (2000) state that this encourages broad-mindedness, which may contribute to maintaining world peace and harmony. Similarly, it can be assumed that international students who have studies in an overseas study country will learn and gain more socio-cultural influences due to their contact with the study destination and local population (Son, 2003). Compared to other conventional tourist markets, international student market is also relatively stable by being less influenced by recession and other external events such as terrorism that usually influence the conventional tourism markets (Hobson & Josiam, 1995; Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). In the US for instance, studies suggest that the incident of 9/11 has not affected international students to undertake their higher education in the US (Marklein, 2002).

2.2.2 Indirect contributions to the tourism industry

In addition to direct monetary and non-monetary contributions, many indirect contributions can also be identified. Such contributions consist of the VRF market. When international students undertake studies overseas, it is common for family, friends and other relatives of these students to come for visits, for the purpose of graduations for instance (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). Although the VRF market would be considered as a conventional tourism market, they may not have chosen to visit the study country if they were not encouraged and recommended by the international students who are already in the study country. Taylor et al. (2004) argue that there is a high likelihood of positive word-of-mouth recommendations provided by international students to their family and friends. Figure 4 illustrates Chinese international students' contribution in attracting the VFR market segment by emphasising on how their own holiday experience in their study country may affect the likelihood and willingness of Chinese international students to encourage VFR to visit the study destination. While Liu and Ryan (2011)'s study is based on New Zealand, the findings can be applied to any study country.

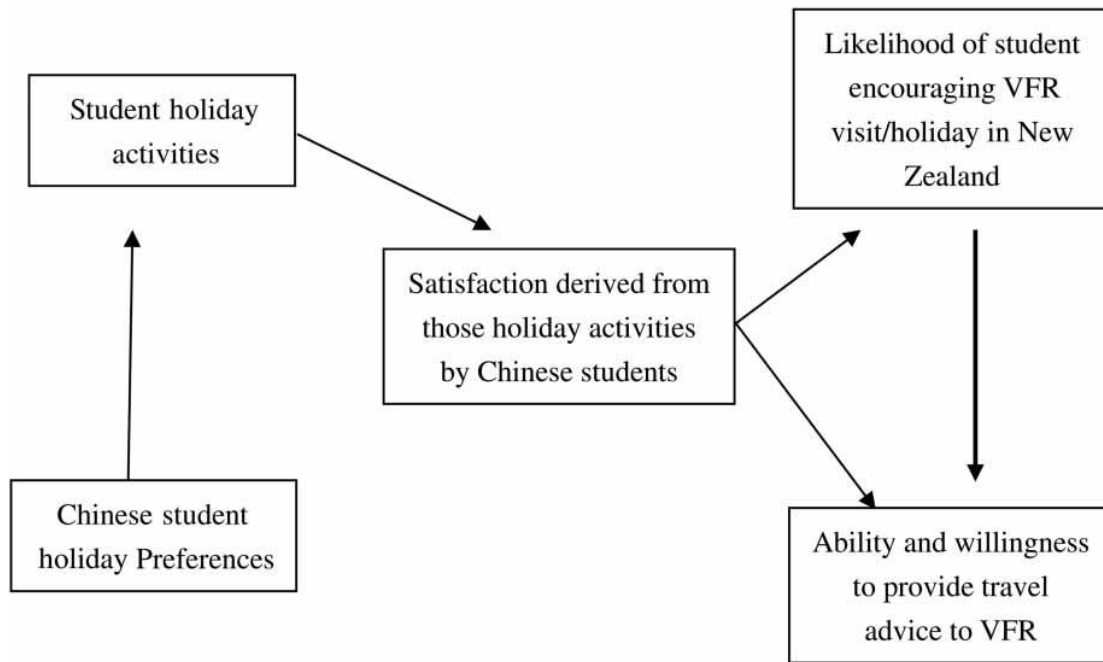


Figure 4 – Relationship between Chinese international students’ holiday experience and willingness to encourage VFR visits to study countries.

Source: Adapted from Liu and Ryan (2011, p. 449).

Evidently, benefits to the local tourism industry would arise when family and friends do come for visit, as they would undoubtedly also undertake travel and tourism related activities, contributing further to tourism expenditures (Dockery, Thorpe, & Haselhurst, 1999). The additional VFR travel and tourism expenditure can be regarded as an indirect monetary contribution contributed by international students (Taylor et al., 2004). However, in order for international students to act as catalyst to the VFR market, there must be a proper positioning (Taylor et al., 2004). Subsequently, to establish a proper position, it is important for tourism operators to firstly recognise international students as an important, lucrative and distinctive market. Other studies also support such notion as the educational sector can generate revenue from international students as direct non-tourism related contribution, but also other

additional contributions when they act as channel for family and friends to visit the study country (Shanka & Taylor, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004). A proper position would also mean that there is a high probability for the VFR market to spread positive word-of-mouth and travel experiences to other travellers or they may return for further visits (Roppolo, 1996).

Furthermore, Weaver (2004) argues that satisfied international students would also likely encourage other students in their home destinations to overtake study at an overseas institution. One of the significant factors when international students decide which overseas destination they should choose to overtake their study is personal recommendation by parents, relatives, friends and even other students (Son, 2003). Many studies agree that the most important information source for prospective international students is positive word-of-mouth recommendations by relative and friends, especially relatives and friends who have also previously undertaken studies overseas (Michael, 2001; Michael, Armstrong, & King, 2004; Son, 2003). Similarly in a study focusing on international students in Australia, it was revealed that families and acquaintances that had previous studied in the study country were considered as the most important factor to impact their decision on choosing the country as a study country (AEI, 2003). Such newly recruited international students would also undertake tourism and travel related activities and they may again recommend the destination to future international students. The contribution of international students to the tourism industry is therefore not limited to the current international students presently located in the study country.

However, it should be noted these findings are based on studies based on the UK, the US and Australia. Although they cannot be directly applied to Norway as a study destination for

international students, it can be assumed that international students as a distinctive market would show some similar characteristics and behaviour.

Both direct and indirect contribution by international students has been discussed in the above sections. Figure 5 provides a summary of the key elements. While the study is based on Australia, the contribution of international students in other host or study country would be similar.

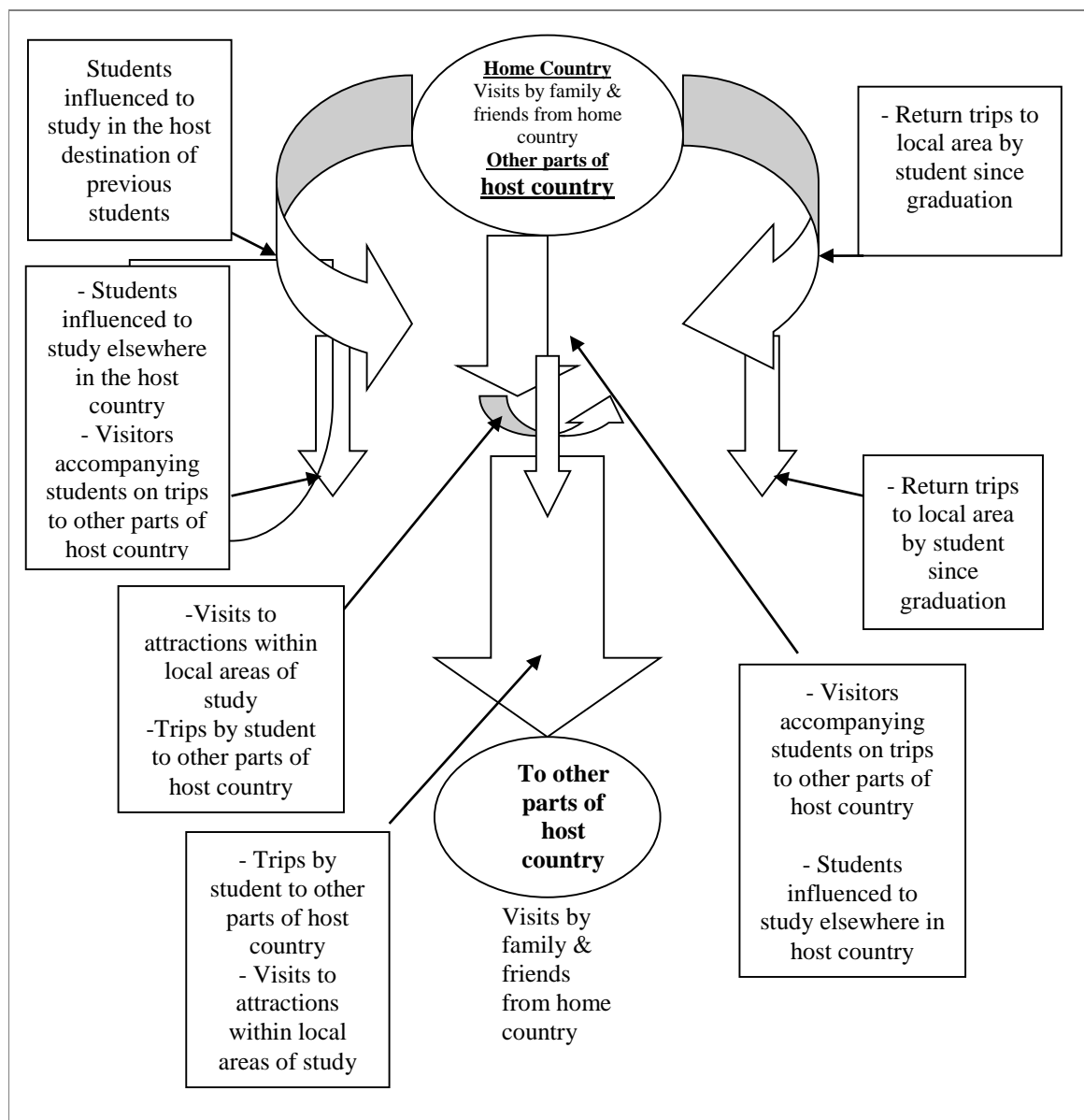


Figure 5 – International students’ direct and indirect contribution to tourism activity

Source: Adapted from Weaver (2004)

2.3 International students and travel behaviour

The travel behaviour of various tourist markets has always been of great interest to researchers and tourist marketers alike in order to provide tourism products that satisfy the needs and wants of various tourist groups. As various travel groups have different travel needs and preferences, international students and their distinctive travel behaviour should be of great interest to the tourism industry in their study destination (Field, 1999). As discussed previous, this is however not always the case. In order to target the various travel markets, tourism operators and marketers must understand the different behaviours and characteristics of various groups in order to develop tourism products, which satisfy their needs and wants (Ahmed & Chon, 1994). Also highlighted above, international students market must be considered as a distinctive market with their own set of travel behaviours, needs and preferences different from what tourism marketers know in regards to the general youth market (Chadee & Cutler, 1996). In addition as discussed, while international students and their travel behaviour can serve as a platform to understand the conventional tourist market, they are however two distinctive markets with some unique travel behaviour characteristics.

In a study conducted by Chen and Kerstetter (1999) in the US, they discovered that a majority of the international students that they surveyed had already undertaking travelling or other tourism related activities in the study country. Those who have not yet travelled intended to travel in the near future. Although this study was focused on international students in the US, Chen and Kerstetter (1999) managed to include a variety of international students including Chinese, Canadian, and several East Asian, African, European, Middle Eastern and Latin American nations. Similar findings was discovered by Gardiner et al. (2013) also included

respondents from various nations but focused on Australia as a study country. Although such studies are not directly applicable to understand Chinese international students' behaviour in Norway, the result from both studies indicate that regardless of nationality, international students do undertake travelling and tourism related activities. Another study from Australia which also included Chinese nations, indicates that about 90 per cent of the surveyed international students plan to travel with an average length of non-educational tourism related trip to be 3 weeks in total (TNT Magazine, 2004). There are however some contradictions as other studies reveal that only 54 per cent of the surveyed international student intend to undertake extensive travelling of more than an overnight trip (Carr, 2003). Carr (2003)'s study does not provide further explanations as to why this is the case or if the respondents were more interested in daytrips and longer trips. Similarly, although a majority of international students would travel in the study countries, Shanka and Musca (1998) also found that approximately 12 per cent of the respondents in their study reported that they did not travel at all. Certain travel barriers could explain some of such behaviour. Thus, Hughes et al. (2015) stress that it is important to identify the travel barriers that prevent international students from undertaking tourism related activities.

2.3.1 Preferences, activities and attractions

As discussed, it is important to understand and recognise activities that are preferred by international students as they have greater yield than the yield from the holidaymakers, conventioners and other types of visitors (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Leiper & Hunt, 1998). Travelling allows international students to learn about the new culture, history and nature, which serve as key motivation for international students to travel in the study countries (Gardiner et al., 2013; Weaver, 2004; Xu et al., 2009). By identifying their travel activities

including changes in preferences, tourism operators will be able to effectively target the segment with selected products and services.

Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) suggest that international students in general would prefer sightseeing and city tours as their travel related activities whereas Gmelch (1997) indicates that international students' preferences change over the time, from culturally related attractions to recreational opportunities. Shanka and Musca (1998) also agree with Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) by emphasising that sightseeing was the single most important activity undertaken by international students including Chinese international students when visiting a new place. In addition, Carr (2003) also suggests that international students find nature-based destinations more appealing and Michael et al. (2004) indicate that international students prefer activities such as sightseeing and shopping whereas water-based activities were unpopular. Furthermore, as international students often change their preferences over time (Gmelch, 1997), their interests in certain destinations and activities may not remain the same.

Both Field (1999) and Michael et al. (2004) further argue that international students would prefer to travel around the study country during holidays and semester breaks. Hence, marketing efforts should include information about various destinations to explore during the holidays (Field, 1999). However, Gmelch (1997) indicate that because many international students often stay overseas one or two semesters rather than undertaking the whole degree, they have less time to see everything. Therefore, they would also travel during weekends.

