An Investigation of Chinese Master’s Students in Denmark and Sweden

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Abstract

This paper investigates and compares Chinese master’s students in Denmark and Sweden, focusing on their motivation for choosing to study in Denmark and Sweden, their daily life and study acculturation experience, as well as their intentions of staying or returning after graduating.

The paper provides information on the current student migration situation, and presents relevant motivational migration and acculturation theories. A semi-structured interview method is then used to gather qualitative data from six Chinese master’s students studying in Denmark and Sweden. In the analysis, the paper applies the theories on the interview data.

This paper’s findings suggest that the main reasons for the Chinese master’s students to study abroad is to improve their competencies and experience foreign culture. When choosing the study destination, decisive factors include the quality of the program, the academic reputation of the universities, the use of English in teaching and cultural aspirations.

The effects of cultural differences, study situation and finance are factors that affect their psychological well-being during the process of acculturation. Their psychological well-being generally follows a “U” curve with an initial high level followed by a lower level which eventually increases to a higher level once again. The students encounter challenges in their study related to the Danish and Swedish academia’s direct teacher-student and student-student communication, as well as the English language.

Regarding the students’ intentions after graduating, some plan to return to China because of family, friends and personal relationship reasons, while others intend to stay mainly for career reasons, but with the intention of ultimately returning to China.

Key words: International students, Chinese university students, study abroad, student migration, motivation, acculturation.
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1. Introduction

Studying abroad has become a fast-growing and prevalent phenomenon (Byram, 2006: 1). Nowadays, developed countries’ prosperity depends on their ability to stimulate the growth of knowledge economies and to counter the negative effects of demographic ageing (Douglass, 2009, cited in Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011: 520). Accordingly, an international race for talent has been set up, including increased efforts to attract international students (Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011: 520).

According to the European Migration Network\(^1\) (EMN, 2012: 8), the EU member states have placed more importance on the policies and practices for attracting international students. For the EU states, international students generally have a positive economic impact on the states’ revenues through the payment of tuition fees, rent and other living expenses, as well as their potential participation in the labour market during and after their study (EMN, 2012: 48).

During the last decade, student migration has become the most prominent feature of Chinese migration patterns in Europe, and has both economic and social impacts on both Europe and China (Shen, n.d.: 147). Many of the EU states regard the recruitment of Chinese students as a means to strengthen economic ties with China, whose booming economy has a vast effect on the global economy (EMN, 2012: 21). As such, Chinese students are not only foreign students, but also important transnational actors and social network agents for the China-Europe relationship (Shen, n.d.: 147). Additionally, China is the world’s largest contributor of students studying abroad (Wang & Guo, 2012: 10), which also makes it an attractive target for international students recruitment.

Chinese students’ preferences when choosing a study and future working destination are therefore important and relevant issues for the EU states. In order to maximise the benefits for both Europe and China, better support and governance should be given to the Chinese international students (Shen, n.d.: 148). As such, issues such as the Chinese students’ academic and daily life adjustments and experience, as well as their psychological well-being are essential.

There are substantial differences between Western and Eastern cultures (Chen and Chung, 1993, cited in Burnett & Garnder, n.d.: 66). Yang and Clum (1994, cited in Yan & Berliner, 2009) argue that the more different the two countries are, the more stressful the adjustment is likely to be. Accordingly, the challenges and stressors encountered by Chinese

\(^1\) The European Migration Network (EMN) is an EU-funded network, aiming at providing information on migration and asylum.
students during their acculturation process in Northern Europe are considerable, and Chinese students’ acculturation process in Denmark and Sweden is therefore interesting to study.

In the academic year of 2009/2010, the number of Chinese students in Denmark was only around one third of the number in Sweden (1,194 and 3,270 respectively) (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering\(^2\), 2011: 47; Högskoleverket\(^3\) & Statistiska centralbyrå\(n\)\(^4\), 2012: 47). Taking into account the total number of international students in Denmark and Sweden, the difference is still substantial, as Denmark had around two thirds of the number in Sweden (17,301 and 27,815 respectively) (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, 2011: 46; Högskoleverket & Statistiska centralbyrå\(n\), 2012: 45). Thus it is interesting to study the Chinese students in both Denmark and Sweden in an attempt to find why Sweden apparently is a more popular study destination for Chinese students.

Another more personal motivation for choosing this topic is that I am a Chinese university student myself, studying in Sweden. This makes it even more interesting for me to share and compare other Chinese students’ experiences with mine, and makes the topic relevant on a personal level too.

This paper starts out by outlining the aims and specific research questions. Subsequently, the paper provides background information about the current situation of international students and Chinese international students in general, as well as in Denmark and Sweden specifically. The theoretical framework contains motivational migration theories and acculturation models, as well as definitions of the concepts of “student migration”, “acculturation”, “migrant”, “sojourner” and “international students”. Thereafter, the semi-structured interview method and art therapy method will be presented. The interviews focus on the Chinese students’ preferences and experiences regarding Denmark and Sweden as study and working destinations. Based on the interviews with six Chinese international students, the paper analyses and compares Chinese university students studying in Denmark and Sweden. Finally a conclusion is drawn summarizing the paper’s main findings.

\(^2\)Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering is the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalization. It is a government agency under the Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, tasked to create ideal framework conditions for the Danish university sector and to strengthen Denmark’s position in the world.

\(^3\)Högskoleverket is the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. It is a government agency in charge of investigating and promoting higher education sector activities.

\(^4\)Statistiska centralbyrå\(n\) (Statistics Sweden) is an administrative agency providing statistics mainly to the government and different agencies.
2. **Aim and research questions**

This paper aims to investigate the Chinese students in Denmark and Sweden, focusing on their initial migration, daily life and study acculturation experience, as well as intentions after graduation. In order to achieve the aims of this paper, the following questions will be examined:

1. Why do Chinese students choose to study in Denmark/Sweden?
2. How do the Chinese students experience their social life in Denmark/Sweden?
3. How do the Chinese students experience their study life in Denmark/Sweden?
4. What do the Chinese students intend to do after finishing their studies?
3. Background

3.1 Numbers of international and Chinese students studying abroad

In recent decades, the world has witnessed an enormous increase in international student mobility, especially in higher education (Zhu, 2012: 3). According to the latest data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, at least 3.6 million international students were enrolled in tertiary education outside their home country in 2010, against 2 million in 2000. The statistics reflect a rapid expansion of global enrolment in higher education. Altbach and Teichler (2001:5, cited in Zhu, 2012: 1) argue that internationalization in higher education is an inevitable result of the globalized and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

China is today the world’s largest contributor of students studying abroad, with 339,700 students in 2011, comprising 17% of the total number of international students (Wang & Guo, 2012: 10). Chinese students represent the largest international student group in many countries, such as the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Russia, Thailand and Malaysia (Wang & Guo, 2012). Chinese students also comprise a predominant foreign student group in Scandinavia; it is the largest in Sweden (Högskoleverket 2012: 34) and the second largest in Denmark (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, 2011: 40) and in Norway (Brekke, 2006: 37).

3.2 The study abroad phenomenon in China

Political changes have made studying abroad easier for students in many countries (Byram: 2006: 1), including in China. The number of Chinese students abroad did not increase substantially until the Chinese economic reform and open-up policy was implemented in the late 1970s. The policies of studying abroad in China were changed during the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Communist Party from 1978 to 1992. Deng Xiaoping believed that the most important and efficient way to develop a country was to enhance the country’s scientific and technological level. One way to do this was to expand the academic communication with foreign countries and send more students to study abroad. As a result, a lot of improvements have been made in order to encourage Chinese students to study abroad (Yao, 2004: 7).

At the early stage of China’s economical reform, most of the Chinese students studying abroad were sponsored by the government, and only around one fifth were self-supported students. China’s booming economy and fast development have since given more

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5 The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the statistical office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
Chinese families the economical ability to afford sending their children to study abroad, and has also strengthened their desire to send their children to study abroad (Yao, 2004: 9, 10). China’s middle class was estimated to be 150 million in 2006 (Kynge, 2006: 169). As a result, the number of self-supported students increased dramatically in the 21st century and made up 92.67 % of the total number of Chinese students abroad in 2011 (Wang & Guo, 2012: 8,15).

The number of self-supported students will continue to grow; it is estimated that by 2030 almost two-thirds of the increase in the global middle class will take place in China and India (Global Environment Facility6, 2013: 2). Besides, loans from state banks secured against property are now an option for many Chinese families, which may further increase the number of self-supported students studying abroad (Kynge, 2006: 169).

Among 339,700 Chinese master’s students studying abroad in 2011, 85 % of them were economically supported by their parents, while 12 % were supported by foreign universities’ scholarships, 2 % were supported by their part-time jobs, and only 1 % were supported by the Chinese government or other organizations (Wang & Guo, 2012: 8,15). The reason why most of the Chinese students studying abroad were supported by their parents lies in the fact that for the average Chinese parent, spending money on their child’s education is second only to food expenses, as they believe that a good education will guarantee their children a better future (Ashley & Jiang, 2000, cited in Bodyncott, 2009: 353).

It is worth noting that 70 % of the Chinese master’s students studying abroad have a family background with higher educated parents and 24 % a family background with parents with high school education. 47 % of the Chinese master’s students studying abroad come from families where the parents have managerial positions, while 44 % come from working class families (Wang & Guo, 2012: 23, 24).

3.3 Reasons why Chinese students study abroad

For students from Asia and Africa who study in Europe and North America, there is often an underlying hope that their foreign education can bring them economic benefits in the future (Byram, 2006: 1). The Chinese student group is a good example of this.

The main reason for Chinese students to study abroad in 2011 is to improve their professional competencies (29 %), to gain frontier knowledge and skill (25 %), to experience foreign culture and expand their horizons (21 %), and to receive advanced education (18 %). Only 5 % study abroad because they intend to work abroad and

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6 Global Environment Facility is the largest public funder of projects for improving the global environment.

The reason that many of the Chinese students express a desire to improve their professional competencies is that the Chinese economy has been developing very fast, and that China thus requires a large number of professional talents with good foreign language skills and intercultural communication experience, as well as an international horizon. In fact, such international talents have better social status and salaries when they return to China compared to those who hold similar degrees from Chinese universities (Wang & Guo, 2012: 21).

3.4 Choice of study destination for international and Chinese students

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development\(^7\) (2011: 321), the five major destinations for international students in 2009 were: the United States (18 %), the United Kingdom (10 %), Australia (7 %), Germany (7 %) and France (7 %). Figure 1 below shows that although these five countries account for the study destination for half of the world’s international students, some new players have emerged on the international education market, such as Canada (5 %), Japan (4 %) and the Russian Federation (4 %) (OECD, 2011: 321).

![Figure 1. Distribution of foreign students in tertiary education, by country of destination (2009). Source: OECD (2011: 322).](image)

The general trend is that English-speaking countries are still the major destinations

\(^7\) The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organization aiming to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
of foreign students, with the emergence of a few new non-English-speaking countries. The non-English-speaking countries have become more attractive partly as a result of an increase in the number of courses offered in English, and because of lenient internationalisation policies (OECD, 2011: 321).

Recent OECD (2011: 327) statistics show that 21.9 % of all Chinese students studying abroad head for the US, while 14 % choose Japan and 12.4 % choose Australia. The UK, Canada, Singapore, New Zealand, France and Russia are also popular destinations for Chinese students (Wang & Guo, 2012: 10).

The fact that English-speaking countries are the major destinations of foreign students reflects that English has become the global language. Students intending to study abroad are therefore likely to have already learned English in their home country and are also likely to wish to improve their English language skills through studies in a native English-speaking country. This constitutes a linguistic disadvantage for the institutions in non-English-speaking countries. In order to overcome this disadvantage, the institutions in non-English-speaking countries have now increased the number of courses in English. This trend is especially evident in the Nordic countries, where the use of English is widespread (OECD, 2011: 323) (see Table 1 below).

![Table 1. Countries offering tertiary programs in English (2009). Source: OECD (2011: 323).](image)

Except for the language factor, the quality of the institutions or programs perceived from different rankings, tuition fees and costs of living, as well as immigration policies in the receiving countries are also factors international students are concerned about when choosing their study destinations. Students may also make their decisions on where to study abroad based on the recognition of foreign degrees, the limitations of tertiary education in the home country, future job opportunities and cultural aspirations (OECD, 2011: 324, 325).

For Chinese master’s students studying abroad in 2011, 59 % chose their destinations country based primarily on the overall academic reputation of the institutions in the
destination country, while 15% chose the destination country because of its ease of applying. Only 8% gave the reason of relatively cheap tuition fees and living costs for choosing their destination country, and 3% chose their destination country because of its lenient immigration policies (Wang & Guo, 2012: 19).

3.5 International and Chinese students in Denmark

Historically, Denmark has attracted foreign students because of its high quality education and safety, as well as the lack of tuition fees (Woodfield, 2009: 7). According to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings\(^8\) 2012-2013 three Danish universities were in the top 200: Aarhus University ranked 116, Copenhagen University ranked 130, and Technical University of Denmark ranked 149. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)\(^9\) 2012 published by Shanghai Jiao Tong University the same three universities made it to the top 200, but with different rankings: Copenhagen University ranked 44, Aarhus University ranked 86, while Technical University of Denmark only ranked 151-200.

