Going Global: Cases for Relationship Marketing in Chinese Higher Education

Integrated views from China and Sweden on international student relationship management

by

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Abstract

The integration of the global economy is a phenomena that is increasingly evident in our everyday lives. Ranging from rapid economic growth in developing nations to the flow of capital across continents, globalization is affecting almost all corners of modern society. This includes the higher education sector, in which recent years have seen unprecedented growth in Asia as the economy increasingly becomes "knowledge-based". The integration of a "knowledge-based" economy is also accelerating global competition amongst higher education institutions.

This thesis takes three distinctive Chinese universities into account as case studies, interviewing respective administrators on policies and strategies concerning international student recruitment, management, and relationship management. Furthermore, interviews and surveys with Swedish students from Lund University should reveal another perspective regarding the attracting elements and factors for studying abroad, and specifically China. Models involving relationship marketing (RM) and customer relationship marketing (CRM) theories will be explored in the context of higher education sector and international student relationship management (ISRM).

Keywords: Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM), Relationship Marketing (RM), marketing strategy, higher education, China, Sweden, international student relationship management (ISRM).

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1   Introduction

1.1   Globalization Today

Globalization is the phenomena concerning the integration of economies, cross border flow of human and financial capital and the rapid spread of technological advancement. It is essentially the connection between parts of the world, far and close, east and west, rich and poor. Looking back, globalization existed to a lesser degree during pre-World War One era though the financial and commercial integration today is largely unprecedented (Bordo et al., 1999).

Today's era sees one of international competition in several fronts, allowing for great opportunities and risks in a global arena. This could be seen from developing nations such as China reintegrating into the world economy in the late 1970's and subsequently introduce foreign capital, advanced technologies and professional management experiences from developed nations. The opening of China, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union followed by an ushering of free trade agreements in the 1990's have suddenly steered a population of around 3 billion people into the world economy (Stewart, 2012). The rise of developing nations as major players in the international economy is further signified by India's economic liberalization in 2003 and China's accession to the World Trade Organization previously in 2001.

Indeed, the participation of developing nations in the globalization phenomena enable tremendous development opportunities; likewise international competition are expected to eliminate monopolistic markets and charter discussions for reforms in closed markets. Economic globalization has been labeled as an inevitable trend at the turn of the millennium-reflecting a significant momentum towards an integration of capital, labor, skills, and knowledge (Gao, 2000). In recent decades, globalization can also be reflected by the constant changes in our society and such integration has brought tremendous effects on nations, cultures, businesses and individuals (Rust & Kim, 2012). Ultimately, effects of globalization are far-reaching in with intensified competition within an engaging and growing-by-day web of labor, capital, trade, information, industries and technologies. Thus society at large is affected by globalization. This includes higher education (HE) (Rust & Kim, 2012).

In addition, the economy is not only becoming more globalized but also increasingly knowledge-based (Stewart, 2012). As Rust and Kim (2012) note, the rise of globalization as a focal point of HE is closely related to increasing competition for knowledge in the free-market economy. The integration of an international "knowledge economy" is essentially the fundamental force in an acceleration of competition amongst educational institutions around the world for the best students.

1.1.1 Higher Education - a shift towards East

As the free-flow of knowledge and information is accepted to be a part of globalization, the competition for high-skilled labour will continue to intensify (Stewart, 2012). The growing global talent pool is reflected as developing countries focus on HE opportunities to improve their citizen's well being, reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth (Stewart 2012). Arvind Gupta (2015), Vice-Chancellor of the University of British Columbia whom frequented China many times as part of a Canadian delegation wrote in the *Vancouver Sun*, "… They [China] regard higher education as the best platform for achieving social and economic development."

Simultaneously, as developing countries continue to ride the tides of globalization in the educational sector, developed nations in the West have sought for the highest standards in their educational system to maintain their advantageous position in the "knowledge economy" (Rust & Kim, 2012). The general consensus in the past century has labeled the United States as the leader in HE following stagnation in European institutions (Rust & Kim, 2012). According to the National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education (2008), the United States constitutes the world's highest levels of college degree attainment amongst 35 year olds to 65 year olds. Stewart (2012) contributes this to the G.I. Bill after the Second World War and the large amount of graduates amongst the baby boom generation.