Moreover, Gmelch (1997) reveals that international students would also travel in groups of approximately five. For most of these students, it was their first time abroad and they did not want to travel alone or in groups of three or less. They also did not want to travel in larger

groups due to logistic problems. When they became familiar with the new environment, they size of the groups declined further. The decline of group size also occurred due to the liabilities when it comes to accommodation, going to restaurants and visiting places. When comes to information search process, Goodall (1990) argues that understanding international students' information search process including which sources they trust is crucial in order to effectively target the market. There are many disagreements between various researches regarding this topic. However, it is generally agreed that word-of-mouth recommendations are regarded as more reliable than commercial advertisement materials (Gmelch, 1997; Lou, 2014; Shanka et al., 2002).

In addition, compared to youth travellers or even local domestic students, international students are considered to have very different travel behaviour. Carr (2003) argues for instance that international students are much more interested in cultural experiences in the study country, in addition good climate and travelling in a safe destination. In comparison, local students were not very interested in such as they are already familiar with the destination and they are more concerned about entertainment and nightlife as well as making new friends. Understandably, international students arriving in a new study country would want to explore and experience new destinations and environment while this is uninteresting and taken for granted by local students (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003). Shanka and Musca (1998) explain that international students are not usually surrounded by family and friends. For such reasons, they are more likely to travel and explore new places during their leisure time. Furthermore, other tourism attributes such as the quality of attractions and tourism facilities are evidently more important for international students as well as value for money due to budget constraints (Carr, 2003; Xu et al., 2009). It is therefore inaccurate to group all higher education students

as one group, as previously done by many national tourism organisations and operators, due to their distinct travel behaviour and characteristics.

2.3.2 Travel behaviour based on demographic

According to Chadee and Cutler (1996), as similar to the conventional tourist market, the market of international students can also be grouped and divided into segments based on nationality and ethnicity. This is because tourists of similar ethnicity usually display similar travel behaviour and preferences. This is also confirmed by a study from Field (1999) focusing on international students in the US. Field (1999) reveals that international students from Australia and New Zealand displayed the highest rate for travelling during the semester breaks. In comparison, Turkish and some Asian nations including Chinese and Indians had low travel rate. Similar studies on tourism expenditure can also be found as Shanka et al. (2002) argue that they can draw relationships between the country of origin and travel behaviour including tourism expenditure. In a further study, Chadee and Mattsson (1996) confirm that international students of many Asian nations display different behaviour from international students from European nations, as Asian international students are more price sensitive in terms of tourism expenditure such as accommodation and car rentals. They simultaneously also expect higher standards and display a lower level of satisfaction if tourism products are not considered as value for money (Chadee & Mattsson, 1996).

Travel behaviour is evidently influenced by national culture and this is not necessary limited to international students. Many tourism studies focused on cultural differences confirm that tourists from high context culture nations display different set of behaviour and preferences comparing with low context culture nations (Litvin, Crofts, & Hefner, 2004). For such reasons, international students even as grouped by some researchers as Asian nations or

European nation should be rather broken down to more specific nationality and ethnicity (Richards & Wilson, 2003).

In addition to nationality and ethnicity, travel related behaviour, needs and preferences are also affected by age, gender, source of income, length of stay and other demographic background (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003). For instance, international students who are unmarried and younger in age would prefer to travel in large groups whereas older international students who are married would travel in smaller groups (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003). Hsu and Sung (1997) also argue that international students on funded scholarships would have budget constraints and therefore travel on low budget. In comparison, international students funding privately by family are more freely when comes to their expenditure and they usually prefer hotels as accommodation preferences. It is important to investigate how the financial situation and potential additional income such as part-time/casual jobs are important as they may influence on the respondents' travel behaviour. For instance, in countries where international students are permitted to work during their period of study, they can possibly again additional disposable income to be spent on travel and tourism in the study country (Shanka & Musca, 1998). Similarly Michael et al. (2004) believe that earnings generated during the time of their study contribute to the incidence of domestic travel activities. Moreover, international students who are more independent in terms of their finances would travel for a longer period of time than those international students who are on scholarships for instance (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003). In regards to gender, some studies argue that females and males international students also display different travel needs and preferences (Gmelch, 1997; Xu et al., 2009). Research is thus needed to address the relationships of ethnicity and nationality, age, gender and income and how they influence international students' travel behaviour.

As travel behaviour, preferences and needs can be influenced and understood by investigating the national and ethnical background as well as other demographic variables discussed above, Chinese international students market should be considered as a distinct market within the international student market. Essentially, it is important to understand Chinese international students and their travel behaviour in other nations than the countries of the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand as existing studies cannot be applied directly to other study countries.

2.4 Chinese international students

As no known studies of Chinese students in Norway exist to date, their exact contribution to the Norwegian tourism industry is therefore uncertain. Nevertheless, based on existing studies from the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand, it can be argued that Chinese international students contribute significantly to the tourism industries of the study countries (Chen et al., 2015; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Liu & Ryan, 2011). Although the number of Chinese international students in Norway is nowhere near the number of such students in other countries of other western democracies, Chinese international students are one of the highest numbers of international students in Norway. Additionally as discussed, Norway as a destination is becoming more popular among conventional Chinese tourists, it is therefore expected that the number of Chinese international students may also increase, like other study countries. Lou (2014) explains that an overseas degree is regarded as highly valuable in China as overseas degrees lead to higher salary and status for graduates. Hence, more students from China will increasingly seek education overseas.

The increasing number of Chinese international students seeking to undertake overseas and English based degrees is also encouraged by the Chinese government as an attempt for its

citizens to seek new experiences by broadening their horizon and interacts with the world outside of China (Chiu, 1995; Lou, 2014). With an improved economy and wealth leading to increased quality of life, Wang and Sheldon (1995) explain that overseas education is part of increased standard of living for many Chinese international students.

2.4.1 Chinese international students' travel behaviour

Studies from the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand indicate that Chinese international students tend to travel extensively while studying overseas (Hughes et al., 2015). Based on the Australian and the UK context, it was revealed that Chinese international students generally prefer iconic attractions, nature based activities and photography (Hughes et al., 2015). Similarly, Xu et al. (2009) argue that they also believe it was more important to see the famous sights and learn about other cultures and history. Different from their northern European counterparts, their participation in adventure tourism activities is low, as they prefer more passive ones (Huang & Tian, 2013). On the hand however, Hughes et al. (2015) argue that participation is low not because they do not want to seek such activities, but because they lack the skills and experience of adventure and nature-based tourism. This is also one of the barriers, which will be further discussed. On a more detailed level, the main activities undertaken by Chinese international students were shopping, visiting natural attractions such as beaches and national parks and sightseeing (King & Gardiner, 2015).

Besides visiting certain tourism sites and destinations, Chinese international students were also keen to seek novel experiences, making new friends as well as learning and exploring new cultures and history (Li & Bao, 2000). Similar findings are noted in more recent study by Liao (2012) based on the US as study country. However, sightseeing remains an important and popular activity documented by a majority of studies focusing on Chinese international

students, regardless of the country of study (King & Gardiner, 2015; Liao, 2012; Ryan & Xie, 2003; Xu et al., 2009).

Existing studies indicate also that Asian international students including Chinese are more likely to travel in groups (of friends or relatives) than their European, Australian, and North American counterparts (Huang & Tian, 2013; Shanka et al., 2002). Although it is agreed that group travelling is common among Chinese international students, studies of group dynamic and the decision-making process within the group is less explored. Furthermore, Xu et al. (2009) state that the travel behaviour of Chinese international students can also be explained by their previous experiences in travelling in addition to the cultural factors. As travel behaviour and preference are also largely influenced by ethnicity, nationality, cultural background as well as the country of study (Chadee & Cutler, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2013), the current studies into international students is not sufficient to be applied to understand Chinese international students in Norway.

Moreover, previous studies on Chinese international students reveal some other contradictory findings as some believe that such students prefer youth hostels due to budget constraints whereas others indicate that hotels and motels were preferred (Huang & Tian, 2013; Shi, Nakatani, Sajiki, Sawauchi, & Yamamoto, 2010; Xu et al., 2009). Huang and Tian (2013) also argue that mode of transport will depend on the destination as in the UK, low-cost airlines are cheaper than train. Chinese international students therefore prefer to travel by air rather than by car and train in other destinations such as Australia. While these recent studies certainly provide valuable insights into Chinese international students and their travel behaviour, they are largely quantitative in nature and based on findings from the UK, the US

and Australia. Hence, many tourist activities are largely dominated by attractions in these destinations and thus cannot be directly applied to the Norwegian tourism.

Additionally, as an increasing number of studies are focusing on Chinese international students and their travel behavior, a majority has mostly focused on motivation, preferences of activities, transport and accommodation preferences and information search (such as Chen et al., 2015; Liao, 2012; Ryan & Xie, 2003; Shi et al., 2010; Shu & Scott, 2014; Wang & Sheldon, 1995; Xin & Lin, 2012; Xu et al., 2009). Whereas travel barriers and constraints experienced by conventional Chinese tourists have been less studied and understood in general (Li, Zhang, Mao & Deng, 2011) and there are even less studies on Chinese international students specifically (Hughes et al., 2015). Thus, only a handful of studies have focused exclusively on the barriers that may prevent these students to undertake certain tourism activities and attractions and one of these is Hughes et al. (2015). Hughes et al. (2015) for instance identified that barriers to travel consist of costs, distances and lack of time as well as personal safety is also in natural environments. In order to further understand barriers, they have conceptualised the barriers into three parts consisting of intrinsic, extrinsic and control barriers (Figure 6).

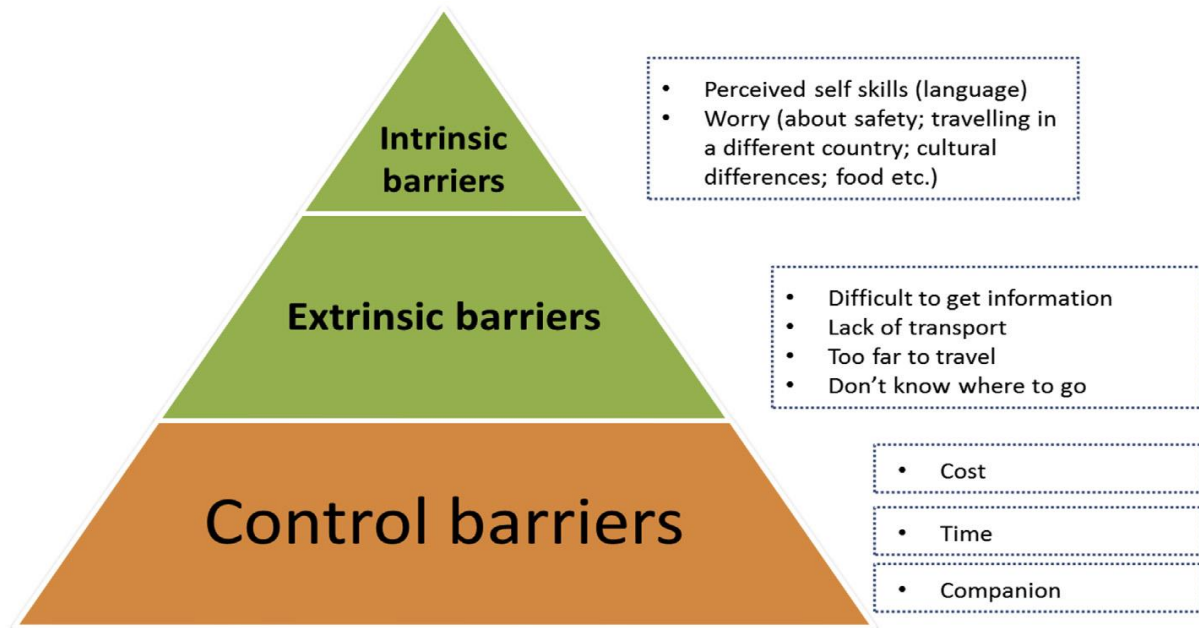


Figure 6 – Hierarchy barriers inhibiting Chinese International students to travel in study countries

Source: Hughes et al. (2015, p. 19)

The control barriers are the first set of barrier Chinese international student firstly encounter. If they have lack of time, cost and companion, they may not choose to undertake any travelling (Li et al., 2011; Hughes et al, 2015). After overcoming the control barriers, these are then followed by extrinsic barriers and intrinsic barriers. While cost and lack of time has been raised by other researchers (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Gardiner et al., 2013), personal safety in natural environments as part of intrinsic barriers due to a lack of knowledge and experience of adventure and nature-based tourism may be particular relevant for Chinese international students as well as Chinese tourists in general (Hughes et al., 2015).

Understanding barriers is just as imperative as understanding travel behaviours such as preferences and needs as barriers may prevent the students from making certain decisions (Li et al., 2011). By understanding the various levels of barriers, tourist commissions and

marketers may be able to design more suitable tourism products and effective marketing programs. As Norwegian tourism is highly dominated by adventure and nature-based activities, identifying the barriers and the intrinsic barriers in particular among Chinese international students is crucial in addition to understanding other travel related behaviours.

Based on the literature review, a proposed conceptual framework has been developed and illustrated in Figure 7. The three research questions (RO) have also been incorporated into the conceptual framework.