Since 2006, students from countries outside the EU/EEA studying a full degree in Denmark have been required to pay a tuition fee (Danish Agency for International Education, 2011: 3). According to studyindenmark.dk\(^10\) website, the annual tuition fee for full-degree students is in the range of 6,000-16,000 EUR.

The introduction of the tuition fee has been supplemented by a scholarship scheme for the most excellent international students within certain subject areas, such as science and technology, in which Denmark has difficulties with attracting students and researchers (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education\(^11\), 2006: 3). The goal of the scholarship policy is to attract only the top students from outside the EU/EEA, and discourage others (Brekke, 2006: 30), as well as to become more globally competitive (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2006: 1).

The charging of tuition fees starting September 2006 led to a substantial decrease in

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\(^8\) The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2012-2013 judge world-class universities across teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking)

\(^9\) The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) is conducted by the Center for World-Class Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (CWCU), which endeavors to build databases of major research universities in the world providing consultation for governments and universities. (http://www.shanghairanking.cn/ARWU2012.htm)

\(^10\) Studyindenmark.dk is a governmental website offering international students information about studying, living and working in Denmark. The website is run by the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalization under the Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education. (http://studyindenmark.dk/study-in-denmark/tuition-fees-and-scholarships)

\(^11\) The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education is an independent organization, which conducts and spreads research relevant to cross-border higher education program delivery around the world.
the number of new non-EU/EEA students studying in Denmark; from 1274 students in 2005/2006 to 741 students in 2006/2007. However, the number increased to 813 in 2007/2008 and to 962 in 2008/2009 (Danish Agency for International Education, 2011: 3; Woodfield, 2009: 7). Despite its negative impact on the number of non-EU/EEA students studying in Denmark, the policy does not have much effect on the overall number of international students in Denmark. In fact the number has increased steadily during the last decade (see Figure 2 below). The number of international students was more than three times higher in 2009/2010 (17,301), compared to 2000/2001 (5,180).

![Graph showing the number of international students taking a full degree in Denmark, 2000/01-2009/10.](image)

**Figure 2. Numbers of international students taking a full degree in Denmark, 2000/01-2009/10.**
*Source: Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering (2011: 40).*

Except for the introduction of the tuition fee, the immigration laws and the labor market regulations also have an effect on non-EU/EEA students’ mobility in Denmark. The immigration laws have been tightened since the 2000s, making it more difficult for non-EU/EEA citizens to obtain residence and work permits in Denmark, and therefore potentially affecting non-EU/EEA students’ decision of coming to Denmark. Table 2 below shows the different immigration and labor regulations for EU/EEA students and non-EU/EEA students in Denmark (Monsneaga & Agergaar, 2012: 527).
Despite the above restrictions for non-EU/EEA students, Denmark is making efforts to facilitate internationalization of its higher education due to the potential positive effects that international students have on the Danish society. One such advantage lies in the fact that both EU and non-EU international students can increase the government revenues. According to the Danish Rational Economic Agents Model\(^{12}\) attracting 1,000 more international students to Denmark in one year could increase government revenues between 0.4 and 0.8 billion (Young, 2013). Moreover, international students have social and deeper economic impacts on the Danish society. As the Danish Minister of Education, Morten Østergaard recently claimed, “international students help internationalise the Danish higher education, and give Danish students a wider outlook and perspective. But they also contribute to getting economic growth started in Denmark, as they have the skills which the Danish companies are looking for” (Young, 2013). The national internationalization agenda in Denmark recognizes that “foreign students and researchers are an important weapon in the global battle for knowledge – and Denmark is ready to join the fight” (Kjærgaard, 2009: 30, cited in Monsneaga & Agergaar, 2012: 527).

Denmark has ambitious plans to not only attract a growing number of international students, but also retain a substantial number of them after they graduate in the hope that they will become a valuable source of highly-qualified labor, thus contributing to Denmark’s economic competitiveness (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2008: 3). As a result, the Danish government implemented the Student Green Card scheme through which international students can be granted six months of residence for looking for a job in Denmark after finishing their university study (see Table 2) (Monsneaga & Agergaar, 2012:

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\(^{12}\) The Danish Rational Economic Agents Model (DREAM) is an independent institution, which makes model calculations and prognoses for the Danish economy.
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527). However, the Danish Minister of Education, Morten Østergaard pointed out that the Danish society will only benefit from the international students if they have stayed in Denmark for three years after their graduation; therefore the Danish Ministry of Education has recently proposed an extension of the Student Green Card scheme so that it gives three years of residence for international students after their graduation instead of the current half a year (Albæk, 2013).

According to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Denmark\(^\text{13}\) (2008: 4), the global center for knowledge in several fields is moving in the direction of China. Therefore, collaborations with China can not only create considerable value for the Danish society, but also help Denmark to maintain its competitive position in the global knowledge economy. The Danish government is very aware of this, and it therefore launched a China strategy in 2008. Part of the strategy is to enhance collaborations with China with regard to university education (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Denmark, 2008: 4).

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Denmark (2008: 18) suggests that in order to attract more Chinese students to Denmark, a number of scholarships could be offered to talented Chinese students applying for a master’s degree in Denmark. Besides, Danish universities and companies are encouraged to offer trainee and internship agreements to leading Chinese students so that they can gain an insight into working conditions and job opportunities in Denmark. Moreover, an alumni network consisting of former Chinese students from Danish universities will be made so that former students can recommend the Danish university to other students in China (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Denmark, 2008: 18).

In the academic year of 2008/2009, there were 868 Chinese students taking a full degree study in Denmark (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, 2010: 40), while in 2009/2010 the number went up to 1,194. The Chinese students therefore made up 6.9 % of the total number of international students in Denmark, and China was the second-largest contributor of foreign students in Denmark only surpassed by Norway (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, 2011: 47).

\(^\text{13}\) The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation is an agency under the Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education. It works with tasks related to research and innovation policies and provides secretariat services and supervision to the scientific research councils.
3.6 International and Chinese students in Sweden

For international students who choose to study in Sweden, the most important factor in their choice of choosing Sweden as their study destination is the quality or reputation of the university or program, followed by the ability to study in English and the quality of life in Sweden (Migration Policy Group\textsuperscript{14}, 2012: 36).

According to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2012-2013 five Swedish universities were in the top 200: Karolinska Institute ranked 41, Lund University ranked 82, Uppsala University ranked 106, Stockholm University ranked 117 and KTH Royal Institute of Technology ranked 140. The rankings were slightly different according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) 2012, where the five Swedish universities in the top 200 were Karolinska Institute ranked 42, Uppsala University ranked 73, Stockholm University ranked 81, Lund University ranked 101-150, and Gothenburg University ranked 151-200. Compared to the rankings of the Danish universities, more Swedish universities are mentioned in the rankings and they generally receive higher rankings.

Just as Denmark, Sweden has also emphasized the importance of internationalization and has become more active in developing aims and strategies to increase internationalization. The 2001 Higher Education Act encourages institutions to actively recruit international students (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2005: 1, 2). According to European Migration Network Sweden (EMN Sweden), Sweden views foreign students as “an important resource for the future need for highly qualified labor” and aims to “have a high number of foreign students studying at Swedish higher education institutions” (EMN Sweden, 2012: 9).

Unlike Denmark, there is no restriction on the number of hours international students are allowed to work in Sweden. Students in Sweden have full access to the labor market (Migration Policy Group, 2012: 16). However, unlike Denmark, Sweden has no special post-study scheme that grants international students a residence permit allowing them to stay and search for employment after they graduate, which means that the international students have to return home if they have not found a job before their study permit expires. A proposal similar to the current Danish Student Green Card scheme that allows international graduates to stay for an additional six months to seek employment was proposed in Sweden in July 2011 (Migration Policy Group, 2012: 18, 31).

\textsuperscript{14} The Migration Policy Group is an independent non-profit European organization. Its task is to improve equality and mobility.
For a long time, Sweden was one of the few countries in Europe where higher education was free for both Swedish students and foreign students (Högskoleverket, 2012: 18), but starting from the autumn semester of 2011 students from outside the EU/EEA countries or Switzerland have been required to pay tuition fees (EMN Sweden, 2012: 8), just like they have been required to do in Denmark since autumn 2006. According to studyinsweden.se website\textsuperscript{15}, the annual tuition fee for full-degree students is in a range of 9,000-16,000 EUR.

The number of international students in Sweden increased five-fold during the last decade; from 5,531 in 2000/01 to 27,815 in 2009/10 (Högskoleverket & Statistiska centralbyrån, 2009: 62; 2012: 45) (see Figure 3 below). The numbers in Sweden and Denmark were very similar at the beginning of the last decade (5,531 and 5,180 respectively, see Figure 2 and 3). During the last decade, both countries’ numbers have increased drastically. By the end of the last decade, the number in Sweden was 1.6 times that of Denmark (27,815 in Sweden versus 17,301 in Denmark).

\textsuperscript{15} Studyinsweden.se is built and sustained by the Swedish Institute. The website offers international students wide-ranging information about higher education in Sweden. (http://www.studyinsweden.se/How-To-Apply/Fees-and-costs/)
As can be seen from Figure 3, the number of international students in Sweden reached a peak of 31,985 in 2010/11. However it saw a decline of almost 30 % in 2011/2012. This was caused by the introduction of tuition fees for students from outside EU/EEA countries and Switzerland, starting from the autumn semester of 2011 (EMN Sweden, 2012: 8).

The academic year of 2009/10 saw 3,270 Chinese students taking full education in Sweden. The number makes up 11.7 % of the total number of international students, thus making China the largest foreign students contributor in Sweden. However, due to the introduction of the tuition fee in 2011, the number dropped by around 30 % to 2375 in 2011/12 (Högskoleverket & Statistiska centralbyrå, 2012: 45, 47).

Despite the decline in the number of international students coming to Sweden, the political aim in Sweden to increase recruitment of foreign students remains. International students remain a heated issue on the agenda of Swedish policy-makers and practitioners, as well as in the media (EMN Sweden, 2012: 8). In order to increase Sweden’s attractiveness to international students, EMN Sweden suggests the following strategies: Enlarging scholarships and exchange programs, making it easier for students from outside EU/EEA countries and Switzerland to stay and work in Sweden after their graduations, and granting family members of international students access to the Swedish labor market (EMN Sweden, 2012: 8). In fact, in connection with the introduction of tuition fees in 2011, a new scholarship fund was set up for qualified students from developing countries with which Sweden has a long-term cooperation with (Högskoleverket, 2012: 34).

3.7 Challenges for international and Chinese students in the host country

Challenges that international students face in general

From the perspective of the host country, international students are attractive as potential skilled migrants because of their proficiency in the language of the host country and their high levels of acculturation. However, many international students speak the language of the host country at a basic or elementary level only, and they have issues with social integration like other migrants (Migration Policy Group study, 2012: 48-49).

One of the reasons could be that the states often regard international students as guests or temporary visitors, and therefore make no efforts to include and integrate them into the host society, which could be of much help in improving the international students’ ability to succeed in the host society in the future. Therefore, it is suggested that international students should receive integration services and assistance on par with other
migrants (Migration Policy Group, 2012: 49).

**Study-related challenges for Chinese students**

Silence is the typical classroom communication behaviour of Chinese students in American universities. One possible explanation is that they have difficulties in expressing themselves in English. Even though they have passed international English tests before they study abroad, their overall communicative language competence is insufficient in academia (Liu, 2002: 37). This also poses problems in their academic writing (Zhu, 20007, cited in Zhu, 2012: 86).

Another plausible reason is the teacher-oriented education in China. As well as in other Confucian cultures in East Asian countries, teachers are completely dominating in the education sector (Zhu, 2012: 78, 86). Confucianism encourages the Chinese to respect hierarchical relationships between teachers and students. Teachers are regarded as an authority, and students accept the knowledge that teachers transmit readily without questioning or challenging teachers in the classroom (Chan, 1999: 301). However, in Western academia, knowledge is co-constructed through student-student and teacher-student communication, rather than being passively absorbed by students as in China. The Western classroom practices volunteering answers, commenting, interrupting, criticizing, asking questions and seeking clarification. Problem solving and critical thinking skills are therefore highly valued in Western academic culture. Therefore the different teaching and learning styles between Confucian education and Western education make the communication with teachers and peer students difficult and challenging for Chinese students in Western universities (Holmes, 2004: 295-296).

As mentioned earlier, many Chinese students study abroad for academic achievement and personal improvement. As a result, it is reported that those Chinese students studying in the US with high academic expectations encounter high academic stress, which they generate themselves (Yan & Berliner, 2009). This is a result of the traditional Chinese cultural value that the child’s academic success brings pride and joy to the family, while the child’s academic failure is a disappointment for the family (Stigler, Smith & Mao, 1985: 1260).

