

A THEORETICAL MODEL OF PARENTAL FACTORS AND STUDENTS' CAREER DECISIONS TO JOIN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN CHINA

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Abstract: China is now enjoying fast growth of international tourism development, which contributes to creating a large amount of employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. For the sake of gaining competitive advantage, this industry has an urgent need to attract and recruit the qualified and skilled employees. However, a great proportion of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) undergraduates fail to make their career decisions to work in the tourism industry due to the parental influential factors. It is therefore important to provide a value conceptual model that expounds on the theoretical relationships existing between two parental factors and HTM students' career intentions. This study contributes to the literature by clarifying the effects of parental influence on the students' career decisions to enter the hospitality industry in China.

Keywords: Parents, Students' Career Decisions, Hospitality Industry, China

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INTRODUCTION

According to UNWTO (2015) report, China as one of the strongest developing countries, especially benefits from the fast development of tourism. According to China National Tourism Administration (2015) statistics, China tourism's direct contribution to GDP, which was US\$263 billion in 2014, just second after the United States, and 12 times greater than the average level for other Asian countries. Added to this, in the same year, global tourism including both direct and indirect employment, created 107,519,000 in 2015, representing 3.6% of total employment. In addition, travel organizations are expected to contribute to a total of 130,694,000 employment vacancies by 2025 (UNWTO, 2015). This rapid tourism development in China has led to a huge demand of personnel

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from the hospitality and tourism market. To illustrate, this year (2016) China will have employment vacancies for some predicted 52,000 management professionals and 583,000 operational-level staff (China National Tourism Administration, 2015). Although the Chinese hospitality and tourism industry contributes largely to employment opportunities, the mainland China is faced to a serious mismatch between supply and demand for personnel, with the problem of keeping and recruiting new employees, resulting in a serious shortage of qualified personnel and potential management in this industry (Chang et al., 2014; Chang & Tse, 2015; Chen & Shen, 2012). Worse, many Chinese Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) programme students are not choosing to work in the industry after graduation, for the major reasons that the Chinese parents are not motivated to support their children to make career decisions to join the tourism and hospitality industry (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Zhang & Gu, 2000; Zhao, 1991).

Many studies conducted in different cultural contexts such as India (Agarwala, 2008; Gokuladas, 2010), Japan (Campbell & Uto, 1994) and the US (Buckley & Petrunik, 1995; Ng et al., 2008) demonstrate that parental factors have a significant influence on students' career choices. However, few studies using China as the research context investigate the Chinese students' parents which have an obvious and strong effect on their career choice. Actually, Chinese parents in particular play a variety of important roles in their children's lives, especially in crucial and vital decision points such as choosing a university and a major programme, getting married and choosing a career (Bai, 1998; Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Jin et al., 2009). Chinese parents do not have the power to change the major programme that they favoured as their child's first choice, so many HTM students join this programme not as their first choice but perhaps as fourth or fifth. Even HTM programme students who have been enrolled in this major for three or four years' learning experience might find that their parents still do not support them in joining this industry (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Jin et al., 2009; Zhang & Gu, 2000). However, there is a scarcity of empirical research on HTM programme students in China, investigating parental influences and views about making career decisions on graduation, especially in the tourism industry context.

For the above reasons, the current research aims to address these gaps through investigating Chinese HTM undergraduate students' awareness of the parental influential factors; whether these factors have a significant effect and influence on their career decisions in selecting the hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Career Decisions

Careers can be viewed from either the organizational or individual level (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). While organization-level analysis considers a career as a structure or pathway within the organization, individual-level analysis views it as the individual's subjective and objective choice or experience of work or job (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). In a previous study by Julien (1999), career is defined as a role of social identity, a social status, or a way to earn a living, or a pathway to achieve a person's needs through self-actualization on the jobs. Ballout (2009) suggested that careers research can be easily divided into two major dimensions in terms of monetary exchange and non-monetary exchange for individuals. Based on the above career definitions and research studies, very little research on career decisions and career choices was found. However, the definition of career decision making in this study refers to the process of a person in choosing his or her career action to deal with a problem or evaluate a career option, organizational environment or the occupation itself (Mimbs et al., 1998).

The career decision-making process involves activities such as identifying career objectives, collecting vocational information, generating career options, and evaluating different alternatives before making a final decision (Mau, 2004).

Thus, this study will focus on the concept of making career decisions, which may fill the knowledge gap around this term and measurement. The students are at the initial stage of employment, making their first career choice, rather than at the stages of looking at career success or career commitment which follow on from the initial decision process.