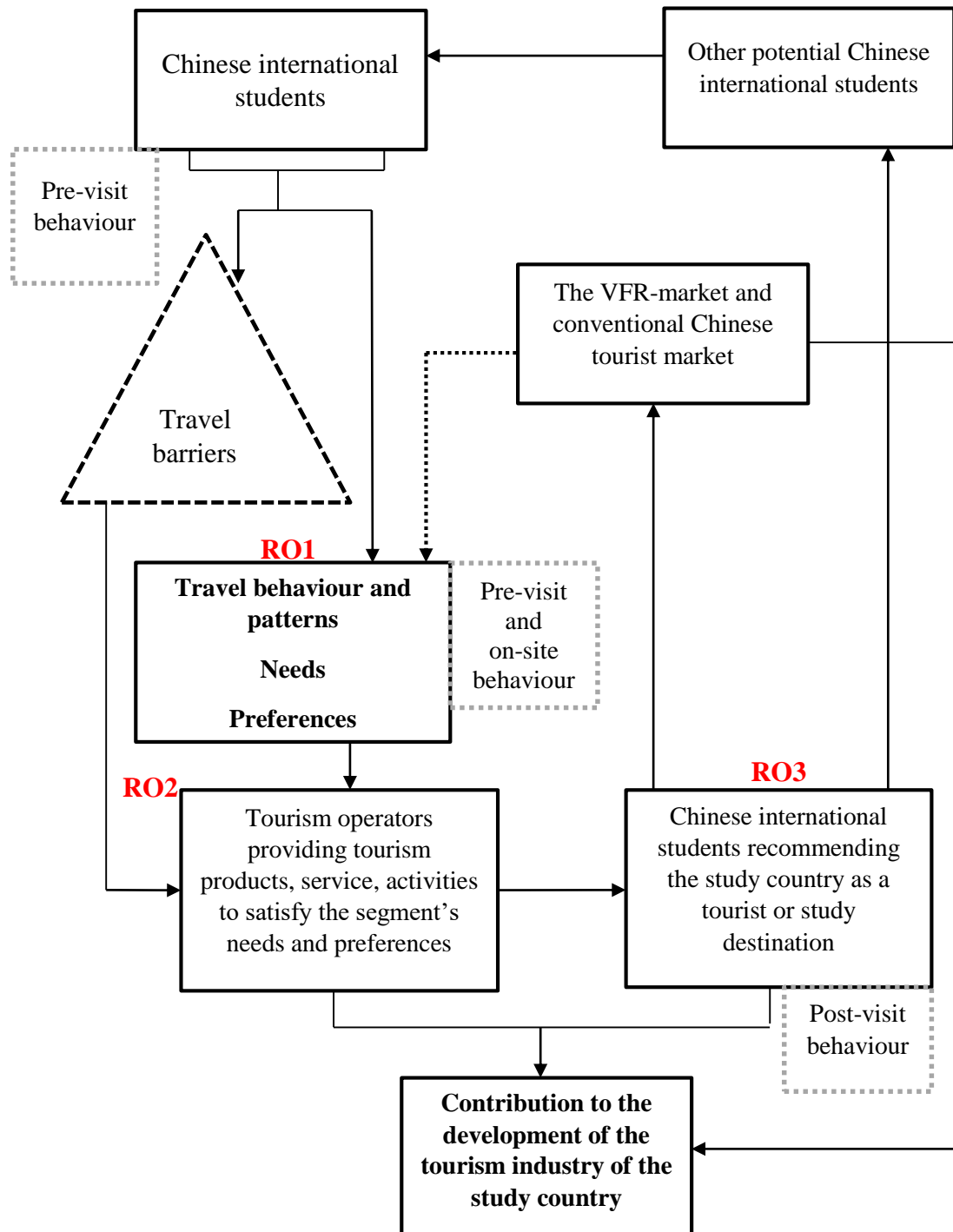


Figure 7 – Conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Cohen et al. (2014); Hughes et al. (2015); Weaver (2004)

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Methodology

This chapter highlights the chosen methodological approach and the justification of such approach based on the nature of the research aim. Furthermore, the chapter also raises some of the methodological limitations. The primary aim of the study was to explore the travel behaviour of Chinese international students in Norway as means to understand their travel related needs and preferences. In the process, their travel barriers were also identified. It was also revealed in the literature review that there has been relatively little research conducted on the overall international student market segment and even less specifically on Chinese international students. A majority of existing are largely dominated by quantitative approach to research methodology. This study aims to contribute to these under-researched areas by employing a qualitative research methodology based on an interpretive research design (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). The methodological position is situated in the interpretive paradigm. The justification for choosing approach is highlighted in the following section.

3.1 The epistemological assumptions

When comes to epistemology, Tribe (2004) states that since knowledge is not an objective account, no universal epistemology exist. Explained by Mannheim (1960) various groups will experience their surroundings in different ways depending on their previous knowledge and background. For such reasons, people have different and sometimes contradictory claims as to what knowledge is. Since knowledge is rather subjective than objective, such issue is will likely influence the researchers conducting a scientific research. This includes the researchers' opinions, preferences and beliefs, which vary among independent researchers (Tribe, 2004). It

is therefore important to be aware that these independent opinions may affect the research process as data and findings may be misunderstood and misinterpreted caused by improper data collection and analysis (Sapsford & Jupp, 1966). Respondents on the other hand may also provide false or inaccurate information. As a result, epistemological assumptions in a study must be carefully considered during the data collection and analysis process as well as when developing the interview questions in the interview guide.

Figure 8 illustrates three approaches of positivist, critical and interpretive, which are considered as the underlying philosophical assumptions.

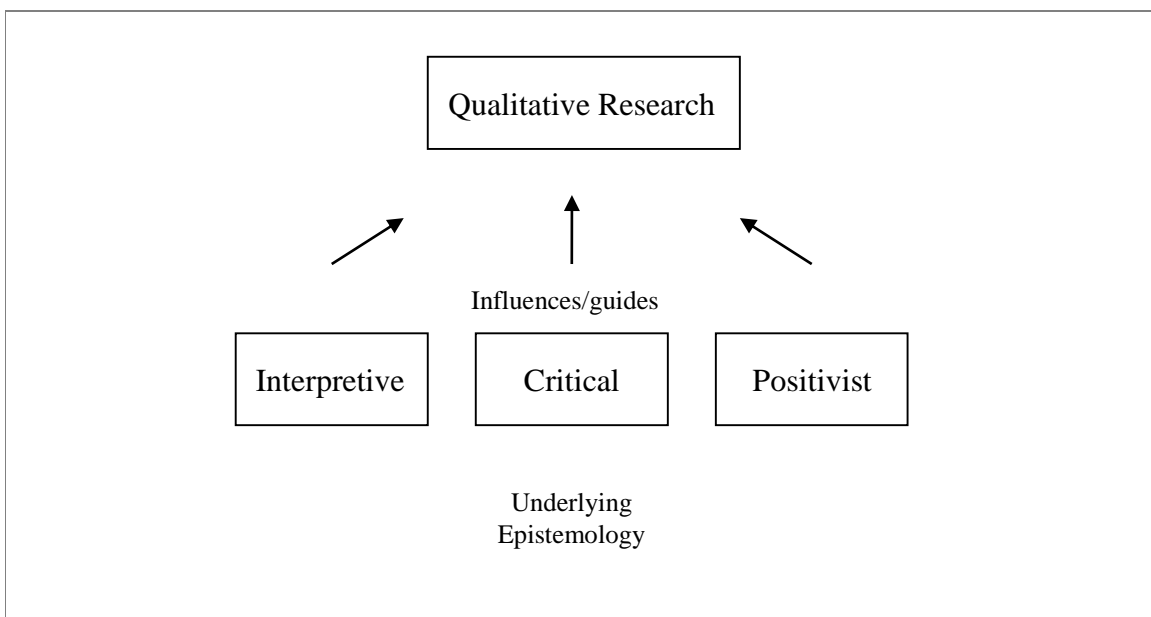


Figure 8 – Underlying philosophical assumptions

Source: Myers (2009, p. 35)

All three underlying philosophical assumptions were evaluated and considered by the researchers of this study. The positivist approach indicate that facts or one correct answer can be found in the within any research. Henderson and Bialeschki (2002) explain that

statisticians or studies based on quantitative methodology often use statistics to develop studies and research methods. This is an example of the positivist view or approach (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Higgs and McAllister (2001) further explain that positivist views can be described as hard science with less room for data interpretation as subjectivity is considered as unsuited with scientific studies. Relationship establishment using statistics and numbers by testing and measuring hypotheses is therefore considered as positivist approaches (Higgs & McAllister, 2001).

Interpretive approach on the other hand as argued by Cohen and Manion (1994), focuses on investigating and understanding human behaviour and experiences based on a subjective point of view. This means that researchers do not seek to find one correct answer but rather to explore many topics and answers that would emerge during the process. The truths will exist within any research studies (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Moreover, the time dimension of the study will be cross-sectional, as it will be carried out once (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Although critical researches share similarities with interpretive research, it emphasises on social critique and aims to challenge prevailing beliefs, assumptions and values often ignored by the subjects themselves. On the other hand, an interpretive approach would describe the current knowledge and beliefs (Myers, 2009). Hence, it was decided that an interpretive approach was more suitable than the other two underlying philosophical assumptions. For such reasons, the interpretive paradigm dominates both the philosophical and the methodological position of the researchers, including the literature view, development of interview guide, data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research design

As discussed, this study employed a qualitative methodology approach as it allows researchers to explore the relevant themes and topics in-depth. In contrary to a quantitative study, qualitative research is dependent on the role of the researchers as the interpreter as well as being able to investigate the topics from various points of view. Additionally, the main difference between a quantitative study and qualitative approach is that quantitative approach focuses on collecting large numbers of data from a large group of population. Qualitative approach on the other hand is more concerned a small sample since to gain rich in-depth data (Veal, 1992). The essence of qualitative research is telling the respondents' opinions and experiences from their point of view rather than the researchers' point of view (Creswell, 1998). As qualitative approach also involves investigating and understanding human behaviour in a more natural setting rather than in a laboratory or other controlled settings. Kraus and Allen (1997) state that such studies are thus more realistic to the real world.

Additionally, qualitative studies have high flexibility because "it is not constricted by the need to develop matched groups of participants in the study or by the required use of validated instruments or measurement procedure" (Kraus & Allen, 1997, p. 101). While such flexibility is one of the benefits of qualitative research, some have argued that it can also be a weakness due to their nature of being unfocused, unstructured and random. This may also cause challenges during data analysis and comparisons (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). By following a predefined interview schedule and guide, which serves as the research instrument, the interview questions were designed to be semi-structured as an attempt to overcome some of the weaknesses of a qualitative methodology approach.

3.3 Research instrument design

Interview schedule serves as the main the research instrument in this study. The interview schedule was developed particularly and independently for this study based on the literature view. Kumar (1996) explains that qualitative study, which uses interviews as the main research instrument; the researchers are able to ask a set of pre-determined questions in a face-to-face interaction. Interviews can also be conducted on the telephone and other digital media such as video conferencing tools including Skype. The best approach is however face-to-face interactions (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002).

In order to gain in-depth information, Henderson and Bialeschki (2002) stress that questions in an interview schedule must be designed as open-ended as such questions will allow respondents to further elaborate and explain their responses. Although, the researchers would be able to explain the questions in a different manner, should the respondents not understand the initial questions, all questions should be designed as neutral, non-offensive and clear. Additionally, the researchers must ensure neutrality of the questions by allowing respondents to freely express their opinions without receiving negative or positive reactions by the researcher (Henderson, 1991).

For this study, the questions in the interview schedule sought to investigate the travel behaviour, preferences and needs as well as travel barriers of Chinese international students in Norway. These questions are based on issues found in the literature discussed earlier, both from studies specifically on travel behaviour of Chinese international students as well as international students in general. Furthermore, some demographical questions were also included in order to explore the relationship between their demographical backgrounds with their travel behaviour. The purpose of demographic information is to collect some statistical

data about the population to be studied (Kumar, 1996), and therefore not always relevant in a qualitative study as it does not seek to establish any statistical relevance. However as discussed in the previous chapter, existing studies indicate that international students and their travel behaviour is very much influenced by age, gender, income and other demographical background. It is therefore important to investigate these elements. Henderson (1991) stress since respondents usually do not regard demographic questions are significant, the researchers of this study have including demographic questions to be at the end of the interview.

3.3.1 Interview schedule

In order to develop an independent interview schedule, the questions in the interview schedule were justified based on issues raised in the literature. As discussed, they were designed to be open-ended and semi-structured in order to gain in-depth information and further exploration of the topic (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Kumar (1996) also states that the order of the questions needs to follow a logical progression based on the objectives of the research.

The first topic sought to explore reasons why Norway was chosen as a study destination. Michael et al. (2004) argue that marketing undertaken by a country or state as a tourist destination may affect its appeal as a place to study. Thus, the researchers wanted to explore whether such a statement is applicable to Chinese international students in Norway. As the education in Norway is tuition free, the motivation to study in Norway may be different than other country such as the UK, the US and Australia, which most existing studies into Chinese international students are based on, as all of these countries require substantial tuition fee. It is also believed that if international students were attracted to Norway as a tourism destination and its attractions, they would be more eager to undertake travel related activities in the study country as well as encouraging visits from VFR-market.

Next topics aimed to explore places in Norway that the respondents have already visited and planning to visit. Other questions aimed to look at the destinations that were the respondents' priorities before arrival and activities that have or will be undertaken by the respondents. Additionally, the sources of information that are used by the respondents to find tourist spots when planning for travel were also investigated. The next topic investigated the various preferences when undertaking travelling. Essentially, these topics covered the preferences and needs of the market. This were then followed by seeks to explore whether Chinese international students encourage their family member and friends to visit Norway during the period of their study. The final set of questions was all socio-demographic related questions. The interview schedule is found in appendix 7.1.

3.4 Sample and participants

Samples in qualitative approaches are usually small and purposive (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). The intended participants of this study were Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Norway. The researches concentrated on universities and university colleges in the counties of Rogaland, Oslo and Hedmark due to time and resource constraints. The main concerns were therefore to ensure that sampling was representative. All sampling strategies are purposeful and seek to select samples, which can provide rich information about issues that are of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). In regards to qualitative studies, it all depends on the purpose of inquiry and other circumstances such as available time and resources. However, some guidelines must be considered such as collecting and analysing data as an ongoing process until no new data can be found (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Punch, 1998). A saturation point may however be reached with as few as twelve participants and no more than twenty (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence, the ideal sample size for this study was 12-15 participants.

3.5 Data collection

Interviews are often used when a smaller sample size is required (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002), which is suitable for this study. To overcome some of the disadvantages of a qualitative approach as discussed earlier, the data collection method was based on semi-structured interviews where the questions were pre-determined and open-ended. This type of interview provided uniform information, which ensures the comparability of data as the same wording, and order of the questions was specified in the interview schedule (Kumar, 1996). Contrary to a quantitative approach of data collection, the respondent may respond in whatever way she or he wants (Saunders et al., 2012).