**Daily life Challenges for Chinese students**

Language skills play an important role not only in international students’ study life, but also in their social life. Research shows that international students with poor English language skills tend to have lower self-esteem, and those with better language skills, particularly
spoken language skills, tend to have better social interactions (Barratt & Huba, 1994, cited in Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002: 374). Before moving abroad, Chinese students generally focus on writing and grammar skills, and less on oral skills, due to the limited opportunities for practicing oral English. Therefore many Chinese students have difficulties speaking with host nationals (Zhang & Brunton, 2007: 127). Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000: 293) point out that good interaction with host nationals can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Chinese students often stick to Chinese friends, rather than the native students in the host country (Turner, 2002, cited in Zhu, 2012: 90). One possible reason is that Chinese students can obtain the reassurance of effective and emotional support from the co-nationals, which can be deficient in the host nationals (Brown, 2009: 446). The other reason could be that students with collective cultural backgrounds regard spending time with their co-national students as a means to maintain their group membership (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002: 375). Host country students’ behavior also play a role in maintaining this phenomenon; although host country students view their international peer students positively, they are generally not interested in starting contact with them (Ward, 2001, cited in Zhang & Brunton, 2007: 127).

Another problem that Chinese students face abroad is financial difficulties. Since China is still a developing country, the average income of a common Chinese family is comparatively low (Zhu, 2012: 91). Supporting a child to study abroad is a big burden for many Chinese families. Some Chinese students have to work part-time in order to get by economically, thereby leaving less time to use on other activities including social activities (Feng, 1991, cited in Zhu, 2012: 91).

The above challenges and problems that Chinese students encounter in study and daily life may be the source of stress in their acculturation process. When facing stress, Asian students tend to use self-control power to resolve the stress. However, some stressors are external and cannot be handled by the students alone. When they fail to resolve the stress, it is likely that they will experience depression (Wei, et al., 2007: 386).

3.8 The intentions of international and Chinese students after graduating
According to OECD (2011: 329, 330), the number of students who remain in the country where they have studied can be measured by a yearly stay rate. The rate is calculated for each year. The numerator is made up of the number of international students who change their residence permit to one not based on the grounds of studying that year. The denominator on the other hand is made up of all those students whose did not renew their student residence permits that year (and thus includes the students in the numerator). The
rate does not measure the number of students who stay over the long term, and does not include students moving under a free-movement regime, such as that in the European Union. The stay rate average was 25% in 2008/2009 in selected OECD countries. An average of 74% of the students who stayed changed their status for work reasons (OECD, 2011: 329, 330).

The Migration Policy Group study (2012: 38, 41) shows that most of the stayers would like to stay on for just a few years and many of them stay because of employment opportunities and a desire to gain international work experience in the host country, while the leavers go back to their home country mainly for family, friends, personal relationship reasons or factors such feeling more connected to the home country. The study also shows that the staying intention is low among students studying social science and humanities, but high among students in the field of natural science. Interestingly, the study also indicates that the desire to stay is high among students from China, Eastern Europe and Turkey, but low among students from English-speaking countries (Migration Policy Group study, 2012: 40).

As can be seen from Figure 4 below, before the beginning of the 21st century the number of Chinese students studying abroad and returning from abroad was quite similar, while the difference became increasingly big after year 2000. It is worth pointing out that it would take a few years before those students who leave China have finished their study abroad and thus have to make the decision of staying or returning to China. In other words, there will always be a “delay” on the curve for returning students, and so an apparent change in the return rate will initially be observed, when more students go abroad to study, even in the case where the percentage of students returning remains constant. Nevertheless, we can see from the figure that over the last decade, more Chinese students stay abroad compared to the number returning.
Figure 4. The annual number of Chinese students going abroad and returning from abroad from 1997-2011.


The Chinese government regards Chinese students who have studied abroad to be valuable in promoting westernization and globalization in China (Alberts & Hazen, 2005: 140). Attracting international Chinese talents has become an important agenda for the Chinese government since 2008. In 2010 the State Council released the National Long-term Talent Development Program (2010-2020) with twelve talent projects, among which one project is called Recruitment program of global experts, aiming to attract international Chinese talents. The government offers returnees many benefits, such as salaries that can compete with those in Western countries, attractive welfare treatment with kids’ schooling, other family members’ employment, public health and social security (Wang & Guo, 2012: 35). Besides, China’s booming economy also plays an essential role in attracting international Chinese talents, especially when compared to many Western countries whose economies are more negatively affected by the current economic crisis. The job market in China is much more positive for Chinese international students than Western job markets (Liu, 2013).

Additionally, in recent years, Australia, the UK, France and Canada have restricted immigration policies for international graduates, which forces many international graduates to go back to their home countries after finishing their studies abroad (Wang & Guo, 2012: 35).
4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Concept of “migrant”, “sojourner” and “international student”

According to the United Nations, a “migrant” is a person who has lived in a country other than his/her own country for one year or more. According to this definition, those international students who are taking part in a degree program (which usually lasts more than a year) are migrants (Shen, n.d.: 151,152). However, the concept of migrant is too broad and not specific when describing the Chinese students studying abroad.

The term “sojourner” was first used by Siu (1952, cited in Zhu, 2012: 20) to specifically describe foreign students, as well as foreign traders, diplomats, international journalists, foreign missionaries and research anthropologists abroad. Furnham (1988, cited in Burnett & Garnder, n.d.: 65) later further defines sojourners as individuals who voluntarily spend a medium length of time (six months to five years) in a new and unfamiliar environment with the intention of returning to their home country at some point. Since sojourners intend to return, they tend to be more attached to the culture of their own ethnic group than the culture of the host country (Siu, 1952, cited in Zhu, 2012: 20).

Compared to the migrant concept, the sojourner concept is more descriptive, specific and appropriate for the Chinese students studying abroad. However, it too has its shortcomings, which lie in the sojourners’ intention of returning to their home countries. As mentioned in the background chapter, there are significant differences in the students’ initial and current intentions about returning to their home countries. In other words, not all of them have the intention of returning.

Despite the presented weaknesses, many researchers use the concepts of migrant and sojourner to refer to students studying abroad (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Leung, 2001; Burnett & Garnder, n.d.; Zhu, 2012). In this paper, I will instead employ the term “international student”, meaning “those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of study” (OECD, 2010: 52), as it is more appropriate for the Chinese students in Denmark/Sweden.

4.2 Concept of student migration

King (2002: 89) points out that migration studies previously has been categorized into dichotomies, such as internal versus international, forced versus voluntary, temporary versus permanent, and legal versus illegal. However, according to King (2002: 89), these distinctions have been blurred by the diverse motivations and modalities of migration in today’s fast-globalized world. Migrants are no longer poor and uneducated. The reasons why
migrants migrate are now not only limited to economic and political reasons, but today include reasons such as “excitement, experience, leisure, and self-realization”. These are new forms of migration, and they require attention and enrichment (King, 2002: 89, 90, 95).

According to King (2002: 101), student migration is one of the new and important typologies of migration, and is motivated by a mixture of personal educational goals, experience, travel, leisure and perhaps work. (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003: 230). Shen (n.d.: 147, 149, 150) points out that student migration, which has emerged as the new drive of international migration as a form of highly skilled labour migration.

Policy makers in Europe have regarded international students as a source of potential skilled migrants since the beginning of the last decade. However, international students are different from regular economic migrants in the following ways: Their credentials are fully recognised by the host country, they have locally relevant education and often work experience, familiarity with the host country’s culture, language, practices and regulations (Migration Policy Group, 2012: 4).

Despite the importance of student migration, it receives limited attention from the standard academic literature (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003: 230). Shen (n.d.: 147, 149, 150) is of a similar opinion, stating that student migration is still a difficult research area, which little research has been dedicated to. This is likely due to the lack of data and other resources. For instance, the numbers of student migrants are smaller and the statistics are often less reliable compared to other migrant groups, such as family migrants and refugees.

According to King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 230), the limited studies of international student migration tend to focus on the initial migration and students’ intentions after graduation (whether they tend to stay abroad or return to their home countries), while there has been little focus on what happens during the study.

4.3 Motivational migration theory
Moving to another country is an important life-changing decision, catalysed by many different reasons and motives, including economic, political and religious ones (Hall, 2004, cited in Chirkov et al., 2007: 200). Different social disciplines approach individuals’ migration motivation differently.

On the premise that the decision to migrate is a rational one, Lee (1966: 50) develops a simple and general schema (shown in Figure 5 below) to explain the possible migration between place of origin and destination. The plus indicates pull factors that make people stay within the area or attract people to do it, while the minus indicates push factors that make people leave the area.
There are some intervening obstacles lying between the origin and the destination, indicating barriers during the migration process, such as the distance, cost of moving, boarding control and immigration policies. A rational comparison and calculation of the push and pull factors at both origin and destination, as well as the intervening obstacles, decide the act of migration (Lee, 1966: 51).

![Intervening obstacles](image)

**Figure 5.** Lee’s migration theory.
*Source: Lee (1966: 50).*

Lee’s model is a historical one. Nowadays, the contemporary reality of migration has become complex (Massey, 2005: 8). Europe, for example, has witnessed new forms of migration, deriving from new motivations and new space-time flexibilities, globalisation forces and migrations of consumption and personal self-realisation. An interdisciplinary approach is required for migration studies today (King: 2002).

Sociologists study structural, political and social factors that motivate migrants’ migration (Richmond, 1993) at both macro- and meso-levels, while economists approach the topic from the point of view of supply and demand of labour in different countries (Massey, 1999 cited in Chirkov et al., 2007: 200) at macro-, meso- and micro- levels. Among the economic theories, the micro-level neoclassical microeconomic theory and the meso-level new economics of migration theory are the most relevant for this paper, because most likely the study abroad decision was made either by the individuals or by their family, and I am investigating the individuals.

Neoclassical microeconomic theory is based on the fact that the choice to migrate is an individual one, and that the individual is a rational actor who decides whether or not to migrate based on a cost-benefit calculation. Benefits and costs are determined by supply and demand differentials in different national labour markets (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008: 55).

Similar to the neoclassical microeconomic theory, the new economics of migration theory believes that the decision to migrate is based on a rational cost-benefit calculation.
However, the decision is not made by the individual as in the neoclassical microeconomic theory, rather, it is made by the social group or family, for the purpose of raising collective income, minimizing the group’s exposure to risk from local conditions and increasing access to credit (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008: 55).

While sociologists and economists mostly study migrants’ motivation at macro- and meso-levels, psychologists approach the issue mostly from an individual micro-level. One of the famous models is McClelland’s three-motive model of human motives. According to McClelland, there are three motivating drivers: “Achievement”, “power” and “affiliation” (McClelland, 1961, 1985, cited in Boneva et al., 1998: 248).

The achievement motive is a recurrent concern to excel one’s own ability and to do something challenging. The power motive is defined as a concern about having impact on or control over others. This is often expressed as a desire to feel strong and powerful, or a desire to gain attention, recognition or fame, or a desire for material needs. People with a high power motive often are dissatisfied with his/her position in society. The affiliation motive is a desire to establish and maintain interpersonal relations and to gain social acceptance. The core of the affiliation motive is to build a strong social network and to be connected with other people (McClelland, 1975, cited in Boneva et al., 1998: 248; Boneva & Frieze, 2001: 482).

Boneva et al. (1998: 248) apply McClelland’s three-motive model of human motives on migration studies. They argue that since people who have a high achievement motive tend to be in search of more challenging goals, they may migrate in order to find better opportunities when the present environment does not provide enough options. Similarly, when people with a high power motive are dissatisfied with his/her position in society, they may migrate. As people with a high affiliation motive are particularly concerned about maintaining relationships and social networks, they are unlikely to migrate. Therefore, Boneva et al. (1998: 248) argue that “(e)migrants have higher achievement and power motivation, but lower affiliation motivation than non-(e)migrants”. Moreover, Boneva and Frieze (2001: 479) supplement that migrants value the work more than the family compared to non-migrants.

Boneva and Frieze (2001: 479) attribute the three motives and the two values to personality characteristics that differentiate migrants from non-migrants and propose a model for the personality determinant factors that predict the desire to migrate together with other psychological factors, environmental factors and opportunities for the actual migration behaviour (see Figure 6 below).
As can be seen from the above, different social disciplines approach individuals’ migration motivation from their own different perspectives, contributing to the fruitfulness of the migration motivation theories. All the perspectives of analysis are needed in order to fully explain and understand individuals’ migration motivation.

4.4 Concept of acculturation

The concept of acculturation was initially used in anthropology in order to describe and understand the process of modernization and westernization that many cultures and communities experienced during the 19th and early 20th century (Trimble, 2002, cited in Tonsing, 2010: 191). In recent times, with migration being a worldwide overwhelming phenomenon resulting from the economic globalization and political conflicts, the concept of acculturation has been employed in sociology to better understand the experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities (Tonsing, 2010: 191).

Tonsing (2010: 189) argues that when migrants leave their home country and move to another country, they will experience many changes, ranging from physical and
environmental changes to changes in values, attitudes and behaviours, as well as problems due to language differences, cultural incompatibilities and negative stereotypes. Daily decisions on how to respond to these problems can make them feel stressful and exhausted (Sussman, 2002, cited in Zhu, 2012: 21). These changes were described as acculturation by Berry (1997: 6).