HTM Students' Career Decisions

HTM programme prepare students for career opportunities in a variety of workplaces in the tourism and hospitality industry, which encompasses a variety of business sectors including a range of travel agency, tour operation companies, sightseeing spots, cruise, hotels and accommodation, food and beverage companies, bars and catering centres, conference and banqueting centres and recreation centres. However, according to Abdullah et al., (2015), most people consider that this industry employees are "uneducated, unmotivated, unskilled and unproductive". This is especially true of Chinese perceptions of this service industry's jobs (Blomme et al., 2009; Chang & Tse, 2015), most believing the jobs involve easily mastered skills with no need for educational qualifications (Brown et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2014; Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010). Based on the study from Chang & Tse (2015), up to 70% of positions within the hospitality industry do not require a formal education, degree or diploma.

The cultural context also results in HTM students not joining the industry, especially those from traditional Asian cultures, where parents do not encourage their children to make careers in the tourism industry, seeing them as servitude with little opportunity for future promotion (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Lu & Adler, 2009). Given the nature of the labour market and the characteristics of the tourism industry, many employees find the work stressful and strenuous, with fewer skills needed, poor pay and bad working conditions compared to jobs in other industries (Brown et al., 2014; Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; Lu & Adler, 2009).

Pizam et al., (2013) stated that many Chinese university students found part-time jobs in the tourism or hospitality industry and recognized this as a "pass-through" phase in their career development. Moreover, many students took on tourism or hospitality work as a way of earning extra money towards their school fees (Brown et al., 2014; Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; Lu & Adler, 2009). Poor remuneration and benefits, heavy workload, no pay for overtime duties and overwork for these part-time students are cited by Fong et al., (2014). Brown et al., (2014) and Richardson (2009) examined the attitudes and perceptions of current HTM undergraduates toward their future careers. Unsurprisingly, this study's findings also showed that many of them made careers in other business sectors rather than the tourism and hospitality industry.

Some researchers (Blomme et al., 2009; Donina, 2015; Lam & Ching, 2007; Pizam et al., 2013) also explained that the students who had internship experience in tourism industry, more than half of respondents claimed that they had a bad work experience and would not join this industry after graduation. Many also cited bad experiences coming from unfulfilled expectations and mismatches between the real work environment and what they learned at university. And the other studies such as Bao & Fang (2014) and Brown et al., (2014) stated that tourism and hospitality employers pay insufficient attention to the treatment of students during the internship programme set by the universities. They are seeing interns as simply alleviating the labour shortage instead of developing potential employees during the internship period, which would largely steer clear of the undergraduates going into a career in this industry. Thus, the industry is

confronted with a significant problem involving the attraction, recruitment, and retention of future workforce (Brown et al., 2014; Fong et al., 2014; Richardson, 2009). This is why this study is dedicated to finding the related parental support and concern factors influence HTM students' career decisions in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Parental Factors

Cultural values are illustrated in the different characteristics and influences on the relationship between parental factors and their children's career decisions, particularly between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Hou & Leung, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Individualistic cultures, such as American, focus on the individual's personal feelings and autonomy; children are less likely to be influenced by their parents, with relatively little parental impact on deciding their career choices (Buckley & Petrunik, 1995; Ng et al., 2008). In contrast, collectivistic cultures such as in China and India, emphasize family relationships and conformity with all kinds of social norms (Agarwala, 2008; Bai, 1998). Similarly, collectivistic culture implies strong parental influences, which also have a significant impact on their children's career behaviours (Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007). China is considered as typical of collectivism cultural values (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Jin et al., 2009). Some studies have stressed that many Chinese students are not willing to be separated from their families, and that they have a certain of psychological dependence on their parents (Bai, 1998; Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Jin et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2014).

This is compared with a country where individualistic cultural values are dominant; for example, in the USA students showed more independence and freedom, being mature and responsible in making their own choices (Ng et al., 2008). Despite the critical part played by Chinese parents on their children's decision points (Bai, 1998), few studies have been conducted on parental influences on HTM programme students' career decisions. This study therefore aims to examine the influence of parental factors on HTM programme students' career decisions to work in the hospitality industry. Based on Chak-Keung Wong and Jin Liu's (2010) research, it employs two major constructs, parental support and parental concern, to evaluate parental influential factors.