Interviews also enable the researcher to gain additional data through observations from non-verbal reactions and visual cues, which is one of the major advantages of interviews. Hence, interviews are often used to explore topics and themes in-depth (Henderson, 1991). The drawbacks of interviews are however the difficulty in standardisation. The richness of the data gathered compensates some of the drawbacks (Henderson, 1991). Furthermore, face-to-face in-depth interviews in qualitative research allow less likelihood for misinterpretations and misunderstandings because questions can be repeated and put it in a form which is understood by the respondent (Sapsford & Jupp, 1966). This also allows the researchers to obtain unplanned or serendipitous information, which might allow more insight into the true feelings of respondents. The purpose of interviews is to find out what is on people's mind and to understand the perspectives of others (Henderson, 1991). In addition, personal interviews often result in a higher response rate and it also allows the researcher to control the process to address the purposes of the evaluation project (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002).

3.5.1 Method

International student offices as well as student unions were contacted by email and telephone regarding the research. Their cooperation was sought to locate Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in the relevant regions. Although they agreed to send out information to Chinese international students through their email systems, there were no responses at all. Thus, a different approach had to be applied. The researchers managed to identify and recruit some Chinese international students located in some of the higher education institutions as a starting point. From there, a snowball approach was employed to further ensure that an adequate sample of international students was attained. A snowball approach involves getting people that the researcher knows to recommend others to participate in a study (Saunders et al., 2012). Although, such an approach is obviously biased, but if there are difficulties in identifying the population needed for the study, a sample may be obtained in such a way (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Participation in the research was strictly voluntarily and this was emphasised by the researchers when they approached the potential respondents.

3.5.2 Interview procedure

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in English. A digital voice recorder was used during the interview, as it acted as both a reassurance of the seriousness of the interview as well as to ensure that all information was recorded for data analysis purposes (Douglas, 1985). A recorder is useful in interviews as the interviewer may devote his or her attention to the interviewee instead of being distracted from notes taken by hand (Henderson, 1991). The respondents were informed about the use of a recorder prior to the interview and their consent was sought. Both the confidentiality of the recording and the whole study were assured. Brief notes were also taken in addition and key words were registered in the notes to ensure that

any ambiguity or disturbance in the recording would not lead to misinterpretation of the information caused by incomplete or missing data. After the completion of interviews, the recorded interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. No real names or any personal details were included in the final paper.

The interviews lasted for about 30 min to 45 min. The respondents were fully aware at the whole time during the interview that their participation was voluntary and that they could terminate the interview at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondent's identities and responses were guaranteed by the researchers.

3.6 Reliability and validity

One of the fundamental issues in qualitative research is validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). High validity is possible to achieve if interview responses are explored from various angles (Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, external validity refers to the degree to which the findings from one study can be generalised while internal validity refers to whether findings demonstrate a causal relationship between two variables (Saunders et al., 2012). To ensure internal validity, the researcher followed an interview schedule and a standardised procedure. In terms of external validity, generalisation is usually limited in qualitative studies. However, qualitative studies do not seek to generalise their findings as they stay close to the empirical world and produce meaningful studies of the real world (Blumer, 1969). In terms of reliability, a study is considered as reliable if it produces the same result when repeat measurements under constant conditions are conducted (Saunders et al., 2012). To ensure reliability and validity, the questions in the interview schedule were developed based on academic literature and previous studies.

Furthermore, in addition to validity, the research must also be reliable. High reliability means that the research can produce similar results when repeat measures under continual conditions are undertaken (Moser & Kalton, 1989). The nature of interviews and the different environment of how interviews are conducted may have a negative impact of reliability. Nevertheless, as qualitative methods focuses on real life situations, it is not possible to create perfect reliability (Kumar, 1996). Both reliability and validity can be to a certain increased. Thus, to increase such, the interview questions were developed based on topics raised in the literature. A pilot test of the questions were also conducted among helpful colleagues, although pilot tests do not need to be as thoroughly conducted than quantitative approaches such as surveys (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002; Saunders et al., 2012).

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted on the basis of a thematic analysis of transcribed interviews. Thematic analysis is a form of constant comparison used to analyse documents, records, transcribed conversations, letters or any documents in a textual form. It involves making inferences by systematically identifying characteristics of messages and is related to a process of ascertaining meanings about a written phenomenon being studied (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Hence, it is a more analytical strategy than a data collection strategy (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Categories or themes are generated from reading, annotation and coding followed by evaluation of the categories in regards to relevance of emerging taxonomy in relation to the empirical setting in which they emerged (Jennings, 2001). The approach to data analysis was an interpretive approach in order to explore the themes and concepts in-depth (Saunders et al., 2012).

For textual types of data and information such as open-ended questions in particular, thematic analysis is widely used (Kondracki, Wellmann, & Amundson, 2002). Hence, thematic analysis is used for data gathered from interviews as well as other rich data such as focus groups and document analysis. However, interviews required a more interpretive approach to explore and understand the themes. Normally in a qualitative research, large amount of rich in-depth data would be collected (Myers, 2009). The 15 semi-structured in this study also resulted in large amount of data. In this paper, the approach to thematic analysis involved grouping and transforming the large amount data to manageable coded themes or categories by identifying similar patterns of the themes and issues (Neuendorf, 2002). The researchers focused on coding and organising data into categories based of key theme and issues as well as developing new establishments and conceptual elements (Jennings, 2001). The researchers did not use any computer software as tool to code the data, as the collected data was manageable without the aid of computer software tools. The interpretation in a qualitative study is depending on the interpretation and skills of the researchers rather than a software tool. The choice of coding the data manually has thus no significant impact on the result in comparison to a quantitative study (King, 2004).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical practice involves the moral stance employed to respect and protect the people to be studied (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher ensured that potential participants were given the opportunity to give their informed consent to participate and that they could freely terminate their involvement for any reason and at any time (Payne & Payne, 2004). Moreover, participant confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, as the two researchers involved in this study were the only persons who can identify the participants by name. The audio

material for the interviews and interview transcripts were also stored in password-protected computers.

3.7 Limitations of the methodology

As with any studies, qualitative or quantitative approach, this study also has certain methodological limitations. Some limitations are relevant to the general approach of qualitative methodology as previously discussed. The quality of the gathered data is also dependent on the researchers' skills when conducting the interviews (Kumar, 1996). As this study was collaborated between two researchers where both researchers conducted the interviews separately, it was not possible to standardise the interview process entirely. However, the fact that both researchers conducted interviews also serves as a positive approach as both researchers were involved in the entire research. This also strengthens data analysis and interpretation of the data.

Moreover, the data collection process where participants was recruited by using snowball sampling was time consuming and may not represent the entire population of Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Norway. In addition, data interpretation and analysis are also fully dependent on the skills, knowledge and quality of the researchers (Henderson, 1991).

As the interviews were conducted in English and not in the respondents' native language of mandarin Chinese, some misunderstanding may have occurred. However, Chinese international students who study in Norway have majority of their courses taught in English at the higher education level, it is thus believed that language barriers were not a significant issue.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Result and Discussion

This chapter reports the findings and results of this research. More importantly, the findings and results are analysed and discussed. As this study uses a qualitative methodology approach, the results are reported together with the discussion, rather than having results in a separate section. As stated in the previous chapter, thematic analysis was used as data analysis method. Thus, the findings are reported and discussed based on themes and categories.

The analysis of the data is based on the information collected from the interviews with the selected subjects and exclusively examines their responses to the questions regarding travel behaviour, needs and preferences. It also identifies emerging trends and any other notable issues. Essentially, the result of the study refers to relevant issues and claims in the literature about Chinese international students as well as international students in general and their travel behaviour, needs and preferences in order to comprehensively discuss the findings. As interviews and any qualitative data collection will result in large amount of data collected. Not all collected data is relevant. Thus, the focus is on exploring and analysing data that is relevant in answering the research aim and the subsequent research questions.

4.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

A profile of respondents is presented in table 3. In total, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with Chinese international students in Norway and all 15 interviews were considered usable. The demographics of the respondents is illustrated are the following charts. The identities of the respondents are anonymous; therefore, the profiles only include some

general information that does not identify the respondents. The demographic information is however important to understand the travel behaviour of Chinese international students.

Table 3 – Profile of respondents

| No. | Study | Age | Gender | Duration of Stay | Form of graduation | Financial Support | Working | Marital status |
|-----|-----------------------|-----|--------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Erasmus | 22 | F | 1 semester - 5 months | Master | Self-funded | No | In a relationship |
| 2 | Erasmus | 25 | F | 4 months | Bachelor | Scholarship | No | Single |
| 3 | Petroleum Engineering | 25 | F | 2 years | Master | Self-funded | Part time job (Chinese restaurant) | Single |
| 4 | Petroleum Engineering | 34 | M | 2 years | Master | Self-funded | Summer job (Chinese restaurant) | In a relationship |
| 5 | NHS | 27 | F | 8 months | Master | Self-funded | Part time job | Single |
| 6 | NHS | 23 | F | 2 year | Master | Self-funded | No | Single |
| 7 | Erasmus | 25 | F | 1 semester | Master | Self-funded | No | Single |
| 8 | Petroleum Technology | 28 | F | 2 years | Master | Scholarship | No | Married |
| 9 | Media | 28 | M | 1 year | Master | Self-funded | Part time job (Chinese restaurant) | Single |
| 10 | Computer Science | 27 | M | 2 years | Master | Scholarship | in a small company (computers) | In a relationship |
| 11 | Business management | 25 | F | 2 years | Master | Self-funded | Planning to work | Single |
| 12 | Business management | 28 | F | 1 year | Masters | Self-funded | No | Married |
| 13 | Literature | 20 | F | 6 months | Degree | Self-funded | No | Single |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------|----|---|----------|---------|-------------|----|--------|
| 14 | Media | 25 | F | 6 months | Masters | Self-funded | No | Single |
| 15 | Engineering | 23 | F | 6 months | Masters | Self-funded | No | Single |

A majority of the respondents were female and self-funded. Although, the study did not manage to achieve an equal balance of gender, both male and female were included. The study managed to achieve a wide range of age groups ranging from 22 to 34 years old. A majority of respondents were postgraduate students and single. Their duration of stay varies from five months to the full two years. This indicates that some students are full-time international students whereas others were exchange students only staying for one or two semesters. In regard to part-time employment, international students from countries outside the EU/EEA/EFTA such as China are permitted to work part-time for up to 20 hours per week. If a work permit is granted, full-time work is permitted during semester breaks. Obtaining student work permit however may also be a time consuming process, as a statement from the institution must accompany the application to confirm that the casual work will not affect the study progress as well as a letter from the employer stating that the student has a job offer (The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education, 2016). Six of 15 respondents were undertaking or planning to undertake voluntary paid part-time or casual work whereas the remaining majority of nine respondents were not. The respondents who did undertake part-time employment did so in a Chinese restaurant.

As highlighted in the literature review, respondents' demographic background would evidently influence their travel related behaviour and preferences. Travel behaviour, which is influenced by the respondents' demographic background, is also discussed travel behaviour pattern in section 4.4 and its following section.

4.2 Norway as a study destination

This theme sought to investigate whether the respondents who choose to study in Norway were attracted by the destinations in Norway that they can explore for tourism purposes. This can be considered as the pre-visit stage in tourist behaviour (Cohen et al., 2014). Michael et al. (2004) who based their study of international students in Australia argue that international students who were attracted by Australia as both a study and tourism destination would be more eager to undertake travel activities. This was nevertheless not the case for the respondents in this study. A majority of the respondents' reasons to choose Norway as a place to study were not directly related to travelling or tourism related purposes as many indicated that they end up in Norway by "accident" or "coincidence". As noted:

I didn't know much about Norway before. I can here because my school has agreement with the school in Norway. That's why I came here. I haven't even heard much about Norway before. More like a coincidence that I ended up here [3].

It wasn't my first choice. More like an accident maybe. I could have been somewhere else [15].

However after arrival, all respondents were positive surprised by the beautiful nature and attractions in Norway as a tourism destination. Specially, the respondents mentioned the clean air and environment including the natural attractions.

I was really amazed by Norway. I mean I have heard about Norway before and seen the pictures. I thought it was only marketing. But it is really

beautiful here. I am from a big city in China so it's very different here. It's so clean! I love the air [1]!

Essentially, as all respondents in this study have undertaken travelling in Norway, whether they were or where not initially attracted by Norway as a tourism destination did not have any substantial impact on whether they would undertake tourism and travel related activities. Not only have a majority of respondents already travelled within Norway, all respondents also indicated that they were planning to go to several other places within the country. Some of the respondents who had not undertaken extensive travelling at this stage were planning to do so in the future before leaving Norway.

I have been travelling but not very much yet. Maybe I will have more time later. But I definitely want to see more of Norway before I finish my studies [4].

This concurs with previous studies, which noted that Chinese international students are very keen on travelling to places with clean environment, climate and good weather (Liao, 2012). The result of the study suggests that Chinese international students would undoubtedly undertake travelling related activities in Norway during the course of their study. As argued in the literature, these international students contribute significantly to the study country's tourism industry and its economy due to their extensive travelling in Norway. Therefore, a marketing effort should be directed to target these students.

4.3 Destinations in Norway

Places in Norway that the respondents had visited are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4 – Places in Norway that the respondents have visited or planning to visit

| Places in Norway | Number of respondents |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bergen | 15 |
| Oslo | 11 |
| Stavanger | 3 |
| Tromsø | 3 |
| Trondheim | 3 |
| Svalbard | 1 |

Of the places that the respondents had already been, Bergen is the city which all 15 had visited following by Oslo. While many respondents mentioned that they want to visit Tromsø, only two have been there. The remaining respondents who had not been to Oslo yet were most definitely planning to go before they leave the country. Bergen and Oslo were classified as a place that everyone has to see if coming to Norway. This is demonstrated in the following statement from one respondent:

I think everybody has to go to Bergen. I'm not saying it's the place for Chinese students, but Bergen is definitely more popular. I really wanted to see the fjords and people have recommended me to see Bergen. It's the place that I have to visit when coming to Norway and Bergen is so beautiful and different from home [7]!