One of the most widely cited and classical definitions of acculturation was proposed by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, cited in Berry, 1997: 7): “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. Although this definition speculates that the process of acculturation involves changes in either or both groups, Berry (1990a, cited in Berry, 1997: 7) argues that in practice, these changes tend to occur more in the acculturating (the non-dominant) group.

Acculturation is a concept that has been employed in both anthropology and sociology for over a century (Olmedo, 1980, cited in Tonsing, 2010: 191). There are differences and similarities between the studies on acculturation in anthropology and sociology. The main difference lies in the focus of the two studies. While anthropological studies focus on the dynamics of cultural change in different cultural groups, sociological studies focus more on the socioeconomic and political dynamics between the migrant group and the host community (Zhu, 2012: 24). According to Kim (1988, cited in Zhu, 2012: 24), the similarity is that, both anthropology and sociology studies acculturation mainly from a group level, rather than an individual level.

From a psychological perspective, Graves (1967, cited in Tonsing, 2010: 192) points out that there is a distinction between group-level and individual-level of acculturation, and employs the term psychological acculturation to refer to the individual-level of acculturation. According to Berry et al. (1987, cited Zhu, 2012: 23), group-level of acculturation refers to changes in the social structures and cultural practices of the group, while individual-level of acculturation refers to changes in the individuals’ psychology. This paper aims to investigate the Chinese students’ experience of changes in their acculturation process in Denmark and Sweden at an individual-level from the perspective of psychology, and three psychological acculturation models – Zapf’s U-curve model of acculturation, Yoshikawa’s acculturation model and Burnett and Garnder’s acculturation model – will therefore be discussed in the following.
4.5 Zapf’s U-curve model of acculturation

According to Zapf (1991: 110), when an individual just arrives in a new environment, the initial feeling is optimistic. Soon, when the individual is unable to understand the new culture, optimism gives way to frustration and confusion. This is the initial phase of the acculturation process, which is “a negative experience, an emotional ‘down’, a decreased sense of well-being”, and has been labelled as cultural shock in other literature (Zapf, 1991: 107). Culture shock is a mental illness that is caused by the anxiety resulting from losing the familiar signs and symbols from one’s own culture (Oberg, 1960: 177). During the culture shock period the individual experiences, copes with and adjusts to the psychological, physiological and vocational changes (Ruben, Askling & Kealey, 1977, cited in Zapf, 1991: 109).

In the later stages, individuals acquire the appropriate understanding and coping skills for making psychological adjustments to the new culture (Adler, 1975, cited in Zapf, 1991: 110). After the resolution of the difficulties, the individual regains confidence and an increased sense of well-being. This stage is labelled as recovery in the literature (Zapf, 1991: 107). It is worth pointing out that if the individual fails to achieve resolution, the frustration will continue, and might lead to a decision to leave the host country (Zapf, 1991: 111).

The culture shock occurs during the first months, but the recovery period varies from person to person (Foster, 1973, cited in Zapf, 1991: 110). The overall process of this psychological adjustment in a new culture can be expected to last about a year. Figure 7 below is Zapf’s generalized U-curve of adjustment to a new culture over time.
Figure 7. Zapf’s generalized U-curve of adjustment to a new culture over time.

The empirical studies that have supported the U-curve show that the curves can be in different shapes. Some curves are flat, while some are tall. All of them are rather irregular (Furnham and Bochner, 1986: 132, cited in Zapf, 1991: 112).

4.6 Yoshikawa’s and Burnett and Garnder’s acculturation models
Yoshikawa’s model and Burnett and Garnder’s model are quite similar. They both claim that acculturation is a developmental process that can be divided into five stages (Yoshikawa, 1988 cited in Burnett & Garnder, n.d.; Burnett & Garnder, n.d.).

First stage: Contact / Encounter
Yoshikawa terms the first stage contact, where sojourners just enter a new culture and encounter cultural differences, while Burnett and Garnder argue that the term encounter is better for describing this stage. During this period, the sojourners are generally positive towards their situation, regarding cultural difference as exciting and amusing.
Second stage: Disintegration / Disorientation

This stage is often known as culture shock. Yoshikawa explains that the sojourners feel confused and distressed after being overwhelmed by the culture differences, and thus reach the stage of disintegration. Burnett and Garnder suggest using the term disorientation for this stage, as the word disintegration has an implicit meaning of breakdown, which is not the case for many sojourners at this stage. According to Burnett and Garnder, sojourners are mostly confused and unsure about the environment and their attitudes, and anxious about the coming of changes.

Third stage: Reintegration / Reaction

Yoshikawa calls the next stage reintegration, where sojourners adjust to the new environment. Burnett and Garnder name this stage reaction, implying that the sojourners make active responses to the environment when they realise that their old strategies are inappropriate.

Fourth stage: Autonomy / Independence

The next stage is what Yoshikawa calls autonomy, where sojourners become more flexible towards the other culture, and learn to accept and appreciate cultural differences. According to Burnett and Garnder, during this period which they name independence, the sojourners begin to master the new culture patterns and find life easier and more predictable. They have more control over their lives, and become independent.

Fifth stage: Double-swing / Internalisation

Yoshikawa terms the last stage double-swing, where sojourners are able to fully enjoy the cultural similarities and differences and form intercultural identities. Burnett and Garnder claim that sojourners do not inevitably have to change their cultural identity. Instead, they can internalise differences so that they can act appropriately in different cultural contexts. This kind of internalisation can not only help sojourners succeed in the host society, but also, more importantly, it can help sojourners reduce the culture shock when they return to their home country.

Yoshikawa’s and Burnett and Garnder’s first, second and third stages can be seen as the culture shock period in Zapf’s U-curve model, while the third and fourth stages makes up the recovery period. However, Yoshikawa’s and Burnett and Garnder’s models have a fifth stage which is not included in the Zapf’s U-curve model.
4.6 How the theories are applied

I will use the motivational migration theory to analyse the relevant push and pull factors involved in the Chinese students’ decision of studying in Denmark or Sweden and their decision regarding staying after finishing their studies. The concept of acculturation and the acculturation theoretical models will be applied to analyse their daily life experience in Denmark or Sweden. The concepts of sojourner, migrant and international students describe the characteristics of international students, and are therefore essential for understanding and analysing their behaviour.
5. Method

This paper aims to investigate the Chinese students’ motivation for choosing Denmark or Sweden as their study abroad destination, their study and daily life experience in both countries and their intention of staying or returning to China after graduation. In short, the paper intends to understand the Chinese students’ perceptions of studying abroad. Therefore the qualitative method is a suitable method, as qualitative research tends to look at the individuals’ perception of the world (Bell, 2005:7), and helps the researcher understand the meaning of human behaviour (Read and Marsh, n.d.: 232).

5.1 Choice of semi-structured interview

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004: 319). According to May (2001:120, 142), the interview is a qualitative method that can give deeper insights into peoples’ experiences, opinions, values, attitudes and feelings. Interviews can help attain an understanding of how people make sense of their social life and their behaviour and is therefore the most suited empirical method for this paper.

Among the interview methods, I chose to employ the semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher can have an interview guide with a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, thus giving structure to the interview and ensuring consistency and comparability between the interviews. On the other hand, the interviewee still has a great deal of freedom in how to reply and ask questions. Questions may not follow the order outlined on the interview guide. Moreover, questions that are not included in the guide may be asked, as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees that the interviewer finds interesting and relevant to the topic (Bryman, 2004: 319). Therefore, the semi-structured interview is flexible and allows the interviewee more room to answer the questions in the way that they prefer, while also allowing the interviewer to ask specific and follow-up questions, allowing the gathering of more detailed information (May 2001:123).

During the interview, Kvale (1996, cited in Bryman, 2004: 325) and Bryman (2004: 325) suggest that there are several criteria that an interviewer should stick to. The interviewer should ask simple, easy, short questions in order to be as clear as possible. The interviewer should not talk too much, which can make the interviewee passive, and should not talk too little, which may make the interviewee feel that he/she is not talking along the right lines. The interviewer should be patient that he/she should let the interviewee finish
what they want to say, and give the interviewee time to think.

5.2 Choice of interviewees, settings and language

In order to make the interviewees more homogeneous, I chose to focus on Chinese students enrolled in master’s degree programs in Denmark and Sweden, who were on their second year of their master’s studies. All the interviewees arrived at their current universities at the end of August 2011. Because of the time limit, the number of interviewees was limited to six, consisting of three students from each country.

The interviews were conducted from April 21st 2013 to May 9th 2013. One of the interviews took place in a park, while the rest were carried out at the interviewees’ university. The interviews lasted between 50 and 100 minutes. All the interviewees were recorded with the interviewees’ consent\textsuperscript{16}. The interview guide document for the semi-structured interview is presented in Appendix 1.

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese in order to make both interviewees and the interviewer (me, as a native Chinese) more comfortable with the conversation, and hopefully allowing both sides to better express themselves. All six interviews were recorded with the interviewees’ consent, and were then translated into English. Because of the financial limitations of this research, I did the translations myself.

5.3 Ethical considerations

Bell (2005: 156) suggests sending basic information about the research to the interviewees beforehand if possible, so that they have the opportunity and possibility to query the meaning and implications of the research, or even withdraw. I sent a document to all the interviewees before each interview with a short introduction of myself, the purpose of the interview, the four main contents of the interview, and my wish to record the interview. Some of them asked a few questions before they gave their consent, and none withdrew.

Confidentiality and anonymity are often linked with informed consent statements in ethical research (Bell, 2005: 48). According to Sapsford and Abbott (1996: 318-19, cited in Bell, 2005: 48), confidentiality is a promise that the respondents will not be identified or presented in identifiable form, while anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which response come from which respondent.

In my research, I do not expose the interviewees’ identities, therefore the six students are referred to as A, B, C, D, E and F, and no information about their identity, such as

\textsuperscript{16}Recordings and transcripts in Chinese and can be translated into English by the author on request.
hometown, master’s subjects, address, are presented in the findings. However, since it is a face-to-face interview, I, as the researcher, can definitely recognize the interviewees and their responses, and therefore anonymity is not possible in this research.

In order to ensure that the results are authentic, I contacted the interviewees during the process of analysing when I found something ambiguous, in order to make sure that I interpreted their meaning correctly. After transcribing the interviews, I sent the transcript to all the interviewees and asked them to read them through in case there were any misunderstandings on my part. Only one of the interviewees wished to make changes to some of her statements, which she felt were too critical in places, when she read the transcript after the interview. This on the other hand indicates that the interviewee trusted me and felt relaxed during the interview, so that she spoke her true mind. Even though the corrections from very sharp opinions to more moderate ones may seem less authentic, I found sticking to the ethics more important.

5.4 The visual method as a methodological tool

In order to gain deeper insights into the interviewees’ daily life experience during the acculturation process, a visual method involving a drawing session was employed in the interviews as a supplementary tool for collecting data.

According to Burnett and Gardner (n.d.: 77), the visual method’s function is to help reveal unconscious thoughts and feelings, which is unlikely to be achieved through direct communication. This method is used in the art therapy, which is “a form of psychotherapy that allows for emotional expression … through nonverbal means. … Adults, on the other hand may use words to intellectualise and distance themselves from their emotions. Art therapy enables the client to break through these cumbersome barriers to self-expression using simple art materials” (The Canadian Art Therapy Association, cited in Edwards, 2004: 3).

Rappaport (2008: 68-70) stresses some key effects of art: Art is strong and flexible enough to hold and contain the entire range of human experience, both positive and negative. Using colours, lines, shapes, textures, and imagery, art helps clients express aspects of experience that words alone cannot express. Through the imagery and creative process, the client can achieve both conscious and unconscious expression.

The visual method has also been used to study children for some decades by researchers such as Kellogg (1970, cited in Burnett & Gardner, n.d.: 77), who used children’s drawings as a way to gain insight into their perspective on their daily life experience. Similarly, Burnett and Gardner (n.d.: 77) employed this method in their study on
the experience of Chinese students in a UK university.

I decided to use this method in my study since it could potentially help the Chinese students to talk about feelings and thoughts that are not only conscious, but also unconscious, which would be useful when trying to fully investigate their daily life experience in Denmark/Sweden. I also hoped that the drawing session could give the interviewees time to recall their memories and gather their thoughts so that they could give the full picture of their acculturation experience.

I used the visual method before asking the interviewees about their daily life experience. I gave the interviewees paper and colour pens, and asked them to draw a picture depicting their acculturation experience from the time they just arrived until now. If they were not able to draw a picture, I asked them to draw a psychological well-being curve depicting their psychological well-being over the period they had been living in Denmark/Sweden (see Appendix 1).

After they finished, I asked them to explain their drawings. I started the part of the interview regarding their daily life experience by asking relevant questions alongside their explanation of the drawings. As such the drawings acted as a shared point of departure in our conversation regarding their daily life experience, while the actual data mainly derived from their explanations of the drawings and their answers to my interview questions.