Parental Support

Parental support refers to behaviour or influence of the father or mother, showing a variety of help and expectations to their children (Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007). It can be realized in behaviour such as discussion, the spiritual, financial and educational support, or other helpful strategies (Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). Parents' support for their children's career decisions can be manifested through providing vocational counselling, capital investment, passing on useful knowledge, offering suggestions on alternative options and providing learning experience opportunities (Silbereisen et al., 1997; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). Campbell & Uto (1994) emphasized that communication with their children and respect for their choices and decisions, plus verbal or behavioural encouragement, played a significant part in parental support. Parental support can be categorized as either supportive and hindering effects on their children's career behaviour (Aldrich & Kim, 2007; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). Bai (1998) suggested that hindering factors, such as discouragement and verbal or behavioural, prevent children from making decisions and exert more negative and adverse pressure on their psychological development.

A large number of studies have emphasized that parental support has positive and supportive effects on their children's career behaviour (Campbell & Uto, 1994; Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007; Silbereisen et al., 1997; Taylor et al., 2004), but few have examined parental hindering factors such as parental barriers or interference in their children's

career development. According to social cognitive theory (Rogers & Creed, 2011), strong parental support has a significant positive effect on a young person's career decisions. Agarwala (2008) also noted that a supportive family environment, especially from the parents, is closely related with children's career development.

A related study by Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu (2010) examined parental support for children entering the hospitality industry; however this factor was rated by the students as of the lowest significance. The authors concluded that Chinese parents do not usually encourage their children to join the hospitality industry as career development. One reason was that parents have negative perceptions of hospitality careers, as well as little knowledge about this industry's development, and the kind of vocational opportunities that would provide for students. Many of them believed that HTM courses would lead to their children becoming tour guides or hotel operational staff, with no advancement or opportunities for promotion or career development (Zhang & Gu, 2000). Hence, Chak-Keung Wong and Jin Liu (2010) blamed the factor of negative parental support as the major contributor to students' unwillingness to join the hospitality industry.

Parental Concern

Parental concern refers to worries about their children making wrong decisions about certain behaviour (Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007), for several reasons: unsatisfactory working conditions, low salary, and low social status in the eyes of relatives and friends (Guan et al., 2014; Salami & Oyesoji Aremu, 2007). Parents in China especially like to discuss and show off their children's progress to other people in the neighborhood (Bai, 1998). Guan et al., (2014) and Zhang et al., (2014) stressed that collectivistic cultural values is a reason for this kind of comparison with others, identifying it as a psychological inclination behaviour.

Similarly, Agarwala (2008) stated that collectivistic cultural values are normally manifest as family or social groups in countries such as China and India, where parental opinions and concerns about their children's decisions or quality of life play a major role. Based on Bai's (1998) research, young people's career choices and career advancement in China are much more influenced by parents, as they are afraid of responsibility in making financial decisions, or psychological frustration in re-investment and re-decision of their choices. Zhang et al., (2014) suggested that many Chinese parents' concern about their children's career choices prevents them from working or studying far away from home. Aldrich and Kim (2007) argued that it may not be the children themselves but the parents who tend to have more dependence on family ties, associating this with their children's career choices. They also judged that a career decision in China seems to be made more to satisfy parents or family needs rather than an individual's own aspiration or interests.

Buckley and Petrunik (1995) considered that parents always replicate their own careers on their children, drawing on traditional family careers, themes, limitations and emotional aspects. For example, when family generations follow a medically oriented career tradition, they will ensure the children stay in the field of medicine, even though they might move to another area of the same field.

According to Salami and Oyesoji Aremu (2007), family systems have become the source of a career counselling model utilizing the effects of family, birth order and sibling dynamics. Children will move into different directions in their career behaviour, when the parents or elder sibling had chosen their own direction and planted their role identity with certain attributes on their children or brother. These parents always believed that their children had trouble in making decisions, imposing rules and roles based on their greater experience, which would be better for their children. Later, parents would impose unsuitable career expectations, past experiences and a relationship network on their

children and thus limit their career decisions (Guan et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2004). In related research within the hospitality context (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010), the respondents placed the highest value on parental concern over welfare and prestige when choosing their career in the hospitality industry. The discussion revealed that Chinese parents are more concerned about their children's future career regarding the factors such as salary and benefits, and work location to make sure their children do not live too far away from them. The reason behind the greater concern over these factors was that if their children earn a high salary the parents do not need to worry about their future medical care, rent or other necessary life expenses (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010).