The environment and scenery in Bergen being new and different from home is one of the main reasons why it is a popular destination among the respondents. This concurs with existing studies as experiencing something different and novel is what simulates Chinese

international students when travelling (Clark, 1992; Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg, 2013). Following Bergen, Oslo was the second most popular destination. One main reason for the respondents to visit Oslo was it was the capital of Norway. Nevertheless, some respondents also express that they are not keen to visit Oslo, as the city is too metropolitan or touristic. As majority of these respondents come from large cities in China including Shanghai and Beijing, they were not interested in visiting large cities. This contradicts with some previous findings on Chinese international students as well as Chinese tourists in general as previous findings argue that city and city tours are largely popular among Chinese international students and tourists (Ryan & Mo, 2001; Xu et al., 2009).

As discussed, a majority of the respondents wanted to visit Tromsø and Northern Norway to see the Northern Lights, however, they have not managed to or will not. The reason as explained:

I really want to see Tromsø and Northern Lights, but I don't know how. Also my money and time is limited, it's just too expensive for me. It's a shame because people have been telling me that if you haven't see Northern Lights then you haven't been to Norway [3]!

I think Tromsø it's too cold for me. And I don't have the right gear to go there. I don't want to spend money on buying equipment or clothes just for that [5].

Such information indicates that while a majority of respondents are familiar with Northern Norway and Tromsø, they are prevented to travel there due to reasons such as unfamiliar

environment, budget and time constraints. Some of these constraints such as cost and time are discussed as control barriers by Hughes et al., (2015). As discussed in chapter two, Hughes et al. (2015) argue for instance that if Chinese international students lack time, cost and companion, they are very unlikely to undertake travelling in the study country. While all of the respondents do undertake travelling in Norway, they are not able to travel to some of the destinations due to time and cost. However, none of the respondents mentioned companionship or lack of companionship as a major barrier to prevent them from travelling in Norway. Issue regarding individual versus group travelling is further explored in section 4.4.2.

Besides the main cities of Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø, Stavanger, Trondheim and Svalbard, they are not familiar with any other destinations, places or attractions elsewhere in Norway. This may also serve as extrinsic travel barriers that prevent Chinese international students from travelling to certain destinations in the study country (Hughes et al., 2015). This is because they do not have enough knowledge and information about certain destinations or do not know how to gain such information. In addition to the specific places and destinations, all respondents stress that the most important asset that Norway offers is the clean environment and air. The clean environment itself is a major factor, which stimulate the respondents to travel and experience Norway. This again concurs with the literature stating that experiencing some new and novel as well as good weather and climate are important factors that encourage the respondents to travel in the study country (Clark, 1999; Ryan & Mo, 2001; Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg).

4.4 Travel behaviour patterns

This following section provides analysis of the respondents' travel behaviour patterns by investigating themes such as their financial situation, whether they prefer independent or group travelling, preferred information source, mode of travelling, frequency and length of travel, preferred accommodation and dining as well as tourism activities.

4.4.1 Financial situation influences

In regards to financial situation, most respondents were either self-funded whereas only a few were on scholarships. Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) argue that international students who are more independent in terms of their finances would have more freedom to travel than those who are on scholarships. The findings of this study however indicate that respondents on scholarships would in fact travel more than those who are self-funded. Thus, the findings contradict with Kim and Jogaratnam (2003).

This may be caused by the fact that previous studies have focused on study countries where international students of any nations are charged a significant amount of tuition fee, whereas this is not the case for international students in Norway. Furthermore, a majority of respondents did not undertake or planning to undertake part-time employment. The following explanation were provided:

I don't have time to work because I'm struggling so hard with my studies.

My English is not that good so it's very hard for me to following the courses at school [11].

I work in Chinese restaurant, it's very hard to compete with other people [in terms of employment]. I don't speak Norwegian [14].

Such situation may be unique in Norway because countries such as the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand where most studies on international students are based on, their main language is English whereas the main language in Norway is Norwegian. The main purpose of investigating the financial situation was to determine whether such situation would affect the respondents' travel behaviour. Hence, an additional question was asked to investigate whether having paid part-time or casual work would encourage the respondents to travel more due to higher disposable income. The result indicates that respondents who do not currently work did not believe that the disposable income would encourage them to travel more. As for the respondents who are currently engaged in voluntary paid employment, they do not believe that paid part-time or casual employment allows more travelling as they have limited time to undertake such activity. Thus, the result also contradicts claims made by Michael et al. (2004) stating that international students undertaking part-time work would travel more due to additional disposable income. Michael et al. (2004) however did not exclusively investigate Chinese international students, rather international students in general.

As the Norwegian government requires Chinese international students to be enrolled as full-time students, it may be difficult for Chinese international students to undertake extensive travelling while working and studying at the same time during the semester. Time constraints primary due to "too busy with study" was also emphasised by Hughes et al. (2015, p. 18) in their study. As discussed previously, lack of time and limited budget are some of the main control barriers preventing Chinese international students to travel (Crawford et al., 1991; Gardiner et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2015; Li & Stoldolska, 2006). This study reveals however

that lack of time is not only related to their commitment due to studies but also contributed other by commitment such as voluntary paid employment. In addition, paid employment does not necessary lead to more disposable incomes that are used on travelling and tourism activities as argued by Michael et al. (2004).

4.4.2 Independent verves travelling in groups

In literatures concerning international students and Chinese tourist in general, there have been suggested that international students prefer to travel in groups of five rather than individual due to unfamiliar environment (Gmelch, 1997). On the contrary, Ryan and Xie (2003) stress that Chinese international students prefer independent travel rather than in groups. Of those who did travel in groups, they generally preferred very small groups (Ryan & Xie, 2003). The findings of this study also support such claim, as a majority of respondents prefer to either travel and independently or with small group of no more than three people in total. Hence, the findings disagree with Hughes et al. (2015) and Li and Stoldolska (2006) as a lack of companionship was not regarded as a barrier that prevent the respondents from travelling at all. Some even preferred to travel alone. As indicated:

In Norway, I prefer to travel alone or in very small group because I find it easy to travel like that. But if I travel alone I don't trust myself to go out at night [2].

I don't prefer a lot of people [travelling together] because there are many ideas and I don't want conflicts while travelling. And I only want to travel with those that I know. Basically my friends [11].

Most of these respondents have not really had any bad experiences in travelling in large groups, it is just the general idea that it is harder to travel in larger groups of people. Further explained by another respondent:

I would travel in a small groups, I think the larger group is more of a hassle if being honest. Like if you have more than 4 or 5 people, it's just more of a hassle than fun. But if you are just there to split costs, like you are just travelling together to split costs, that's fine. Once you start trying to do things together, it just gets hard because everyone wants to do different things. We're all on different time schedules and stuff like that. You know if you really want to have fun [5].

If I have to travel in a group, the smaller group the better. I try to avoid a group itinerary, I don't like that particularly. I haven't really experienced anything negative about it, I just prefer a smaller group. I guess just being able to be individual. And not having the problem with a group itinerary and do the thing that the group is doing. Just want to do my own thing basically [7].

As discussed, previous findings emphasise that international students prefer to travel in groups of five because they are often unfamiliar with the new environment (Gmelch, 1997). The group size tends to decline over time once they become more familiar with the destination. Unfamiliar environment also generally prevent Chinese international students to travel or undertake other leisure activities in the study country (Li & Stoldoska, 2006). The result of the current study thus disagrees with such a statement as the majority of the

respondents preferred in travel alone or in very small groups. Such preference was not due to experience and familiarity with the destination at all. Only two of 15 respondents needed to travel with someone else because of the unfamiliar environment and safety issues as claimed by Gmelch (1997). Besides unfamiliar environment and safety issues, another reason is that they wanted to share the experience with each other as indicated:

I have travelled by myself, I spent some time travelling alone about a week, that was nice and interesting but I like to be able to share my travel experiences with at least another person. Because after when the travelling is done, you've got someone to talk to about the experience [12].

While Norway is not an English speaking country, English is widely spoken by majority of the population in Norway. Hence, the respondents felt comfortable to travel in Norway, as there are less language barriers particular in cities such as Bergen and Oslo. The study also contradicts claims made by Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) who suggest that unmarried and young international students would travel in large groups and older married international students would travel in small groups. The result clearly shows that a majority of respondents, either single, married, unmarried or in a relationship prefer to travel alone, by themselves as couple or in small groups of people. Thus, there are some clear contradictions between statements made in the literature and the current study. The different environments and circumstances in previous studies may have contributed to the reasons why contradictions are found. For instance, Gmelch (1997) based his study in Austria where language barriers could be an issue, while Kim and Jogaratnam (2003) studied mainly international students of Asian nationality in general rather than exclusively on Chinese international students. The former studies are also of much older date than the current study. The more experienced people

become in travelling in general, the more they become confident to conduct independent travelling and similar notion can be applied to Chinese international students (Huang & Tian, 2013). It can only be assumed that the younger generation of Chinese population such as Chinese international students are more experienced in travelling, compared to older generations. This is due to China's "open door policy" by encouraging its citizens to absorb international knowledge and experiences through travelling and studies in the last decades (Li et al., 2011). Thus, the respondents of this study can also be considered to have more experiences as travellers and thus prefer to travel alone or in small groups and independently in Norway.

4.4.3 Information source preferences

After arrival in Norway and prior to undertaking travelling and tourism activities, the information search process can be also considered as pre-visit tourist behaviour (Cohen et al., (2014). The following table illustrates information source preferred and use when undertaking planning for travelling in Norway.

Table 5 – Information sources used

| Methods | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|--|---|
| Research on the general Internet | 15 |
| Search engine Baidu | 15 |
| Social media such as Weibo and WeChat | 12 |
| Recommendation from family and friends | 11 |
| On the moment than planning | 4 |
| Planned by friends | 3 |
| Commercial printed media such as brochures | None |

Recommendation from family and friends through the chatting platform WeChat, the Chinese social media platform such as Weibo and search engine Baidu is the most used information sources. This is consistent with the study conducted by Gmelch (1997) and Shanka et al. (2002) who discovered that a majority of international students used recommendations from friends as an information source to gain knowledge about destinations. In regards to Chinese international student specifically, Lou (2014)'s study on Chinese international students in New Zealand also concurs with the findings. On another note, in addition to the Internet, Shi et al. (2010) in their study on Chinese international students in Japan discovered that they also relied on information from public media including television, radio programs and newspapers. This was however not the case in this study as these sources were not mentioned at all by the respondents.

Furthermore, nine of the 15 respondents used the Internet specifically to find cheap airfares and to place booking online such as Airbnb, whereas the remaining students used the Internet

to search for general information. Holiday planning for those who booked tickets online took place according to when cheap and suitable airfares were available. It is also important to note that eight of the 15 respondents used both research on the Internet and recommendation from friends and family in their holiday planning process. Interestingly, the preferred channel of Internet source is clearly Chinese based Internet platform such as Weibo and Baidu. Google as search engine was mentioned but not extensively used by the respondents. In Lou (2013)'s study however, both Baidu and Google were used equally. This was however not the case in this study as indicated:

It's very convenient and easy to use [Chinese-based platforms]. We are used to these platforms. I think we can trust the information there. We understand everything [1].

Nevertheless, relying on Chinese based search engines and social media platforms may be problematic. As discussed in section 4.3, the respondents are only familiar with the most popular destinations and cities such as Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Oslo. While some respondents have heard about Tromsø, they are reluctant to travel to Northern Norway for various reasons. It can be assumed that they have not heard or are not familiar with other places in Norway due to lack of information about potential destinations and tourism activities. Lack of information and knowledge as well as not knowing where to find the information about destinations are some of the extrinsic barriers emphasised by Hughes et al. (2015). This is also the case for the respondents of this study. The respondents' reliance on Chinese-based platforms means that information they find on these platforms about Norway, as a holiday destination is very limited. This may have contributed to the lack of information and knowledge. While the control barrier such as lack of money and time is beyond the

control of tourism operators, the lack of information about destinations is certainly a barrier, which can be overcome if proper information is provided by the tourism industry and operators to cater to this segment. In addition, while the respondent did not state language barrier as a problem when travelling in Norway, it is clear that the respondents still prefer to search for information in Chinese. Hence, Norwegian tourism operators as well as official Norwegian tourism sites may consider providing travel and destination information in Chinese as well.

Furthermore, none of respondents planned their holiday based on brochures obtained from visitor centres and other places such as travel agents. Field (1999) claims that international students would use travel agents for bookings and other support because they tend to be unfamiliar with the foreign environment. This is, however, not consistent with the current findings as a large number of respondents state that they are comfortable with making their own bookings online. The result indicates that the respondents prefer to make their own arrangements when it comes to holiday planning by booking their own airfares activities rather than going for package deals. Such findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Chadee and Mattsson (1996) and Michael et al., (2004) which reveal that a majority of international students prefer to make own arrangements when planning for a holiday. On the other hand, findings also disagree with the more recent studies of Hughes et al. (2015) indicating that holiday packages are well sought by Chinese international students in Australia as well as travelling with companion. The reason for the contradictory findings is uncertain. It can be assumed that Michael et al. (2004), who also based their studies in Australia, focused international students in general and not specifically on Chinese international students. In addition, the infrastructure in Norway is quite different from Australia. Firstly, Norway as country is much smaller in size with less population. Secondly,

conventional travellers in Norway do not commonly use travel agents as people usually undertake travel related bookings online by themselves with websites well-designed for self-service (Fonbæk, 2014). A lack of travel agents and similar services as well as the ease of use of online booking sites in Norway may have led to Chinese international students undertaking independent and individual travelling and arrangements online instead.

Based on the findings of this study, Norwegian tourism business should offer independent activities with flexible arrangements that Chinese international students may choose to undertake and arrange for themselves rather than package deals.

In regards to which information sources are believed to be most reliable among the respondents, Table 6 provides the findings.