**5.5 My position as a researcher**

Lee (1996, cited in Burnett & Gardner, n.d.: 76) points out a potential difficulty in making research on Chinese young people, that is, they have great respect for parents and educators, and will therefore be reluctant to express anything negative on an authority or institution. Moreover, Holm and Solvang (1997: 106, cited in Osanami Törngren, 2011: 97) argue that in order not to disappoint the researcher, some respondents will give the answers that they believe the researcher would like to hear, rather than what they themselves think.

The fact that I, as the researcher, am a Chinese student studying in Malmö University myself, helped me avoid the above problems, and had a positive effect on this research in terms of making the interviewees feel more relaxed and more willing to express their true thoughts, thus adding up to the validity, reliability and accuracy of the research. Also, being an insider, I possess a similar cultural background and experience as the interviewees, which helps me understand and interpret their situations and feelings better.

One might also argue that I, being an insider and the researcher at the same time, might be biased when it comes to analysing and concluding on my research, or take certain aspects for granted that outsiders might not. I am aware of this and will do my utmost to
always be as objective as I can.

5.6 Validity and reliability

According to Mason (1996: 24, cited in Bryman, 2005: 272), validity refers to whether “you are observing, identifying or measuring what you say you are”. In the aim and research question section, I stated that the aim of this paper is to investigate the relevant push and pull factors involved in the Chinese students’ decision to study in Denmark/Sweden and their decision on subsequently staying in Denmark/Sweden – as well as their daily life and study acculturation experience in Denmark/Sweden. In order to achieve the aim, I start off my interview with asking the Chinese student interviewees about the reasons they chose to study their master in Denmark/Sweden but not in China or other countries. I then go on to the second and third part of the interview, in which I ask about their daily life and study experiences, including what difficulties they encountered and how they managed to overcome these challenges. In the final part of the interview I ask about the interviewees’ intentions of staying or leaving after graduation and the reasons for their intentions. In the analysis, I use motivational migration theories to analyse the Chinese student interviewees’ answers in the first and the final parts of the interview, while employing acculturation theories when analysing the second and third part of the interview. I then draw my conclusions based on the whole analysis.

According to Bell (2005: 117), reliability is “the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions”. LeCompte and Goetz (1982, cited in Bryman, 2004: 273) argue that it is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research, because it is practically impossible to ensure the same social setting and circumstances as the initial study was performed in. Furthermore, it is especially difficult to achieve reliability in this paper, because of the small number of interviewees involved; there are only six interviewees, and so my conclusions may not be very representative. Despite this shortcoming, this paper can still yield interesting ideas and conceptions, and may help pave the way for more in-depth research in the future.
6. Interview findings and analysis

6.1 The interviewees’ background

This section briefly summarises the background of each of the six interviewees, who were studying the second year of their master’s study. Here and in the following sections, the interviewees are referred to as Interviewee A through to F. Interviewee A, B and C studied in the Copenhagen area in Denmark, while Interviewee D, E and F studied in Scania, Sweden.

*Interviewee A:* 26-year-old male studying natural science in Denmark. After completing his bachelor study in China, he worked for nine months in China before coming to Denmark. This was his first time studying abroad. He found a part-time job as a teaching assistant, but he still needed the financial support from his family to get by.

*Interviewee B:* 24-year-old male studying natural science in Denmark. He came to study in Denmark as soon as he finished his bachelor in China. This was his first time studying abroad.

*Interviewee C:* 23-year-old female studying social science in Denmark. She came to study in Denmark as soon as she finished her bachelor in China. She had previously studied at a Danish university for one semester through an exchange program two years prior to beginning her master’s study, and it was therefore her second time to study in Denmark. She received a scholarship in the form of an opportunity to act as a teaching assistant, which allowed her to support herself financially, with no help from her parents.

*Interviewee D:* 24-year-old female studying social science in Sweden. Before she came to study in Sweden, she had worked in China for nine months after finishing her bachelor degree. This was her first time studying abroad.

*Interviewee E:* 25-year-old female studying social science in Sweden. After graduating her bachelor study in China, she worked for 10 months before moving to Sweden to study her master’s. This was her first time studying abroad.

*Interviewee F:* 24-year-old male studying natural science in Sweden. He spent the last year of his bachelor in an exchange program at another Swedish university, after which he began his master’s degree at his current university.

All six Chinese interviewees came from big cities in China. The interviewees had no siblings, except Interviewee C who had a younger sister. Except Interviewee B, who received a scholarship covering his tuition fee, all the interviewees had to pay the tuition fee.
Only Interviewee C completely supported herself financially by working a part-time job as a teaching assistant; the rest of the interviewees depended financially on their parents.

Regarding the parents’ education, eight had a higher educational background, while four held a high school education. Eight of the interviewees’ parents were from the professional-managerial class, while four of the interviewees’ parents were from the working class. My interviewees’ parents thus show characteristics very similar to Wang and Guo’s figures presented in the background section (Wang & Guo, 2012: 15, 23, 24).

Many of the interviewees did not have much previous knowledge about the host society and culture. Only Interviewee D and E, both studying in Sweden, had done some research about Sweden through online forums and books before they came.

6.2 The decision to study in Denmark and Sweden

The decision-making actors
Most of the interviewees made their own decision to study abroad, with the parents simply supporting their decision. However, Interviewee A’s mother and Interviewee F’s father actively encouraged them to study abroad, and therefore had a larger say in their children’s decision to study abroad.

Since most of the interviewees were unable to study abroad without the financial support of their family, one could argue that decision to study abroad was inevitably a decision made by the family, rather than by the individual interviewees alone. This distribution of the decision-making power is in accordance with the previously mentioned new economics of migration theory, which suggests that the decision to migrate is made by the social group or family (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008: 55).

Reasons for studying abroad
The findings regarding the interviewees’ main reasons for studying abroad are presented in Table 3 below.

The use of tables in this section is simply meant to give the reader a clearer understanding of the qualitative findings, and should not be interpreted as quantitative findings.
Interviewee A had the intention of studying abroad when he was on the third year of his bachelor study. At that time, his reasons for studying abroad were to experience the study life in a foreign country and to challenge himself. His nine months of working experience further strengthened his desire to study abroad, because his colleagues with a foreign educational background received better salaries and attained higher social statuses than the colleagues with equivalent Chinese degrees. Therefore, after working in China, his main reason for studying abroad was to improve his competencies in order to have a brighter career future. He believed he could gain frontier knowledge and advanced education through studying abroad. Also, Interviewee A was interested in the possibility of future immigration.

For Interviewee B the main reason for studying abroad was to expand his horizon by experiencing foreign culture. A secondary reason was to improve his competencies. He believed that he could obtain better education in a foreign country.

For Interviewee C the main reason for studying abroad was also to experience a foreign culture. Interviewee C mentioned the opportunity to cultivate herself by studying abroad, and also the possibility of future immigration as a reason for studying abroad.

As was the case with Interviewee A, Interviewee D’s working experience in China also stimulated her intention of studying abroad. For Interviewee D, the working life in China consisted of only three things: Company, friends and home. She felt her life was too
ordinary and boring and sought to experience some changes in her life. She too wished to experience foreign culture. A secondary reason for studying abroad was to improve her competencies. She also mentioned travelling as part of her reason for studying abroad.

Interviewee E also wished to experience foreign culture. A secondary reason for studying abroad was to improve her communication skills and other competencies.

Interviewee F wanted to study abroad because he thought the education in China was inferior, and also because he hoped studying abroad would improve his competencies in general.

The findings of the interviewees’ reasons for studying abroad are similar to Wang and Guo’s (2012: 20-21) findings on the main reasons for Chinese students to study abroad, except that my interviewees generally did not put as much emphasis on gaining frontier knowledge. A plausible reason is that the Danish and Swedish universities are not top-ranking universities, and so the Chinese students who feel very strongly about choosing top-ranking universities simply do not tend to end up in Denmark and Sweden.

When comparing the students studying in Denmark and Sweden, there were no major differences except perhaps that two of the students who decided to study in Denmark thought of the possibility to immigrate to a foreign country. However, I can think of no credible reason for this difference other than coincidence and the fact that I only questioned six interviewees.

**Pull factors involved in choosing Denmark and Sweden**

The general findings for the interviewees’ reasons for choosing Denmark and Sweden as study destinations are presented in Table 4 below.
Lessons taught in English
No requirement to learn the local language
Quality of the program
University’s reputation
Cost of the study
Cultural aspirations
Future job opportunities
Exchange experience

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<td>Interviewee C</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Interviewee E</td>
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<td>Interviewee F</td>
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Table 4. Pull factors involved in choosing Denmark and Sweden as study destination, according to the interviewees.

Interviewee A stated that the main reason for choosing to study in Denmark was that the course was taught in English. Besides, Denmark was in a world leading position in the field that he was going to study. He also stated that he had found the Swedish tuition fees to be more expensive than the Danish.

Interviewee B also mentioned that Denmark had high quality studies and industries in his field of study. However, for Interviewee B, receiving a scholarship from his Danish university that would cover his tuition was the main reason for choosing to study in Denmark.

As mentioned earlier, both Interviewee C and F had previously attended exchange programs in Denmark and Sweden, respectively. They both had pleasant exchange experiences and decided to pursue their master’s degree in that same country. When choosing their universities for their master’s study, they both considered the academic reputation of their universities.

For Interviewee D and E, both studying social science, the quality of the program
didn’t play as important a role in their decision of choosing study destinations. Instead, social and cultural factors of the destination country were taken into consideration. Interviewee D had a few Swedish friends in China, through which she heard a lot about Sweden. When Interviewee E was seven years old, she learned about Sweden through a Chinese TV program. Since then, she was interested in the Swedish culture and history, especially the Vikings, and had a positive impression of Sweden as a friendly and open country. Both Interviewee D and E mentioned that Sweden had beautiful nature.

When asked about the reason for not choosing English-speaking countries or other European countries, four of the interviewees (Interviewee A, B, C and F) mentioned that they considered the Graduate Record Examination (required to study in the US and Canada) too time-consuming. Interviewee A and C mentioned that master’s programs in the UK only last for one year, which they considered to be too short. Interviewee A further pointed out that it was difficult to find jobs in the UK after graduation. For interviewee C, E and F, another reason not to choose other European countries was the requirement of basic host country language proficiencies in some popular European countries, such as Germany and France. There was no such requirement in Denmark or Sweden. Besides, the high popularization of English language in both Denmark and Sweden mentioned by Interviewee A, C and D was also a big advantage.

As can be seen from the above, the reasons for choosing to study in Denmark and Sweden were overall quite similar for the six interviewees. Similar to OECD (2011: 323-325)’s findings on the factors determining international students’ choice of study destination, factors such as the language used in teaching, the quality of the master’s program, the academic reputation of the universities, cultural aspirations, future job opportunities and tuition fees were all taken into considerations by the interviewees when choosing to study in Denmark/Sweden.

One obvious difference between the students studying in Denmark and the students studying in Sweden is that for Interviewee A and B the quality of the field that they were going to study in the host country played an important role in their decision, while social, cultural and environmental factors weighed more in Interviewee D and E’s decision.

However, this difference can most likely be explained by the interviewees’ different fields of study and their general reasons for studying abroad. Interviewee A and B both studied natural science and wished to study abroad in order to improve their competencies; therefore the quality of the university was an important factor in their decision-making process. On the other hand, Interviewee D and E, both studying social science and both
studying abroad for the purpose of experiencing foreign culture and expanding their horizons, would likely give more attention to other factors.

Another difference is that only students studying in Sweden mentioned the beautiful nature as a pull factor. Although Denmark most certainly also has areas with beautiful nature, few would deny that Sweden has a more varied and abundant natural environment.

Only Interviewee A mentions a difference in tuition fees as a reason for choosing one country over the other. His claim that Sweden has higher tuition fees most likely does not represent a general picture, but rather a coincidental case related to his specific program; as previously mentioned, the Danish annual tuition fees lie in the range of 6,000-16,000 EUR, and the Swedish in the range of 9,000-16,000 EUR.

**Push factors involved in choosing not to study in China**

When asked about the reasons for not taking a master’s study in China, Interviewee A said he felt that the quality of the master’s educations in China was not sufficient. Moreover, he had experienced how employees with a foreign degree received better salaries and social status compared to those who held a domestic degree from the same field of studies.

Interviewee B, C and D had not seriously considered the possibility of studying a master’s degree in China. They were tired of the Chinese education and were interested in experiencing a different and foreign education.

Interviewee E had considered taking a master’s degree in China. However, she pointed out that she did not favour the academic environment in China, and thus preferred to study abroad.

As was the case for Interviewee A, Interviewee F also felt that the quality of education in China was unsatisfactory.

As can be seen, there were no noticeable differences between the students studying in Denmark and Sweden, regarding their perception of push factors in China; they all emphasized that the education was dissatisfactory in China.

**Applying motivational migration theory**

Just as the labour migrants (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008: 55), the interviewees made a rational cost-benefit calculation, considering the push and pull factors in both the destination country and China, as well as relevant intervening obstacles (Lee, 1966: 51), and found that the benefit of migrating seemed to outweigh the costs. As a result, they decided to migrate to another country for their master’s study.