Another important parental concern is that Chinese parents prefer their children to work in a good organization with a high salary which makes them proud in front of their friends, relatives or neighbourhood (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010). For instance, parents usually demonstrate their children's abilities to bring honour and prestige to their families such as by working in a bank, or as a government official, lawyer or teacher (Bai, 1998; Hou & Leung, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). This factor was valued highest by HTM undergraduates, encouraging them to stress the salary and job status as major considerations in choosing a career and strengthening their inclination to enter the hospitality industry (Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Ko, 2007; Lu & Adler, 2009).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Various theories have been developed to explain what career choice is. Some describe it as the entry stage of a career (Palos & Drobot, 2010), whereas others recognize the need for individuals to realize their vocational inclination and preference (Mimbs et al., 1998). Yet, this study emphasizes students' career decision making and examined the related theories listed below. Parsons' trait-and-factor theory (London, 1983) focuses on personal traits such as ability and personality in influencing career actions. Ginzberg's theory (Kosine & Lewis, 2008) explained individual's lifelong process of career development, comprising three different stages. Super's theory (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007) is more closely related to this research, targeting respondents like adolescents preparing to enter the labour market, but he still divided their career development into five stages based on Ginzberg's theory. Holland's theory (Katsikea et al., 2011), like Parsons' concentrates on the person fitting the environment, influencing the individual's career action. Gottfredson's theory (Jin et al., 2009) of career choice also emphasized self-concepts such as self-interest, self-abilities, self-values which can influence the different stages of career development and choice. Most studies of the students' career decisions utilize Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which illustrate too many original variables such as person inputs, background contextual influences, self-efficacy, outcome expectations and career goals (Ballout, 2009; Mau, 2000; Rogers & Greed, 2011; Usinger & Smith, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland, 2008).

Concluding the above theories, they are not wholly sufficiently close to the research objectives and questions of this study. Yet, this study is going to use Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), which clearly indicated that career choice is influenced by three determinant variables and most importantly, showing the links between attitude towards behaviour, subjective norms, behavioural intention, and individuals' behaviours. First, attitude towards behaviour indicates an individual's positive or negative evaluation about performing the behaviour. Second, termed subjective norms, which indicate individuals' perceptions about what other people or society think they should do, such as parents' or friends' recommendations, who may exert an influence on the individual's attitudes and inclination to make decisions.

Behavioural intention is a tendency of individuals to take action in the future according to their subjective judgment. According to TRA, an individual's behaviour is driven by behavioural intention to perform a behaviour. The individual's behavioural intention is predicted by his or her attitude towards behaviour and subjective norms. The purpose of research framework is to investigate the logical sense of relationships between the independent and dependent for testing those relationships are meaningful or not, a critical part of any research (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Through the above theoretical and literature discussion, the study proposed a research framework presented in (Figure 1).

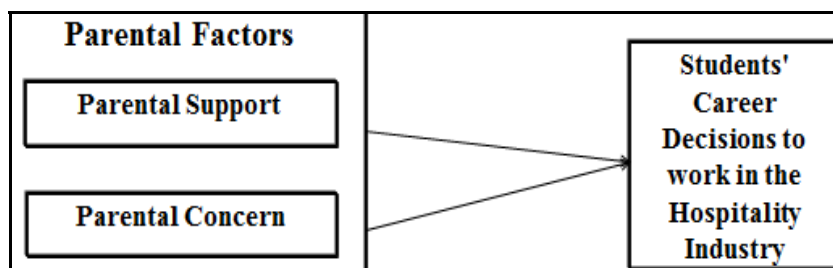


Figure 1. Research Framework (Source: This study, 2016)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) models are utilized to evaluate students' career decisions in this study. Within this research context, as Figure 1 shows, two independent variables are input: parental support and parental concern factors to evaluate students' career decisions as the major dependent variable.

A large number of researchers have found that students' career decisions were largely influenced by parental factors (Bai, 1998; Chak-Keung Wong & Jin Liu, 2010; Silbereisen et al., 1997; Taylor et al, 2004; Zhang et al., 2014; Zhao & Zhu, 2014). They all revealed that positive parental motivational factors can be the major determinants of students' career decisions to work in the hospitality industry.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

Despite numerous studies on HTM students' career development in the hospitality industry (Bao & Fang, 2014; Fong et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2013; Ko, 2007; Lam & Ching, 2007; Pizam et al., 2013), few have examined the relationship with parental influence within Chinese context, a gap which this study will fill. Based on TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) theory relationship, a framework for this study was proposed. Two parental factors, parental support and parental concern were evaluated from the literature and the relationship between these two factors and students' career decisions. Further empirical study in this area is in progress along with a follow-up of Chinese undergraduate students and their parents via survey to determine statistical findings.

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