Table 6 – Information sources considered as reliable

| Reliable information source | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|---|---|
| Word-of-mouth from other students and friends | 7 |
| The Internet | 5 |
| Combination of various sources | 10 |

A majority of respondents used both recommendations from family and friends as well as the Internet as the main information sources, 10 of 15 respondents believe that a combination of various sources is most reliable. This is followed by word-of-mouth recommendations. Several respondents agreed that the Internet was reliable information source because a large

amount of information can be obtained online, but they did not trust solely the Internet. The following answer provided by a respondent:

Most reliable information source I have to say word-of-mouth, I mean the Internet is good too because you can find a lot of information online and it's nice to look at pictures. I can also use the Internet to see how the place and things look like, but not all websites are good I think. So definitely word-of-mouth [3].

Some findings are thus similar to Hughes et al., (2015) arguing that Chinese international students tend to rely on the Internet and word-of mouth advertising whereas Xu et al. (2009) suggest that they are less reliant on commercial advertisement and more on recommendations from friends and family. There are also nevertheless other mixed opinions about the Internet as a reliable information source. Five respondents indicated that it is a reliable source because destinations and other things can be viewed visually whereas other respondents felt that anything on the Internet such as pictures of lodging and other similar things can look good depending on the angle and websites are often not as objective. A majority of the respondents do not trust printed advertisements such as brochures. As explained by one respondent:

You know there are so many brochures, materials and stuff but word-of-mouth is always the best. They have real-time experience. I don't really trust those printed materials because they are made by business people and they have to make money. If you are lucky you'll get a good one. They have to make a sale. Sometimes the attractions and destinations are not like picture in brochures [6].

The findings reveal that a majority of respondents prefer a combination of various sources instead of relying solely on one source. Although it was revealed earlier that both the Internet and word-of-mouth were extensively used by the respondents as information sources to gain knowledge about destinations, the result indicates that word-of-mouth remains overall the most reliable single information source which has great influence on a majority of the respondents. Hence, tourism businesses and organisations should be aware of such and attempt to encourage people to give feedback about their tourist experiences and opinions about certain destinations and tourism operations. Tourism businesses and organisations however need to continue to promote their products and provide information on the Internet because although it is not considered to be the most reliable, it is still widely used by the respondents as revealed in these findings.

4.4.4 Mode of transportation preferences

Mode of transport, accommodation and dining, frequency and length of travel as well as tourism activities may be considered as on-site tourist behaviour (Cohen et al., 2014). The following table displays the respondents' transportation preferences when travelling in Norway.

Table 7 – Transportation preferences

| Transport mode | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Plane | 15 |
| Train | 8 |
| Bus | 3 |
| Car and other mode of transport | 1 |

A majority of respondents prefer planes when travelling in Norway. This is followed by train and very few indicated bus. Five respondents explained that they prefer public transportation such as train and buses when travelling short distances while planes are used for long distances. Only one respondent indicates rental cars as the preferred transport. While many of the respondents state that they have driving licences and that, they are allowed to drive in Norway, they do not prefer travelling by car at all. Such findings contradict with other studies on international students in general that argued that car is the most frequently used mode of transport (Chadee & Cutler, 1996; Field, 1999; Frost & Shanka, 1999; Hsu & Sung, 1997; Shi et al., 2010; Sung & Hsu, 1996). Furthermore, in more recent studies by Huang and Tian (2013), they discovered that train travelling is most frequently use by Chinese international students followed by bus and car. However, the transport mode will definitely depend on the study country, as in countries such as the UK and Norway, plane tickets are cheaper than train (Huang & Tian, 2013). This is for instance not the case in Australia (Michael et al., 2004). While train is still popular among many respondents in this study, bus and car are not preferred modes of transport. Hsu and Sung (1997) and Field (1999) also further state that international students prefer to travel by car or plane while Field (1999) also claim that international students almost never used bus and train. Hence, it seems that there are many

contradictions between the current study and previous studies as well as between previous studies. The different environment of the study country, which previous studies have focused on, may have contributed to these inconsistencies. Shanka et al. (2002) further explain that international students in Australia are likely to use cars because there is a general lack of efficient public transport system in Australia. There are for instance a lack of passenger trains in both the US and Australia in comparison to the UK (Huang & Tian, 2013). The reason why travelling by plane is preferred by respondents in this study is explained:

I travel by bus and train, but of course plane is much better. It's much cheaper than train and bus! I can get really cheap plane tickets sometimes. Much cheaper than train and bus. I save a lot of time too. So why no [8].

The findings suggest that the environment in the destination, the price, the facility and the availability of the various transportation modes influence the preferred mode of transport, as there are little common or similar behaviour shared by Chinese international student in general. It is therefore the facilities in the study country that determine preferred mode of transport rather than their status as international students or their national backgrounds. Such findings are logical as international students including Chinese international students do generally have budget constraints and therefore want value for money by choosing the mode of transport with the best value (Huang & Tian, 2013; Hughes et al., 2015).

4.4.5 Frequency and length of travel

Respondents who stay for a short period of one semester or a few months would evidently have limited time to undertake tourism related activities. The impact of such issue on their travel behaviour is further discussed. It is also assumed that once Chinese international

students arrive in Norway, they would be interested in other destinations in Europe beside destinations within Norway. As they have limited time to travel due to their full-time student status, if more time is spent on travelling in other destinations in Europe, they would have less time to travel in Norway. This is a major challenge for Norwegian tourism. Table 8 illustrates the frequency of travelling divided in terms of overall travelling, travelling within Norway and travelling elsewhere in Europe, which is outside of Norway.

Table 8 – The frequency of travel

| | Overall travelling | Within Norway | Elsewhere in Europe |
|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Once a week | 1 | 2 | - |
| 3 times in a month | 2 | 3 | - |
| Twice a month | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Once a month | 10 | 8 | - |
| Once every 2 months | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Once every 3 months | - | - | 1 |
| Once every 4 months | - | - | 1 |
| Once a year | - | - | 2 |
| None | - | - | 1 |

While all of the respondents undertake travelling within Norway during the time of their study period, three of the respondents indicate that they were keener to travel elsewhere in Norway. Travelling elsewhere in Europe is however longer and only conducted during the breaks between semesters rather than weekends as they would when travelling within Norway. Length of travel is also illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9 – Length of travel

| Length | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|--------------------|---|
| More than 3 nights | 8 |
| 3 nights | 2 |
| 2 nights | 6 |
| 1 night | 5 |
| Daytrip | 5 |

Shanka and Musca (1998) argue that international students in Australia would travel for 2-3 weeks when travelling to further away to another state for instance. As Norway is not divided into different states and the geographical span is not as large as Australia, it is logical that they do not travel for as long as 2-3 weeks, even to another part of the country. Also, as the preferred mode of transport is plane as discussed in the previous section, it is possible to travel for shorter period of time within Norway. However, respondents who do undertake travelling outside of Norway, elsewhere in Europe would travel for 2-3 weeks. The next section explores when travelling is conducted during the semester.

Table 10 illustrates when travelling is conducted during the semester. Travelling is mostly undertaken both in the weekends and the mid-semester breaks. Nine of 15 respondents only travelled during the weekends, as they do not have time to travel during the mid-semester breaks due to university commitments. Generally, respondents used the end of semester holiday to either go back home to China or to undertake travelling in other countries in Europe rather than within Norway. Five respondents also indicated that they conducted more

travelling at the beginning of the semester when there are fewer assignments and other university commitments.

Table 10 – When travelling is undertaken during the semester

| When during the semester | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|---|---|
| Both weekends and mid-semester breaks | 9 |
| Weekends only | 5 |
| The break between the spring and fall semester (not Norway) | 3 |

The findings contradict with claims made by Field (1999) and Michael et al., (2004) who indicate that international students would undertake most of the travelling during the mid-semester breaks as the result shows that weekends are more frequently used for travelling purposes. Both Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) and Gmelch (1997) suggest that many international students who only stay for one or two semester overseas would travel more during the weekends, hence they have less time to see everything. As discussed earlier however, a majority of the respondents are staying in Norway as international students for more than one year, and yet weekend is still when they travel most. Moreover, it is evident in this study that length of stay in Norway does not necessary determine when travelling is conducted as the respondents who are staying in Norway for two years also prefer to travel during the weekends and the same goes for respondents who only stay for one year or less. Hence, marketing efforts to target Chinese international students should not only promote destinations and other tourism related activities during the holidays but also at the beginning of the semester and continue throughout the semester.

4.4.6 Accommodation and dining preferences

The following table shows the accommodation preferences provided by the respondents when travelling in Norway.

Table 11 – Accommodation preferences when travelling

| Accommodation preferences | Number of respondents |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Airbnb or homestay | 15 |
| Hostels | 5 |
| Hotels | None |
| Camping | None |
| Stay with friends or family | None |

A common perception about Chinese international students and students in general is that they prefer cheap accommodations due to budget constraints (Ryan & Xie, 2003). Such perception seems to be accurate based on the findings of this study as a majority of the respondent, whether they are self-funded or on scholarship, indicated homestay or accommodation located on Airbnb, followed by hostels. Some respondents indicated either homestay or hotels.

I prefer cheap accommodations, no hotels. I prefer cheaper solutions like hostels or Airbnb. The owner provides us breakfast and they bring us around. I really like that kind of accommodation [11].

Hotels are too expensive for me. I have limited funds so if I wanna travel and see more, hotels are not good options [15].

The findings do contradict with other recent findings based on the UK and Japan. For instance, Huang and Tian (2013) and Shi et al., (2010) discover that hotels are most preferred mode of accommodation among Chinese international students followed by staying with friends. Similarly, Chadee and Culter (1996) identify that international students do not necessary rely solely on backpackers and hostels as they would also use hotels. Huang and Tian (2013) further argue that such behaviour and preference is similar to the conventional Chinese tourist market where the demand for higher-quality standard is increasing in the recent years. The findings of this study thus disagree with these studies, as hotels are not the preferred mode of accommodation. In fact, the respondent preferred bed and breakfast type of accommodation and none of the respondents state that they were unfamiliar with this type of accommodation.

I'm fine with hostels or Airbnb. I prefer Airbnb the most. It's easy and I can see the pictures. Sometimes the host offers meals like breakfast included in the prices. They also bring us around the city. I think Airbnb is great. It's cheap and reliable [7].

The respondents of this study thus display similar behaviour as backpacker travellers due to their budget constraints. As Airbnb is a relatively new type of accommodation, previous studies have thus not focused on this type of accommodation.

Chadee and Culter (1996), Field (1999) and Sung and Hsu (1996) further claim that international student prefer to stay with family or friends when travelling. Staying with friends is nevertheless not an alternative for the respondents as they do not have any relatives or close friends which they can stay with when travelling in Norway. This is also the similar

case for Chinese international students in the UK (Huang & Tian, 2013). Moreover, none of respondents listed camping as a preferred mode of accommodation. This is surprising as cheap accommodation and budget constraints and saving money are some of the main reasons for choosing homestays and hostels. This concurs with Field (1999) who claim that international students are very unlikely to stay in camping grounds. One of the reasons why respondents do not prefer camping as accommodation may be that they simply are not aware of the existence of such type of accommodation in Norway, similar to not being familiar with bed and breakfast type of accommodation in the UK (Huang & Tian, 2013).

Camping? I'm not sure. What do I need when I go camping? I might get cold. I'm not sure what equipment I need when going for camping. I don't want to spend money on buying equipment [9].

I have never stayed in camping grounds before. It is safe? What do I need? I think it's better to choose places that I'm familiar with. Airbnb works very well for me. I can pretty much find Airbnb anywhere I want to go in Norway [12].

The issue of camping may be related to their reluctance to undertaking adventure tourism related activities despite being interested in such type of activities. This is further explored in section 4.4.6. The next section explores the dining preferences.

Table 12 illustrates the respondents' dining preferences when travelling in Australia.

Table 12 – Dining preferences

| Dining preference | Mentioned by number of respondents |
|--------------------------|---|
| Fast food | 12 |
| Cooking self | 5 |
| Local food | 4 |
| Proper nice restaurants | 4 |

In terms of dining preferences, differences were found among respondents who were on scholarships versus respondents who are self-funded. A majority of respondent who are self-funding prefer local food and were keener on exploring new things. One self-funded respondent indicated that:

If I travel I wanna try local food. I want to explore more and maybe try things that I can't get at home [5].

Whereas a majority of respondents on scholarship stress that:

I'm not picky about food. Cheap food is fine. I can eat food from kiosk or fast food. Otherwise, I just cook myself if I can in those homestays [9].

None of respondents prefer to dine in a nice restaurant when travelling in Norway. A majority of respondents also prefer fast food such as food in kiosks or any cheap food, which includes kebab and sandwiches. This is similar to Hsu and Sung (1997) who argue that international students generally prefer fast food when travelling. Some respondents, especially those on

scholarships also prefer to bring or prepare their own food when travelling. Another finding when comes to dining preferences is that respondents do not want to visit or dine at Chinese restaurant.

I don't eat Chinese food when I travel here. I want to try local food. Honestly, I don't like the taste of Chinese food here and it's quite expensive. I think I can cook better ones myself. I'm not keen on eating Chinese food anyway. I wanna try something new and unique [4].

In regards to willingness to try the local food, there is no indication to suggest that females are more willing to try local food than male as claimed in the literature by Gmelch (1997). Equal numbers of female and male respondents stated that they wanted to try the local cuisine when travelling. Rather, the willingness and interests in trying local food is influenced by the financial situation than the gender of the respondents. In such sense, the findings thus disagree with Huang and Tian (2013) in the sense that Chinese international students in general are keen to try new food when travelling in the study country. The findings also contradict with Shi et al. (2011) who stress that Chinese international students prefer fine dining and cuisine in the study destination. The preferences of cheap food and dining options may be also be related to the preference of cheap accommodations as discussed in the previous section. Much of such may be attributed by the high pricing level in Norway which may explain the contradictions with previous studies based in the UK, the US and Australia. Furthermore, Hughes et al. (2015) and Li et al. (2011) argue that not being able to locate suitable food when travelling can also serve as travel barriers among Chinese when travelling including Chinese international students. However, for the respondents of this study, food was not considered as any travel barrier at all.