There are social and economic factors involved in the interviewees’ motivation for
studying abroad. The desire to improve their professional competencies derives from the fact that in Chinese society, a foreign degree is often more valued and can assure a better social status and salary.

Even though society thus has an effect on the interviewees’ decision regarding studying abroad, the interviewees’ individual psychological factors are likely more decisive, particularly the achievement and power motives in McClelland’s three-motive model. The presented reasons why the interviewees wished to study abroad can be seen as achievements that can be achieved through studying abroad. At the same time, the purpose of improving one’s professional competencies suggests the desire for a better position in society. As such, the interviewees, as student migrants, have a high achievement and power motivation, as Boneva et al. (1998: 248) argued.

6.3 The daily life acculturation experience
As mentioned earlier in the method section, before asking the interviewees about their daily life acculturation experience, the visual method was employed; all the interviewees were required to draw a picture illustrating their daily life experience over the period of their stay in Denmark/Sweden. Only Interviewee A, C and E were able to draw a picture depicting their daily life experience over the different periods of time. Interviewee D also drew pictures, but the pictures only depicted different themes and activities of her life in China and Sweden, and not a continuous daily life acculturation experience over the period of her stay in Sweden. Interviewee B and F were unable to draw a picture, and chose to only draw a psychological well-being curve (see Appendix 2).

Since not all of the interviewees were able to draw a picture, I decided that those who were able to draw a picture were also required to draw a psychological well-being curve over the period of their stay, thus enabling a direct (though partial) comparison between all the interviewees’ drawings.

After drawing, all the interviewees were asked to explain their pictures/psychological well-being curves chronologically. As they explained their drawings, they talked about their daily life acculturation experience. The interviews all went smoothly and the interviewees seemed structured and able to recall the different periods of their stay with no difficulty. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the interviewees had time to recall their memories and gather their thoughts while drawing. The drawings and the findings of their daily life acculturation experience are presented below in chronological order.
**Immediate post-arrival period**

When the interviewees just arrived in Denmark/Sweden at the end of August 2011, most of them felt excited, curious and optimistic about the new environment and took part in many activities and parties. As can be seen in Interviewee A’s picture, he drew many people having fun partying together and used a red colour to represent happiness for this period of time (see Interviewee A’s picture in Appendix 2). Similar to Interviewee A, Interviewee E used an excited facial expression to present her excitement in her picture (see Interviewee E’s picture in Appendix 2). During this period the excitement, curiosity and optimism were at the highest for many of the interviewees; the psychological well-being curve was at the highest level for Interviewee B, D and E, and at the second highest level for Interviewee A, but not so for Interviewee C and F (see the interviewees’ psychological well-being curves in Appendix 2).

Even though Interviewee C had lived and studied in Denmark for half a year, she still felt excited but mostly anxious when she arrived in Denmark in August 2011 for her two-year master’s study. In her picture she used red circles to represent anxiety, uneasiness and passion (see Interviewee C’s picture in Appendix 2). Therefore her sense of psychological well-being was relatively low at this time (see Interviewee C’s psychological well-being curve in Appendix 2). This was mainly due to financial reasons. During the first semester, the teaching assistant job only allowed her to work two hours a week, meaning that the salary she received was insufficient to support herself; some financial support from the family was initially required. Similar to Interviewee C, Interviewee E also pointed out that financial difficulties posed problems to her.

Interviewee F had previously been exchanged to another Swedish university for a year before starting his master’s degree in August 2011. As a result, studying abroad was not as new as it was for many of the other interviewees. When asked about his exchange year, he said that at that time, he did feel excited and fresh in the time right after arriving. His exchange year in another Swedish university was a pleasant one. He spent most of the time with Chinese exchange students and did well in his study, and therefore had a feeling of psychological well-being throughout the whole exchange year (see Interviewee F’s psychological well-being curve in Appendix 2). The cold weather in Sweden and long-distance relationship with his ex-girlfriend, who was still studying at the exchange university, were other reasons for his low psychological well-being at the beginning of his master’s study.

This period is the earliest stage of the acculturation process and is what Yoshikawa
called contact stage and what Burnett and Garner termed encounter stage. Many interviewees regarded the cultural differences in the new environment as exciting, new, amusing and positive. Cultural differences didn’t have negative effects on them during this period. There was no noticeable difference between students studying in Denmark and Sweden.

Conflict period
According to Interviewee A, B, D and E, the initial positive periods only lasted for two months, after which they lost their interest and curiosity towards the cultural differences, and started to experience a decrease in their psychological well-being. The feeling of a poor psychological well-being lasted between five and fourteen months for Interviewee A, B, D and E, starting from October, 2011 (see Interviewee A, B, D and E’s psychological well-being curves in Appendix 2). As previously mentioned, Interviewee C and F had not experienced a positive initial period to begin with. For Interviewee C and F, the whole of the first semester and first year respectively saw a low sense in their psychological well-being, but with gradual small increases (see Interviewee C and F’s psychological well-being curves in Appendix 2).

During their stay in Denmark and Sweden, each of the interviewees’ psychological well-being was affected by factors such as their study, personal finance, the weather and cultural differences (see Table 5 below). Overall, I found no noteworthy differences in the answers given by the students studying in Denmark and the students studying in Sweden. Therefore, the findings will be presented and analysed as a whole, rather than according to where the interviewees studied.
Table 5. Factors affecting the psychological well-being of the interviewees.

Interviewee A, D and E all emphasized that when the semester commenced, they encountered problems related to their study, which made them feel stressed. Also, the arrival of the cold winter played a role in the negative change in their psychological well-being. Interviewee C and E’s psychological well-being was also affected by their financial situation, as mentioned in the first period.

All of the interviewees experienced cultural differences to some degree. Interviewee B, D and F pointed out that the food and the entertainment activities in Denmark and Sweden were not on par with the options in China. Interviewee B, C and F could not understand why the local people so enjoyed going to pubs and drinking. Interviewee C initially disliked the apparent habit of how Danish people always referred to their calendar when arranging when to meet, even under casual circumstances among good friends. In China, good friends could often meet without booking a time days before, and so the frequent use of the calendar made her feel less close to her Danish friends.

Interviewee A confessed that he had indeed experienced cultural differences, but insisted that they had no effect on his psychological well-being. He explained that it could be because he was an open person, and that his psychological well-being was instead largely affected by his study situation, due to the fact that he had high expectations regarding his academic results. Interviewee A drew a few people studying together and used a green colour to represent that his spirit was slightly low from October 2011 to December 2011.
His mood continued to decrease for one more year. He drew himself studying alone and used a blue colour to represent the sense of gloom during this period of time (see Interviewee A’s picture in Appendix 2).

Most of the interviewees felt that it was more comfortable and easy to communicate with Chinese friends because of the language, similar cultural background and experience. Interviewee B found it especially difficult to communicate with people from other nations in English, even after almost two years of adjustment. As a result, he did not have many friends, and his friends were all Chinese. This was part of the reason why he felt lonely and depressed in Denmark. This is also in accordance to the claim put forth by Barratt and Huba (1994, cited in Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002: 374); that students with poor English skills tended to have lower self-esteem and poorer social interactions.

All three natural science students only had two to four Chinese friends as their close friends in Denmark/Sweden. The number was ten to twenty for the social science students. Even though the majority of the social science students’ close friends were Chinese, international and local friends also accounted for a considerable proportion. Apart from indicating a trend regarding field of study and social interactions, these findings are also in line with Turner (2002, cited in Zhu, 2012: 90)’s findings that Chinese international students often find Chinese friends.

Due to the factors mentioned above, the deterioration in the psychological well-being occurred sometime after the arrival in the host country for many of the interviewees (Interviewee A, B, D and E). This period was referred to as disintegration by Yoshikawa and disorientation by Burnett and Garner, and was labelled as the “culture shock” period in Zapf’s model, where the sojourners encountered excessive cultural differences.

However, as can be seen from the above, even though many of the interviewees at this stage were affected by the cultural differences, these were not the only reasons for the deterioration of their psychological well-being, and only Interviewee B, C and E felt that they were overwhelmed by the cultural differences and experienced culture shock. The culture shock was experienced throughout the first semester by Interviewee C and from October 2011 to the end of the first semester by Interviewee B and E.

Interviewee B complained that two months after arriving, he felt that the life in Denmark was boring and too different from his life in China. He did not have many good friends in Denmark and felt lonely. He started to miss China and became anxious and sad. During this period he frequently contacted his friends in China and sought their comfort and support. In an attempt to change his situation, he began to take part in more activities in
order to meet more people. This strategy initially seemed to work well, but after a short time, when he failed to make friends by attending the activities, he experienced a depression.

Interviewee C pointed out that at the beginning of her encounter with Danish culture, when the Danish culture clashed with the Chinese culture, she was confused and lost. She was unable to judge and filter the Danish culture, and unable to choose between the Danish culture and the Chinese culture. Instead, she tried hard to adapt to everything in the Danish culture. However, this posed great difficulties for her. Her perceived obstacles varied in nature; she felt humiliated because she could not ride her bicycle as quickly as other Danish people, and felt unconfident because she did not know the host country language.

Interviewee E explained that there were two main causes resulting in her experiencing culture shock. One was the difference in the general mentality of the Swedish people compared to Chinese, such as different ways of thinking. The other was that the Swedish people were not as friendly and helpful as she had expected. When experiencing culture shock, she felt hopeless, homesick, and tired towards Swedish people. Interviewee E used a sad facial expression to express her sadness and disappointment during this period of time (see Interviewee E’s picture in Appendix 2).

Adjustment period
For all the interviewees, when experiencing a decrease in their feeling of psychological well-being, they tried to make adjustments accordingly. They constantly met challenges and problems, requiring them to continuously make adjustment along the way. Therefore, the adjustment period, which was the third stage and was called reintegration by Yoshikawa and reaction by Burnett and Garner, occurred simultaneously with their experienced challenges and obstacles, rather than presenting itself as a detached stage following the conflict stage. This period was a part of both the culture shock period and the recovery period in Zapf’s model.

All the interviewees made adjustments mainly by themselves using their “self-control power”, a characteristic trait of Asian students (Wei et al., 2007: 386). Interviewee A chose to go travelling, write diaries, exercise and dance Zumba. Interviewee B chose to attend different activities in order to overcome his loneliness but failed in the end. As a result, he experienced a depression, which as suggested by Wei et al. (2007: 386) happens when Asian students fail to resolve the stress by themselves. Interviewee C would read psychology books in order to adjust herself.

Interviewee C, D, E and F also chose to talk to friends about their situation. Interviewee C and D talked to their Chinese friends and local friends. Interviewee C pointed
out that the Danish friends of a similar age were unable to provide her psychological help; she felt that their different background, experience and culture was a barrier for them to understand her situation and thoughts. However, the Danish friends could still help her calm down and find her way. Interviewee E and F mainly talked to Chinese friends about the problems that they encountered. Interviewee E mentioned that her Chinese Swedish friends had helped her manage to balance the coexisting Swedish and Chinese culture.

When asked about opinions towards local people, the interviewees’ opinions were generally similar regarding both the Danish and Swedish people. Interviewee B felt that Danish people were kind, polite and friendly, while Interviewee A felt that ethnic Danish were conservative and not as open as immigrants in Denmark. Interviewee C made a similar comment, saying that Danish people tended to conceal their emotions and did their best to stay cool and composed. They were less open to new friends compared to other foreigners. It was difficult to get close to them and become friends. However once you were friends with them, they were nice to you.

Similarly, Interviewee D, E and F felt that Swedish people were conservative and reserved. Interviewee F pointed out that Swedish people tried not to express their emotions and would not freely initiate a conversation with others. When the Swedish people were drunk, they became very different from how they normally were. Similar to Interviewee B’s comment on Danish people, Interviewee E felt that Swedish people behaved politely and friendly to others without discrimination.

**Accustomed period**

After the long period of feeling troubled and making constant adjustments, Interviewee A, B, D, E and F finally reached a more stable and higher level of psychological well-being (see Interviewee A, B, D, E and F’s psychological well-being curves in Appendix 2). They felt calm and relaxed, became familiar with the life in the host country and acquired ways to adjust themselves, thus becoming more flexible. This period was represented by a red colour again in Interviewee A’s picture (see Interviewee A’s picture in Appendix 2). This period was described as the recovery stage in Zapf’s U-curve model. Yoshikawa called the period autonomy, while Burnett and Garnder labelled it independence.

At this stage the interviewees had learned to accept and deal with the cultural differences, but not all of them appreciated the cultural differences. Interviewee B still found the Danish culture strange, and Interviewee E felt that she continued to experience feelings of culture shock, but not as often or as strongly as before. Therefore, even though the interviewees reached a higher level in their psychological well-being and felt more in
control of their lives, few of them could be described as autonomous and independent at this stage.