4.4.7 Tourism activity preferences and additional barriers

Sightseeing is the most common and popular tourism activity that is undertaken by all 15 respondents. This is followed by museum attractions, which is undertaken by 10 respondents. All of the respondents state sightseeing as the activity that appeals to them the most while emphasising that they were not interested in organised tours, as they would rather prefer sightseeing a destination on their own. As explained:

I want flexibility. I don't want to be tied up [when travelling]. And I don't want to be seen as a typical tourist...[10]

These findings are similar to the results of previous studies (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Ryan & Xie, 2003; Shanka & Musca, 1998). Michael et al. (2004) claims that water-based activities are unpopular among international students and this is also applicable for this study mainly because of the weather constraints. Field (1999) further suggests that going to a museum is not popular for international students, this is however not applicable to the current study as museum attractions were the most common activities after sightseeing. While Michael et al (2003) argue that shopping is a popular activity among international students; this contradicts with this study as shopping was not a popular activity at all.

Furthermore, Michael (2001) argues that international students prefer to go to festivals, national parks, theatre and theme parks. Similarly, Carr (2003) also claims that international students are interested in attractions such as natural environment such as national parks. He did however not exclusively investigate Chinese international students. These activities were not emphasised by any of the respondents as tourism activities they would undertake in Norway. While Michael (2001) based his study in Australia, Norway also offers attractions

such as festivals, national parks, theatre and theme parks. The respondents who were not interested in these activities may not know the existence of such activities and attractions in the first place. As indicated in section 4.3, respondents are only familiar with the most famous cities in Norway and have very little knowledge about Norway beyond these destinations and attractions.

Another interesting finding nevertheless is respondents' interest in adventure tourism and its associated activities. While none of the respondents wants to undertake such activities, they did display interest in such activities. Some of the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers are preventing them to seek to undertake such activities. The extrinsic barriers being not knowing where to find information about these attractions as well as lack of equipment, whereas intrinsic barriers consist of lack of skills and knowledge of adventure and nature-based activities. This will be further discussed. Barriers that prevent the respondents to travel may not be directly related to the actual on-site tourism behaviour but it may be a part of the pre-visit behaviour (Cohen et al., 2014; Hughes et al, 2015). As the needs and wants of tourists including their preferred tourism activities are some of the key issues in understanding and studying tourist behaviour and process, it is therefore crucial to understand travel barriers in addition to other common tourist behavioural themes. Hughes et al (2015) also argue that such barriers have received less attention in the literature.

The popularity of sightseeing and museum visits as tourism activities undertaken by Chinese international students as discussed, is also confirmed by existing studies (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; King & Garnier, 2015; Liao, 2012; Shanka et al., 2002; Ryan & Xie, 2003; Xu et al., 2009). It may thus have been assumed that Chinese international students are mainly interested in sightseeing. For instance, Ryan and Xie (2003), Ryan and Zhang (2006) and the

more recent study of Huang and Tian (2013) all claim that activities related to adventure tourism are not popular among Chinese international students as their preferred main activity in the study country was sightseeing. This study however also found that 11 of 15 respondents indicate that they are interested in adventure tourism. They have not or they do not plan to undertake adventure tourism related activities, or listed adventure tourism as preferred tourism activities due to lack of knowledge of adventure tourism destinations as well as lack of skills to participate in adventure tourism activities.

I wanna do the adventure but I don't know how to do, I am afraid that I might hurt myself. I don't trust me self. I have never done it before. If I don't know I might hurt myself [3].

I would love to try, but my parents said no. They said don't put yourselves in risk when in overseas. Why try something if there's good chance that you gotta get hurt? I don't how the adventure tourism is like here. I mean I have seen the pictures. It looks amazing but also dangerous [7].

What do I need for adventure tourism? Do I need some special clothes and shoes? I don't want to look stupid if I don't have the right equipment. And it's dangerous if I don't have the equipment isn't it [11]?

While Ryan and Xie (2003) have argued that Chinese international student prefer passive activities rather than adventure tourism, they have not investigated the reason for such low participation. The findings of this study discovered that there is no lack of interest in participating in adventure and nature-based tourism among Chinese international students.

The barriers that prevent them from undertaking such activities include lack of skills, equipment and knowledge. Such findings concur with Hughes et al (2015)'s argument on the risk factor as well as lack of skills and knowledge. It is thus incorrect to assume that sightseeing is the only or the most popular tourism activity, as low participation in adventure tourism does not equal low interest. As explained by another respondent:

I would like to try adventure tourism. In China we don't have that stuff and most of the time we live in city and there are a lot of people and it's hard to get nature related things. I would like to try because I have never tried and in our country it's hard to find [14].

This also concurs with some of recent findings by Lou (2014). While the findings also contradict with many previous findings which argue that adventure tourism is not popular among Chinese international students (Huang & Tian, 2013; Xu et al., 2009), these studies may not have explored the why factor. In addition, while there are discrepancies in regards to adventure tourism, a majority of studies on Chinese international students do agree that Chinese international students are keen to experience something new and novel when travelling in their study country (Clark, 1999; Ryan & Mo, 2001; Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg, 2013). Undertaking adventure and nature-based tourism related activities could definitely be categorised as something new and novel, which they cannot experience at home.

Based on the findings, many barriers preventing Chinese international students from travelling are discovered. While travel behaviour is important to understand the needs and preferences, it is equally important to understand the barriers in order to provide and develop suitable products as well as effective marketing programs (Li et al., 2011). While some

barriers such as time and cost is beyond the control by the tourism industry and operators (Hughes et al., 2015), some tasks can be done such as offering adventure tourism activities which incorporates education element in order to educate Chinese international students about adventure tourism. As risk-avoidance is also high among the respondents and generally high in Chinese nations, adventure tourism that is marketed should also emphasise on soft-adventure with low risk rather than hard-adventure. Additionally, there should be possibilities to rent or hire equipment including clothing and shoes which are needed to undertake adventure and nature-based tourism in the tough Norwegian nature.

In Hughes et al. (2015)'s study on Chinese international students' travel barriers, language barriers and difficulties to understand signs and the service personnel were also identified as extrinsic barriers to travel. However, none of the respondents of this study raised any of these barriers at all, despite that Norwegian is the official language in Norway and not English. As discussed in section 4.4.1, while some respondents did mention the difficulty of undertaking their education in English, there were no language barriers or difficulties when comes to travelling in Norway. Hence, there is no need for multilingual signs or service personnel as suggested by Hughes et al (2015)'s study or any other studies focusing on the travel barriers of Chinese tourists such as Li et al., (2011).

Based on Hughes et al (2015)'s model on hierarchy barriers inhibiting Chinese students to travel in the study country, Figure 9 has attempted to summarise the findings of barriers relevant to this study. This figure is also incorporated into the further developed conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 10.

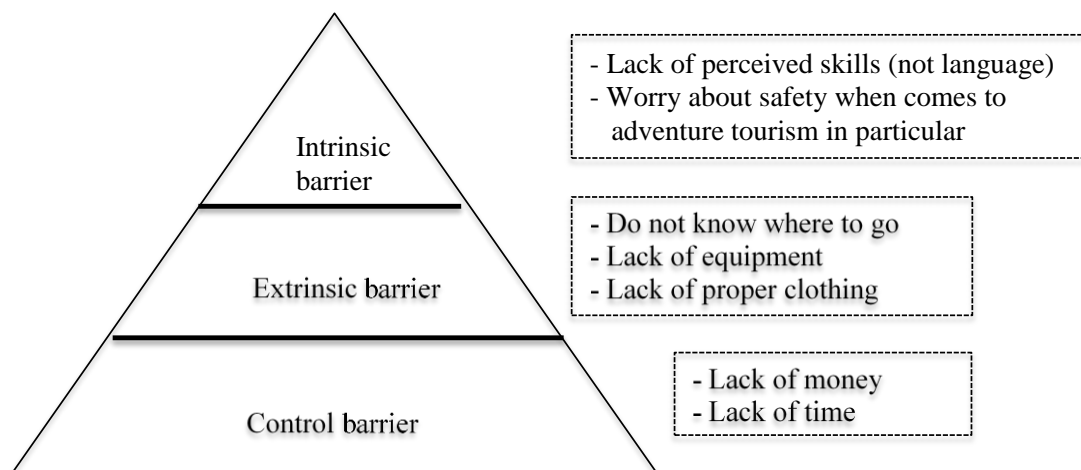


Figure 9 – Hierarchy barriers inhibiting Chinese international students to travel in Norway

Source: Adapted from Hughes et al. (2015)

As illustrated in the figure, while some of the barriers are similar to the existing literature, there are some contradictions. The most evident findings in this study are the language barriers, as there was none as indicated by the respondents. The lack of perceived skills is most associated with the lack of skills to undertake adventure and nature-based tourism activities rather than language difficulties. In terms of extrinsic barriers, in addition to not knowing where to go, not having the proper equipment and clothing for the Norwegian nature and environment also serves as a major barrier for the respondents to undertake certain adventure and nature-based activities. As Norway has harsh environment in terms of adventure and nature-based tourism activities, these barriers may be more relevant in a Norwegian setting than in an Australian setting for instance. In terms of control barriers, there were similarity between previous studies and this study as both lack of money and time served as control barriers. However, lack of companionship was not a barrier considered by the respondent, and lack of time is due to both study and paid employment commitment. It is

important to emphasise that the lack of time and money did not prevent Chinese international students to travel at all in Norway as all of the respondents did travel. These barriers has nevertheless led to less travelling opportunities than the respondents wanted. This means that some destinations were more prioritised than other was.

4.5 Recommending to other family and friends – VFR market

While post-visit behaviour can consist of numerous behaviours and emotions such as satisfaction and evaluation, this study is primarily interested in Chinese international students' willingness to recommend Norway as a holiday and study destination to other potential family members, friends and acquaintances in their home country. This is also argued as one of the key indirect contributions of the international student market to a study country's tourism industry and the areas that have received the least attention. For instance, Bischoff and Koenig (2007) and Huang and Tian (2013) argue that very little attention have been paid to Chinese international students and international students in general and their contribution from a VFR market perspective. As discussed, it is generally agreed that satisfied international students would for sure recommend the study destination to other potential international students (Weaver, 2004).

After undertaking tourism related activities, tourist can display certain post-visit behaviour. A typical type of post-visit behaviour is word-of-mouth recommendation (Cohen et al., 2014). This study specifically focuses on Chinese international students' willingness to recommend and encourage family members and friends to visit Norway as well as their willingness to recommend Norway as a study country for other potential Chinese international students. Although both positive and negative word-of-mouth recommendations can be provided by any typologies of tourists as part of their post-visit behaviour, the recommendation to friends

and families as a way to encourage the VFR market is one of the key contributions of international students to the study country. All 15 respondents state that they have had or will have family coming for visit or that they would definitely recommend family or friends to come.

Yes I had my family coming for a visit for a couple of weeks. They have never been here before so I'm gonna bring them around. To see the fjords, Bergen and Oslo for sure. But I'm not sure if Norway is a good place to study. I mean if you want to get a good degree [5].

I will definitely get my family to come and visit Norway. It's so different from home. The clean air and the environment. You can't get this in Shanghai [8].

I'm not sure if my family has time to visit me when I'm here. But I will definitely come back and bring them with me if they are not coming now.

They have to see Norway I think. It's once in a life time experience [13]!

Liu and Ryan (2011) argue that Chinese international student play an important role as host for their family and friends. The findings of this study are similar with previous studies, which argue the important contribution of international students through the VFR market. Chen et al., (2015) further explain that Chinese international students would be attached to their study country and thus display positive word-of-mouth behaviour by recommending the study destination as a tourism destination to others. Hence, more attention should be focused on this particular segment as it has the potential to contribute significantly to the Norwegian

tourism industry. While the respondents would recommend Norway as a tourist destination to their family and friends, they were more hesitant to recommend Norway as a study destination. The main reason is due to dissatisfaction with the education system rather than Norway as a tourist destination. This is an interesting finding, however beyond the scope of this paper to explore further.

4.6 Further developed conceptual framework

In chapter two, an extensive literature review was conducted and the gaps in the literature highlighted. Based on the literature, a conceptual framework, which incorporates the three research questions, was proposed. Figure 10 illustrates a further developed framework that is based on the findings and results of this thesis.