It is worth pointing out that for Interviewee C, the improvement in her psychological well-being occurred around the beginning of the second semester, shown in her picture as less red circles and more green circles representing calmness (see Interviewee C’ picture and psychological well-being curve in Appendix 2). This change came because she became able to teach more hours as a teaching assistant, and thus started to earn enough to support herself financially. Again it shows that her psychological well-being was predominantly affected by her financial situation.

**End-stage of acculturation**

There is an end-stage of acculturation in Yoshikawa’ model called “double-swing”, where sojourners go beyond their own culture in order to adapt to the host culture and create new intercultural identities. According to Interviewee E, changing the old life style and making adjustments to the new one are important and necessary strategies for foreigners who wish to live happily in another country. However, I found no evidence that the interviewees’ change of strategies resulted in a change of identity, and so none of the interviewees had reached Yoshikawa’s end-stage of acculturation. This is likely due to the fact that they had only lived in the host country for around two years.

The Migration Policy Group (2012: 48-49) state that international students encounter social integration issues like other migration, and this is also the case for the interviewees in this paper. None of the interviewees felt well integrated into the local society, mainly because they were occupied by their studies in universities and therefore had little contact with the rest of society. Many of them felt that they had partly integrated by adjusting the living style and the way of communicating, but not so for their mentality. Interviewee B and F felt that they did not integrate at all.

As short-term international students, the deep transformation in their identities that Yoshikawa suggested was unlikely to occur. Rather, Burnett and Garnder’s term of internalisation that is “the ability to internalise the experience of cultural difference within their sense of identity” (Burnett & Garnder, n.d.: 89) is more appropriate and better describes the interviewees’ experience. After a period of staying in a foreign country, the interviewees had experienced dealing with cultural differences. However, the degree of internalisation varied between the interviewees.
The shape of the interviewees’ psychological well-being curves

Looking at the interviewees’ depictions of their psychological well-being, Interviewee A, B, E and F’s curves were similar to the “U” curve, yet individually different (see Interviewee A, B, E and F’s psychological well-being curves in Appendix 2). The curves were rather irregular, sometimes flat and sometimes tall, just as Furnham and Bochner (1986: 132, cited in Zapf, 1991: 112) argued. For Interviewee A and E, the curve for the final accustomed period was where their well-being peaked. They explained that they felt their lives were the most fruitful at that stage. However, for Interviewee B and F, the curve for the final accustomed period was not as high as in the immediate post-arrival period. The conflict and adjustment periods differed among these four interviewees. Interviewee A’s curve was flat, while Interviewee F’s was also flat, but with gradual small increases. Both Interviewee B and E had flat curves and fluctuating curves during this period, due to the study burden and the uncertainty regarding their future career. Interviewee E used different facial expressions, such as happy, puzzled, anxious and worried expressions, to represent her complex psychology during this period of time (see Interviewee E’s picture in Appendix 2).

Interviewee D started her curve from March 2011, five months before she came to Sweden. Her curve of psychological well-being was the highest at this time, because she was excited about the new life in Sweden. Her level of psychological well-being decreased until the move to Sweden. It then increased and reached a peak in October 2011. From then on, it looked similar to the general “U” curve (see Interviewee D’s psychological well-being curve in Appendix 2).

Interviewee C’s psychological well-being curve was very different from the other interviewees’ (see Interviewee C’s psychological well-being curve in Appendix 2). Her curve did not resemble a “U” curve. Instead, the curve was low and fluctuating at the beginning, went up during the beginning of her second semester and then stayed at a high level. As mentioned earlier, this was due to the relatively strong importance of her financial situation on her level well-being.

6.4 The study life experience

Study differences and challenges

The interview findings suggest that the Danish and Swedish styles of education were similar to each other, but very different from the Chinese education style. The interviewees generally pointed out that the main academic activities in Denmark and Sweden consisted of lectures, seminar and group work, with direct and frequent communication between the
teacher and the students, described as “open dialogue” by Interviewee C. In China, on the other hand, the main academic activity was lectures given by teachers, with very little other communication between the teacher and the students. Most of the interviewees favoured the Danish and Swedish kind of teacher-student communication, because they felt that their voices were heard and they were given the opportunity to practice expressing themselves. Only Interviewee B did not explicitly state that he liked this direct form of communication, likely because he generally found communicating in English challenging.

Besides the direct teacher-student communication, the student-student communication in the form of frequent group work was also new for the interviewees. In China, the interviewees mostly studied individually. Unlike the prevalent positive opinion among the interviewees towards the direct teacher-student communication, there were differing opinions regarding the Danish and Swedish emphasis on group work.

According to Interviewee B, successful group work required the ability to clearly express one’s own opinion and cooperate with others. This posed problems for him, because he had been studying alone in China and had seldom discussed academic topics with his peer classmates. After almost two years of adjustment, he had improved his ability in doing group work. However, he still considered group work difficult and was often quiet during the group work. This challenge of interviewee B was in line with Holmes’ findings that the different teaching and learning styles between Confucian education and Western education make the communication with teachers and peer students difficult and challenging for Chinese students in Western universities (Holmes, 2004: 295-296).

In contrast to Interviewee B, Interviewee D expressed a preference towards group work. She felt group work was a good chance for her to share opinions with her classmates, and allowed her to learn more about her classmates. The diverse opinions between Interviewee B and D regarding group work can likely be explained by their different personalities and characteristics, rather than an underlying difference in the Danish education and Swedish education.

The interviewees had different opinions regarding whether the number of lectures in Denmark and Sweden was sufficient. Interviewee A felt that the lectures in the Danish university were sufficient, while Interviewee B and C felt the opposite. Interviewee B felt that he was in need of more lectures in order to do better in his study, and Interviewee C pointed out that she only had two hours of lectures each week, which was insufficient. Similar to Interviewee B and C studying in Denmark, Interviewee D and E studying in Sweden also mentioned the shortage of lectures in their studies. Interviewee F felt that the
number of lectures in his Swedish university was enough for some but not all of his courses. Comparing students in Denmark and Sweden, there were no big differences regarding the number of lectures in respective universities, and most of them felt that there should be more lectures in their study.

English language was a problem for some interviewees especially in the beginning, including both students studying in Denmark and Sweden. For students studying in Denmark, Interviewee B had language problem in class communication, and Interviewee C had problems listening in class. Interviewee D and E studying in Sweden both pointed out that the amount of reading was excessive and the academic writing was difficult at the beginning. Even though they had passed international English tests before, their language skills were insufficient for the academic reading. Most of the interviewees overcame the language problems in a short time, except for Interviewee B and E. This is in line with the findings that Chinese students’ overall communicative language competency is insufficient in academia (Liu, 2002: 37).

Interviewee A and B, both natural science students, mentioned that they found that the things they learned were practical, and more-so than was the case in China. Interviewee A and F, again both natural science students, considered the teachers in Denmark and Sweden respectively to be better than in China. They also considered the workload to be higher and spent most of their time studying. On the other hand Interviewee C, a social science student, felt that the workload was too small and that she did not gain the amount of knowledge that she had expected. For the social science students Interviewee D and E, critical thinking was new for them, and at first they considered it difficult. However, they gradually grasped this way of thinking, and found it useful and began to use it when thinking and analysing.

One could argue that from the answers given by the interviewees, it could seem that the natural science students were generally more satisfied with their education than the social science students. However, the difference was not big and the social science students also mentioned aspects of their studies that they were happy with.

When facing academic challenges, most of the interviewees attempted to find a solution by themselves. Again, this is in accordance with Wei et al.’s findings that Asian students’ use their self-control power when facing challenges (Wei et al., 2007: 386). Only Interviewee D sometimes asked her classmates and professors for help. Most of the time, Interviewee D overcame the challenges through her own efforts. According to the interviewees, the first month was the most difficult period, after which their academic
situation gradually improved. By the end of the first semester, they generally felt that they were doing well in their study, except for Interviewee B who still experienced problems with discussions, lectures and languages and Interviewee E who still had problems with the academic writing.

When asked about which way of education they prefer, three of the interviewees (Interviewee A, D and F) chose the Danish/Swedish style as they had learned and improved much more during their studies in Denmark/Sweden compared to in China, while the rest could not make a choice, because there were advantages and disadvantages in each style of education.

Achievement and satisfaction
All the interviewees felt that they had gained some academic improvements, such as an improved ability to self-study, analyse, express oneself, apply critical thinking and communicate. Only two of the interviewees (Interviewee A and D) were satisfied with their academic achievements, while the rest felt that they should have done even better.

Most of the interviewee felt that it was the right decision to study in Denmark/Sweden, but Interviewee B said that he regretted not choosing to study in an English-speaking country instead of Denmark. The reasons he gave were that in so doing it would have been easier for him to find more Chinese friends, as he believed there were many more Chinese in English-speaking countries, and also easier to learn about the host society. He pointed out that the Danish language was the barrier for him to know about the Danish society, and gave examples of how all the signs on the street, the newspapers and the TV programs all were in Danish.

6.5 Intentions of staying or returning

The intention of returning – push and pull factors
Among the six interviewees, three chose to return to China after graduating while three intended to stay in Denmark/Sweden. The three students who wished to return to China were Interviewee B studying in Denmark and Interviewee D and F studying in Sweden. The reasons given by Interviewee B included that in China he had more friends, the food was better and that he felt more connected in China. He also mentioned there being more opportunities for him in China. The two students studying in Sweden, Interviewee D and F, mentioned that they would like to stay with their family. For all three students, regardless of whether they studied in Denmark or Sweden, the driving factor in their decision to return to China was that they preferred to maintain their interpersonal relations in their home country.
None of the three students wishing to return to China claimed that Chinese government’s policies favouring returnees had an effect on their decision. Despite this, they were all positive regarding their chances of finding a good job in China. All three leavers had some worries regarding this decision, mainly concerning the polluted environment and social problems such as food safety, competitive working environment and high working pressure in China.

Some pull factors in Denmark and Sweden were also mentioned by these interviewees. Interviewee B favoured the beautiful nature and social environment in Denmark. Interviewee D also praised the nature in Sweden, and Interviewee F thought highly of the social environment in Sweden, such as a good welfare system, high salaries and opportunities for personal development. Again, no obvious differences were observed for students studying in Denmark and Sweden.

Naturally, Interviewee B, D and F also mentioned several push factors in Denmark and Sweden. Interviewee B stressed the big cultural difference between Denmark and China and complained that there were too few working opportunities in Denmark. Interviewee D also stressed the difficulties regarding finding a job using an anecdote about a Spanish national who conducted a small experiment in Sweden. The Spanish national had first applied for a number of different jobs using his Spanish name, but had received no response from any of the employers. He then applied for the same positions using a made-up Swedish name, which resulted in interview offers from 92% of the employers. Interviewee F felt that the range entertainment activities was too limited in Sweden and expressed that he was tired of living in Sweden. Once more, I saw no apparent difference between students in Denmark and students in Sweden regarding this issue.

The intention of staying – push and pull factors
The three students who intended to stay were Interviewee A and C studying in Denmark and Interviewee E studying in Sweden. Interviewee A and C’s reasons for not returning to China after their master’s study were that they felt that holding a master’s degree would not in itself guarantee them a good job back in China. They therefore wanted to stay and improve their CV and competencies further, before returning to China. Interviewee A intended to pursue doctoral and post-doctoral degrees in Denmark, but was unsure if he would be able to get a doctoral position. Interviewee C intended to find a job in Denmark in order to gain some overseas working experience that could add to her competencies, and thought her chances of finding a job in Denmark were good.
For Interviewee E, the main reason to stay was that she was not sure about her career goals and so she would like to continue her current life and give herself some time to think about the future. Besides, she also would like to gain some overseas working experience. Unlike Interviewee C, Interviewee E was pessimistic regarding her chances of finding a job in Sweden. When asked why she felt like as she did, she mentioned her lack of Swedish language proficiency and lack of working experience. Besides, the lack of a post-study scheme in Sweden also added to her pessimistic feeling about a future career in Sweden, since she would have to leave Sweden immediately after graduating if she had not found a job beforehand. Interviewee E thought that the Greencard Scheme for students in Denmark was a great idea, and she wished Sweden would offer similar schemes for international students.

Comparing Interviewee A and C studying in Denmark and Interviewee E studying in Sweden, it seems that Interviewee A and C had a clearer plan regarding their future career and were generally more positive towards their future job-hunting situation than Interviewee E. Interviewee E’s contemplations concerning the difficulties with finding a job due to a high language proficiency requirement in Sweden, is likely a result of the location of the interviewees’ studies; the Copenhagen area is a more international region than Scania, also in terms of career opportunities. As such the observed difference in language barriers is not due to a general difference between Denmark and Sweden, but rather stems from the characteristics of the local regions in which my interviewees resided. Besides the lack of a post-study scheme in Sweden, part of the reason for Interviewee E’s pessimistic outlook could be that she had not worked in the host country at all, unlike Interviewee A and C.

In short, the main reasons for Interviewee A, C and E to stay were to improve their competencies and become more competitive, either by receiving more education or by gaining overseas working experience. They wished to use this edge to obtain a good position back in China, and so did not plan on staying abroad permanently – instead they wished to return to China in a few years’ time. Furthermore, as mentioned before, they believed that they could more readily secure a good job and a high salary back in China by virtue of them being international talents.

Interviewee A intended to go back to China after finishing his doctoral and post-doctoral degrees. His reason for eventually returning to China was also influenced by his wish to be with his family and friends in China. Interviewee C mentioned a desire to serve her country as a reason for eventually moving back to China. However, this desire was not stronger than that she would choose to move to another area with Chinese culture – such as
Hong Kong, Tai Wan or Singapore – if she found the natural and social environment in China to be unsatisfactory by the time she wished to leave Denmark. Interviewee E also had the intention of returning at some point, but admitted that she might change her mind later.

Not surprisingly, Interviewee A, C and E listed more pull factors in Denmark and Sweden than the interviewees who wished to return to China after graduating. Both Interviewee A and C mentioned the high salaries and good welfare in Denmark and that the hierarchy tended to be flat in Denmark, which made employees feel relaxed. Furthermore, Interviewee A favoured the nature in Denmark, and Interviewee C pointed out that the Danish society supported and respected individual development. Interviewee E also felt that the high salaries, good welfare and beautiful nature were advantages of Sweden. However, unlike students in Denmark, Interviewee E did not mention the working environment in Sweden, likely due to the fact that she had not been working in Sweden.

As can be seen from the above, most of the interviewees would return either as soon as they finished their studies or after a few years of working overseas. This is in line with the general increasing trend of Chinese student returnees (Wang & Guo, 2012: 35).

**Applying the motivational migration theory**

Just as with the study abroad decision, the interviewees took all the push and pull factors in Denmark/Sweden and China into considerations, as well as relevant intervening obstacles, such as the immigration policies (Lee, 1966: 51), into consideration, and made a rational cost-benefit calculation (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008: 55), before making the decision of staying or returning.

The interviewees’ reasons for staying and returning were in accordance with the Migration Policy Group (2012: 38)’s findings, that career-related factors are important for stayers, while family, friends and personal relationships are essential for leavers. This also matches Boneva and Frieze (2001: 479)’s argument, mentioned earlier, which said that compared to non-migrants, migrants value the work more than the family. This also corresponds with McClelland’s three-motive model. Stayers stay because of a desire to gain better opportunities and better social position, and therefore have a high achievement and power motivation. In contrast, leavers have a desire to maintain their interpersonal relations in the home country and feel connected, and thus have a higher affiliation motivation.
7. Conclusion

Chinese students have become the second largest and largest international student group in Denmark and Sweden respectively, and have significant social and economic impacts on Denmark, Sweden and China. It is therefore essential to investigate their preference and experience regarding Denmark and Sweden as study and working destinations, in order to give them better support and governance during their stay, as well as to attract more Chinese students and to retain those who are already in Denmark and Sweden.

Accordingly this paper set out to qualitatively investigate the Chinese students in Denmark and Sweden, focusing on three aspects: Their motivation for choosing Denmark or Sweden as their study abroad destinations; their daily life and study acculturation experience in Denmark and Sweden and their intentions of staying or returning after graduating. Although the resulting interview findings and analysis showed no big difference between Denmark and Sweden, this paper found several common opinions and experiences among the Chinese students.

The main reasons for not taking a master study in China were the perceived deficient quality of education in China, the poor academic environment in China, and an interest in experiencing a different kind of education. Main reasons for the interviewees to study abroad were to improve their competencies and to experience foreign culture. Also the fact that a foreign degree often guarantees a better social status and better salary in China played an important role in their decision. Interestingly, there seemed to be a tendency for natural science students to value the academic and job-related aspects more than the social study students, and conversely the social study students seemed to value the cultural and personal winnings more.

When choosing the study destinations, most of the interviewees mentioned the quality of the master program, the academic reputation of the universities, local language requirements, the high popularization of English and its use in teaching, cultural aspirations, future job opportunities and tuition fees as decisive factors. However, once again natural science students tended to have different criteria compared to social science students. For the natural science students, the quality of the subject field in the host country was considered essential, whereas the social science students valued social, cultural and environmental factors of the host country more.

Regarding push factors in China, they all emphasized that the education was dissatisfactory in China. Considering the push and pull factors in Denmark/Sweden and
China, they made a rational cost-benefit calculation and found that the benefit of migrating seemed to outweigh the costs; therefore, they decided to migrate to another country for their master’s study. As student migrants, they have high achievement and power motivations.

Based on my interviews, Denmark and Sweden had no evident differences in their ability to attract Chinese students. However, I found an apparently significant difference in the preferences and values of the students related to their field of study, when choosing a study destination. Since my number of interviewees was limited to six students, it is quite possible that this difference does not represent an underlying general characteristic, but the findings nevertheless suggest that this might be the case. Further research could be carried out to investigate this phenomenon.

Most of the interviewees’ psychological well-being during the process of acculturation in Denmark and Sweden could be depicted as a “U” curve as argued by Zapf, namely representing a high level of well-being during the first two months, a relatively low well-being during the next five to fourteen months, and then a higher sense of well-being in the most recent period. In the immediate post-arrival period, named the contact and encounter stage by Yoshikawa and Burnett and Garnder respectively, they were excited, curious and optimistic towards the cultural differences, and their psychological well-being was therefore good.

After two months, they lost their interest and curiosity towards the cultural differences, and started to experience a decrease in their sense of psychological well-being. They reached the period of conflict, which is slightly different from the disintegration and disorientation by Yoshikawa and Burnett and Garnder respectively, in that the reason for the decrease in the sense of psychological well-being was not only due to the negative effects of cultural differences as Yoshikawa and Burnett and Garnder argued, but also due to loneliness, academic difficulties and financial problems.

The interviewees tried to adjust in order to overcome and cope with these challenges. This adjustment period took place simultaneously with the conflict period, rather than presenting itself as a detached period following the conflict period as Yoshikawa and Burnett and Garner suggested.

They eventually acquired the ability to successfully adjust themselves and become calmer, more relaxed and used to the life in the host country. As a result, their psychological well-being improved. They reached the accustomed period, which was again different from the autonomy and independence periods in Yoshikawa’s and Burnett and Garnder’s models respectively, in that even though they had learned to accept and deal with the cultural
differences, not all of them appreciated the cultural differences, and were therefore not autonomous and independent.

The interviewees’ change of strategies did not result in a change of identity, and none of them felt integrated into the host society.

When it comes to the opinion on the local people, the interviewees generally had similar opinions on the Danish and Swedish people. They found the Danish and Swedish people to be kind, polite and friendly, but also conservative and tending to conceal their emotions. Most of the interviewees felt that it was more comfortable and easy to communicate with Chinese, and all the interviewees had a predominance of Chinese friends.

There were no major differences between the students studying in Denmark and students studying in Sweden regarding their daily life experience.

Regarding their study experience, the more direct teacher-student and student-student communication in the Danish and Swedish academia posed difficulties for some of the interviewees. However, most of the interviewees expressed a preference towards teacher-student communication in academia. The natural science students generally thought that the teachers were better, found the workload to be heavier and the knowledge to be more practical in Denmark/Sweden compared to China. The social science students felt that the concept of critical thinking was useful for their way of thinking and analysing. The English language initially posed a problem for some interviewees, and remained a hindrance for two of the interviewees. When facing challenges and problems in both their daily and study life, the interviewees generally tried to overcome the obstacles singlehandedly.

All the interviewees felt that they had improved academically, including their ability to self-study, analyse, express oneself, apply critical thinking and communicate. However, only half of them were satisfied with their academic achievements. The other half felt that they should have done better. Most of the interviewees felt that it was a good decision to study in Denmark/Sweden.

Regarding the interviewees’ intentions after graduating, half planned to return to China mainly because of family, friends and personal relationship reasons, while the other half intended to stay mainly for career reasons; therefore the stayers seemed to value work more than the family, which agrees with Boneva and Frieze’s claims (Boneva & Frieze, 2001: 479). The stayers had higher achievement and power motivations, while the leavers had higher affiliation motivations. Those who intended to return to China mentioned difficulties finding jobs and the big cultural difference as main push factors in Denmark and
Sweden, while both those who intended to leave and stay praised Denmark and Sweden’s opportunities for personal development, high salaries, good welfare and attractive natural environments.

According to the interviewees, Sweden had more barriers compared to Denmark in terms of finding a job, including a lack of policies facilitating the acquisition of a residence permit for international students after graduation, and local language requirements. The mentioned language barrier is likely due to the different local regions in which the interviewees studied in Denmark and Sweden. Once again, the interviewees took all the push and pull factors in Denmark/Sweden and China into considerations and made a rational cost-benefit calculation, based on which they made the decision of staying or returning. Finally it is worth mentioning that all three interviewees who intended to stay in Denmark and Sweden expressed a wish to ultimately return to China some years later.
8. Reflections

Since this research only involved six Chinese students in Denmark and Sweden, it does not allow me to draw general conclusions regarding the importance of the found factors involved in the Chinese student migration in Denmark and Sweden. I therefore suggest further research using quantitative methods to elaborate on these findings. Likewise, a more detailed qualitative research involving a bigger number of interviewees would also contribute to the generalizability of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study still manages to successfully indicate and point out some Chinese students’ preferences and experiences on studying abroad in Denmark and Sweden. These findings can potentially be used by Danish and Swedish educational institutions to form recruitment strategies. Also governing authorities can use the presented data regarding the challenges Chinese students encounter to formulate policies and regulations aimed at supporting the Chinese students while they are in the country and ultimately retaining the Chinese talents.

As student migration has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon on the international migration stage with considerable implications for both the sending and receiving countries, this area of migration studies requires more attention and research in order to guide the implicated actors.
References


Appendix 1: Interview guide

This is the prepared question list. Depending on the interviewees’ answers, relevant questions from the question list were asked, together with different additional questions. During the interview, if the interviewee gave several reasons for a certain action (i.e. why they chose to come to Sweden), I asked them to specify their relative importance.

1. Background information.
   • Where in China are you from? How old are you?
   • What is your bachelor degree? What is your current study?
   • How many people are there in your close family?
   • What do your parents do for a living? What is your parents’ educational background?

   • Was it your own decision to study in Denmark/Sweden?
   • Why did you want to study abroad?
   • Why did you choose Denmark/Sweden as your study destination?
   • Why didn’t you study your master in China?
   • How much did you know about Denmark/Sweden before you came?

   • Please draw one or more pictures to illustrate your acculturation experience of your daily life, or a part hereof, over the period of your stay in Denmark/Sweden. (The interviewees will be given colour pens and paper, and can draw in whatever way they choose. If the interviewee feels that (s)he is unable to draw a picture, the interviewee can opt to draw a psychological well-being curve, depicting their psychological well-being over the period they have been living in Denmark/Sweden. After drawing, the interviewee will be asked to explain their drawings.)
   • How was your daily life experience/psychological well-being over the period you have been living in Denmark/Sweden?
   • What were the cultural differences that you encountered?
   • What’s your opinion on the local people?
   • How did you adjust to the new environment?
4. Study life.
   - In what way is the Danish/Swedish way of education different from the Chinese one? Which style do you prefer?
   - What are the problems/challenges that you encountered in your study? How did you solve these problems?
   - What have you gained from your study? Are you satisfied with these achievements?
   - Overall, do you think it was the right choice to study in Denmark/Sweden?

5. Intentions of staying or leaving after finishing the study.
   - What do you plan to do after your graduation and why?
Appendix 2: Interviewees’ drawings depicting their acculturation experience and psychological well-being

Interviewee A

Interviewee A’s drawing started from August 2011, with the date and its representative curve beneath. In the picture of different situations above, a red colour represents happiness, a green colour means slightly low in spirit, while a blue colour represents feeling gloomy.
Interviewee B

Interviewee B’s curve started from August 2011, with the date on the upper area and its representative curve beneath.
Interviewee C depicted her experience living and studying in Denmark as three sections moving from left to right across the picture. Red circles represent anxiety, uneasiness and passion, red lines represent passion, blue circles represent busyness and green circles represent calmness. The psychological well-being curve was drawn in pencil in the lower part of the picture.
Interviewee D

The first picture presents her life in China. The sky was grey, indicating that life was boring and that the natural environment was bad.

The second picture used a tree to represent her life in Sweden, which was fruitful with many achievements. Red colours indicate positive feelings: Feeling relaxed and that things are new and exciting. Green colours indicate calmness.
Above was her psychological well-being curve, starting from March 2011, five months before she came to Sweden. The acculturation experience started from August 2011.
Interviewee E

In the picture above, interviewee E used nine different facial expressions to depict her experience living and studying in Sweden during different periods of time. The nine expressions were presented chronologically and vertically.
Above is Interviewee E’s psychological well-being curve. The numbers 1-7 coincide with the periods depicted in the first 7 expressions, while point 8 represented the period from March to April 2013 (the 8th and 9th expression) and point 9 represented May 2013.
Interviewee F

Above is Interviewee F’s psychological well-being curve, starting from September 2010, when he had been exchanged to his first Swedish university. His master study started from September 2011. The blank areas from June 2011 to September 2011 and from June 2012 to September 2012 represent the period that he stayed in China for the summer holiday.