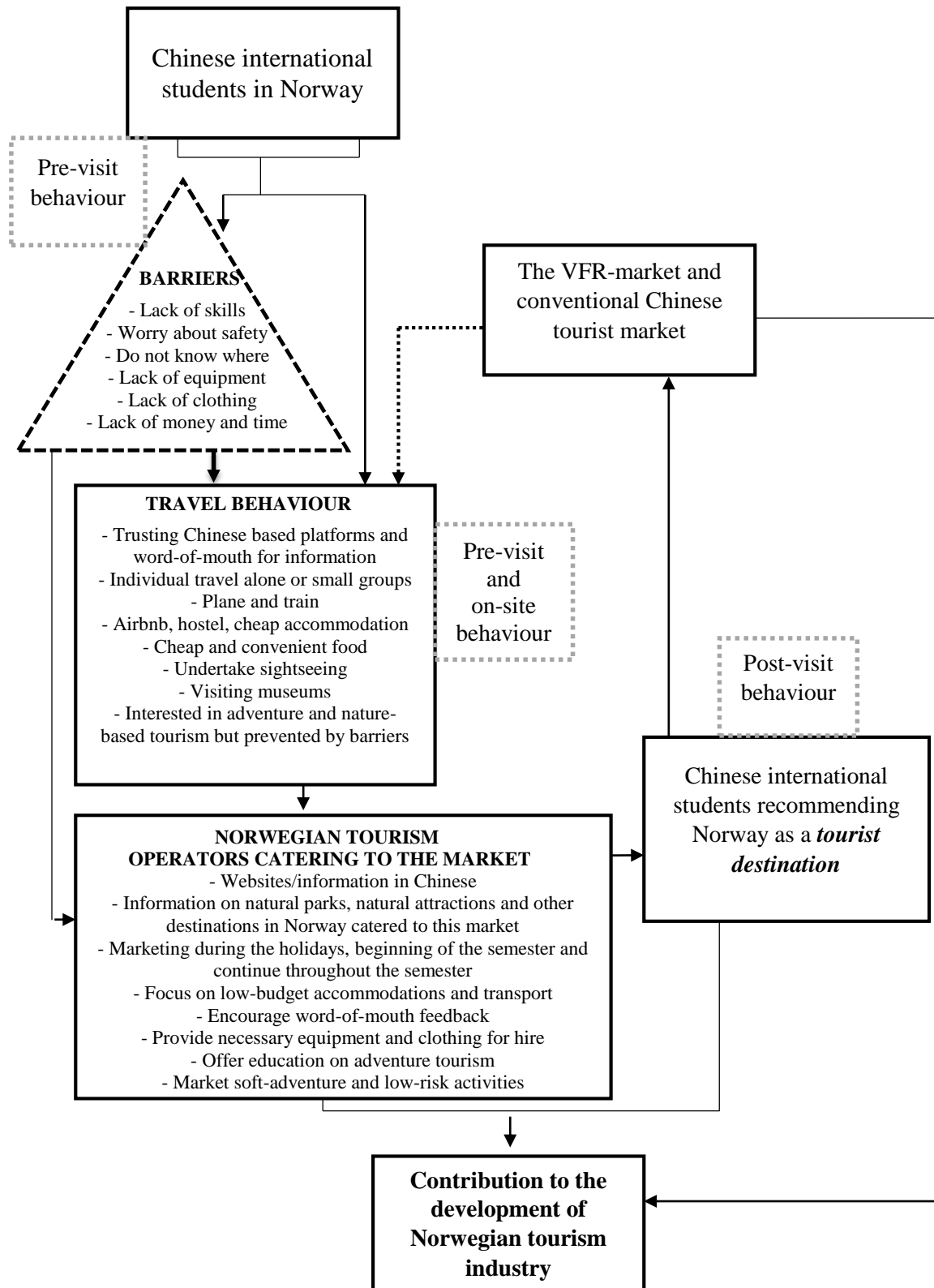


Figure 10 – Conceptual framework of Chinese international students' travel behaviour and barriers

Source: Developed for this study, based on the findings

As illustrated in the figure, understanding travel behaviour including needs and preferences of Chinese international students in Norway would enable Norwegian tourism operators to cater to the needs of such market. Furthermore, by recognising the travel barriers, tourism products and services can also be adapted to the market. Not all barriers are relevant to every Chinese international student but barriers will prevent some Chinese international students from undertaking certain tourism activities. By understanding the travel behaviour and barriers, tourism operators can also learn about the conventional Chinese tourism market and their travel behaviour, needs and preferences. This should however be further studied in order to verify. Although all the respondents indicate that they would recommend Norway to their family members and friends, they would logically be even more willing and enthusiastic to recommend Norway as a tourist destination if the Norwegian tourism industry and operators understand their needs and preferences. This ultimately contributes to the economic development of the Norwegian tourism industry.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the research aim and the following three research questions. As highlighted in chapter one, the research aim was to

- To explore the travel behaviour of Chinese international students in Norway as means to understand their travel related needs and preferences.

In addition, three specific research questions were:

1. What are the key elements that can explain Chinese international students' travel behaviour, need and preferences when they travel domestically in Norway?
2. How can Norwegian tourism operators accommodate and adapt to Chinese international students' travel related preferences and needs while limiting the barriers that may prevent them from travelling in Norway?
3. Based on their experiences in Norway, how willingly would Chinese international students recommend their family members, friends and other acquaintances to visit Norway as a tourism destination as well as a potential study country?

5.1 Summary of findings and responding to the research questions

This section summarises the findings of this paper as well as responding to the three research questions dominated by the purpose and the overall research aim.

5.1.1 Summary and responding to research question one and two

The essence of this thesis was to identify the key elements, which can explain Chinese international students' travel behaviour when undertaking tourism, and travel related behaviour when studying in Norway. Such behaviour also includes travel patterns, needs and preferences. Based on such findings, barriers can also be identified as well as means the Norwegian tourism industry and operators can adapt to their needs while limiting travel barriers. Hence, it is logical to summarise and respond to both research question one and two in one section.

The findings indicate that while Norway was not chosen as a study country in the first place, the respondents were all amazed and fascinated by the Norwegian nature and environment. This encouraged them to undertake tourism and travel related activities, despite that they were little aware of Norway as a tourism destination initially. Nevertheless, they generally travelled to the more popular places and cities such as Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Tromsø due to time and budget constraints, which is consistent with previous findings. As many also state that they were not aware of other places in Norway of interests, the challenges here is argued to be some extrinsic barriers as discussed by Hughes et al (2015) as respondents simply do not know where to find the information. Such findings are interesting for the tourism industry and tourism operators seeking to target such market.

Other barriers that prevent respondents to undertake more travelling was lack of time and money, considered as control barriers (Crawford et al., 1991; Hughes et al., 2015). Tromsø and Northern Norway was for instance familiar amongst the respondents but only two have been there. While previous studies indicate that lack of time was primarily due to academic commitment, this study revealed that lack of time was also due to voluntary paid employment. In contrast to previous findings, more disposable income due to paid employment does not necessary lead to more money spend on travel related expenses. Although these barriers are beyond the control of the tourism industry, tourism operators can possibly provide products and services, which are offered at discounted price for international students. It should also be easier for Chinese international students to find information about certain destinations by making the information search and planning process easier for those with lack of time.

Another interesting finding is that the respondents generally prefer to search information about destination in Norway using Chinese based platforms such as Weibo, Baidu and WeChat rather than the general Internet or search engines such as Google. As it can be assumed that information about Norway, as a holiday destination is limited on Chinese based websites and platforms, Norwegian tourism industry or operator may consider providing information about destinations in Chinese in addition to other languages. Lack of information or not knowing where to find information is clearly one of the travel barriers and constraints discovered in this study. Furthermore, as word-of-mouth is regarded as the most reliable source of information, tourism operators may encourage their customers to leave feedback and evaluations of their businesses online.

Lack of companionship on the other hand, was not considered as a travel barrier at all as a majority of respondents preferred to either travel alone or in very small group. This contradicts with previous literature. Hence, the tourism industry and operator should also provide products and service, which cater to individual Chinese international students' travel preferences and needs, which is also suitable for small groups. There are further contractions with the previous finding in the literature, as they preferred to travel by plane rather than private cars and trains as well as cheap and budget accommodation rather than hotels. Some of such findings can logically be explained by their financial situation that is also one of the major control travel barriers.

The most evident findings is that despite sightseeing and museum visits as passive activities are the most popular activities, it does not mean that the respondents were not interested in other types of tourism activities such as adventure and nature-based tourism. The intrinsic barriers that prevent them undertaking such activities were lack of skills and worrying about safety while the extrinsic barriers consist of lack of clothing and equipment, and knowing where to find information. These are travel barriers, which the Norwegian tourism industry and operators can help the market to overcome.

5.1.2 Summary and responding to research question three

Another important task of this study was to identify the willingness of the Chinese international students market to the recommend Norway to family and friends to visit Norway as a tourist destination. Thereby leading to increased additional tourists and visits through the VFR market and contributes to Norwegian tourism industry. While the exact monetary contributions of the increased VFR market contributed by the Chinese international student market in Norway was not the goal of this study, it can be established that Chinese

international students in Norway would definitely recommend family members and friends to visit Norway as a tourist destination. From there, it can be argued that significant contribution to the Norwegian tourism industry as well as the tourism economy is evident.

Additionally, Michael et al. (2004) argue that tourism contributions of international students to the study country also occur when they recommend other students, family members or friends to undertake their education in the study country. While this may be accurate, the respondents were not keen to recommend Norway as a study destination due to the education system, which is beyond the control of the tourism industry in general as well as beyond the scope of this thesis to explore further.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that not all Chinese international students will display the same travel behaviour. Some of the behaviour, preferences and needs are also evidently dependent on the study destination. Some of preferences such as mode of transport, accommodation and dining are mostly depended on the study destination, its infrastructure, facilities and environment rather than the respondents' status as international students or their demographic background.

The findings of this study provide some further contradictions from previous studies on Chinese international students. Previous studies have assumed that Chinese international students prefer sightseeing and visiting big cities rather than rural areas. This contradicts with the findings of this study, which indicate that Chinese international students want to venture into more adventure and nature-based tourism related activities. Thus, a significant theoretical implication is that while sightseeing or a single tourism activity may seem as the most popular

tourism activity for Chinese international students, it is not solely due to their preference to undertake such activities. Sightseeing is the most popular activity because respondents do not know how to undertake other activities or where to find information about other adventure and nature-based tourism activities. The perceived lack of skills prevents them from undertaking such activities. While lack of perceived skills have been identified by previous studies, they have mostly focused on cultural barriers and language barriers. Cultural and language barriers were not considered as barriers at all among the respondents. The major intrinsic barrier was lack of perceived skills in undertaking adventure and nature-based tourism activities. This is what prevents respondents seeking adventure and nature-based tourism, not because they do not want to experience such activities.

As sightseeing is still the single most popular activity, which had been shown in several studies including this current one, destinations should still continue to direct their marketing efforts in promoting interesting tourist spots where sightseeing can be conducted. The findings also indicate that respondents commonly undertake museum attractions; hence, tourism organisations should also further promote such activities in order to target the market effectively.

5.2 Practical implications and recommendations

For Norwegian tourism and tourism operators, the findings provide insight into understanding Chinese international students and their needs and wants. While Chinese international students in Norway are considered as a relatively small tourist market compared with other popular study countries such as the UK, the US and Australia, the findings discovered by this study about Chinese international students can also be used to further understand the conventional Chinese tourist market as suggested by Hughes et al., (2015). This is particularly

relevant as this study also reveals that Chinese international student for sure have recommended or would recommend family and friends to visit Norway, hereby creating an important VFR-market as an indirect contribution to the Norwegian tourism industry. As Norwegian tourism activities, attractions and products are highly based on the adventure and the nature-based element, this study reveals that there are great potentials in terms of marketing and providing adventure and nature-based tourism to Chinese international students as well as the conventional Chinese tourist market. This study has further suggested the many approaches that Norwegian tourism industry and operators can do in order to cater to this market such as:

- Providing websites and other information in Chinese
- Providing more information on natural parks, natural attractions and other destinations in Norway catered to this market
- Marketing tourism products and destinations during the holidays, the beginning of the semester and also continue throughout the semester
- Focusing on low-budget accommodations and transport
- Encouraging word-of-mouth feedback
- Providing necessary equipment and clothing for hire
- Offering education on adventure tourism
- Marketing soft-adventure and low-risk activities

5.3 Concluding remarks, limitations and suggestions for further research

International students as tourists in the country of their study have received less attention by researchers and practitioners. This is because they have traditionally not been considered as tourists or registered as tourists in tourism statistics. Although such significant contributions are recognised by some researchers, national tourism organisations such as tourism

commission have largely ignored the existence of such market. Thus, their exact direct monetary contributions to the Norwegian tourism industry are also unsure. As existing studies have mainly focused on international students in countries such as the UK, the US and Australia, it is important to conduct study into international students in other study countries. Studies in the UK, the US and Australia cannot represent the travel behaviours of all international students in other nations than these countries.

In addition, as most existing studies are largely quantitative based, further qualitative based studies are needed. Particularly, further studies may seek to explore the more detailed and monetary contributions by the Chinese international students in Norway as well as link such contribution more specifically to the VFR market segment. The likely outcome of the study will help to gain more understanding into the travel behaviour of international students in Norway. Limitations of the study also exist as it mainly concentrates on Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions, which are in close proximity to the researchers due to time restrictions. Generalisation of the findings is also limited to a study country such as Norway and may not be as applicable to other study countries with different infrastructure, facility and environment. Nevertheless, findings may be applicable to study countries of similar nature as Norway. This includes for instance Germany, and other countries such as Finland and Austria that charges very low tuition fees.

While this study has attempted to study the travel behaviour of Chinese international students using a holistic approach by investigating several concept and issues as well as the various stages of pre-visit, on-site and post-visit behaviour, more detailed and comprehensive studies, which use the longitudinal approaches, may be beneficial to contribute further to the body of

knowledge. In addition, comparison studies, which include international students of various nationalities, would also be interesting to investigate.

6.0 References

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7.0 Appendices

7.1 Interview schedule

Introductory questions

1. Why did you choose Norway as a place to study?
2. Were you attracted by the destination and its attractions that you could explore?
3. Where have you been so far in Norway? And where are you planning to go in Norway?

Destinations and tourism activities in Norway

4. Which destinations and tourist spots were your priorities before arriving in Norway?
5. Which destinations and tourist spots do not interest you and why?
6. What types of attractions/activities appeal to you? Are you for instance interested in nature-based activities and adventure tourism? Why/why not?
7. Are you more interested in visiting metropolitan places such as Oslo and Bergen?
8. Are you interested in visiting natural environments such as the Pulpit rock, the Northern lights etc.?
9. Are there any travel barriers or constraints that may prevent you from travelling or visiting certain places in Norway?
10. If you are not planning to go anywhere in Norway, what are the reasons for not doing so?

Information search and source of information

11. How do you plan your holiday?
12. How do you obtain information about destinations that you are interested in?
13. Which source do you trust or you believe is most reliable?

The preferences when undertaking travelling

14. What are your accommodation preferences when travelling?
15. What are your dining preferences when travelling?
16. What are your transport preferences when travelling?
17. How do you like to travel? Do you prefer to travel alone, in small groups or in large groups?

18. When do you travel during the semester?

VFR market segment

19. How do you encourage your family members and friends to visit Norway?

20. Where do you recommend them to travel?

21. Do you travel together with them?

22. Do you recommend other students from China to study in Norway?

Socio-demographic related questions

23. How long are you staying in Norway as a student?

24. What is your age and gender?

25. Are you an undergraduate or postgraduate student?

26. Are you single, married or in a relationship?

27. What is your financial situation and support? Are you under scholarship or self-funded?

28. Do you undertake any form of paid part-time or casual work?