However, the United States falls relatively lower in global rankings (10th place) concerning young adults aged 25 to 34 with a Bachelor's degree or higher (National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education, 2008). This trend is also reflected in graduation rates in which college dropouts amongst American universities are very high- only 54 percent of those entering American colleges and universities complete their studies (Stewart, 2012). Statistics indicate older generation Americans to be better educated in global comparisons, but regions such as Asia sees a remarkable rise of young adults with university degrees (Stewart, 2012).

As our "knowledge economy" strengthens, the desired skill-mix of high-skilled laborers has transformed the global educational development. This shift of development has meant the pace of HE expansion has augmented worldwide, and many other countries in Asia now have extraordinary economic growth aligning educational reforms to accommodate a rising talent pool. On a global level, nowhere is educational expansion more staggering and rapid than in Asia (Stewart 2012). Rather prophetically, the Nobel laureate Harold Varmus announced in 2009 that the 20th century saw American education overtaking the United Kingdom, and in similar fashion the 21st century may see China exceeding the United States in education (Stewart 2012). Looking forward, the global talent pool finds itself steering towards Asia- and at remarkable speed during a vital era of internationalization.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The higher education international marketing theory development is still at a pioneer stage. The aim is to: (i) understand how Chinese universities seek to attract foreign students by (ii) bridging literature on HE with relationship marketing theory and (iii) develop a model making it possible to identify external factors that have an influence on university international promotion in the long-term. Considering the unique industry characteristics of education, decision makers could hardly find proper business models to implement. With increasing tendency and desire by universities to explore the overseas market, more recruiters are applying certain marketing tools from business sector incorrectly or ineffectively.

Since such reforms are still on-going, the marketing model provides knowledge for decision-makers in different HE sector. By outlining a model, the long-term theoretical contribution would be connecting different dimensions of HE promotion, and adding some distinctions to existing relationship marketing theory. The model should derive from synergizing relationship-marketing strategies applied by Chinese universities and the emotional responses by Swedish students that identify reasons for selecting China to studying abroad.

Considering the current projection of a remarkable shift in higher education growth and expansion in the east, Asia with a population of 2.3 billion people is unquestionably an important region. China's remarkable economic growth began with her re-opening in 1978 by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, lifting millions out of poverty and triggering a continuous wave of HE reform to this day (Li, 2010). China would be a viable and interesting benchmark to put RM models at work and to test its potentialities and limits, particularly the promotion of Chinese HE in Sweden. Essentially, the interaction between the Chinese institutions and Swedish students should display the challenges and opportunities derived from the internationalization of education. The attraction of universities for Swedish students based in a developing nation in a region widely acknowledged to become the world's fastest growing economy will be also be noted.

By evaluating existing projects between Chinese and Swedish universities, the more immediate research outcome would be analysing factors that have been regarded as crucial from the Chinese HE providers' perspective. Potential students in Sweden could then provide insights on what elements actually impact their decisions. The differences between them would demonstrate the empirical gap between the understandings of HE international marketing and the expectation of students regarding studying abroad.

1.3 Research Purpose

Triggered by globalizing pressures and conditions, HE sector tends to implement some marketing tools to recruit more overseas students. The restructuring efforts are apparent in China, and these reform packages are embedded in the context of HE framework to attract foreign students. The research purpose should reflect our aims and therefore answer the following questions:

1. How do Chinese university administrators perceive their institution's policy(ies) in attracting foreign students?
2. How do prospective Swedish students perceive Chinese universities' current admissions policy(ies) in attracting foreign students?
3. How can Chinese universities improve their foreign students' admission policy(ies) by applying models of relationship marketing?

1.4 Research Limitations

Research limitation can be reflected by China's on-going HE reforms that may potentially have an impact on universities' practice on foreign admissions. A key point of the research is analyzing Chinese universities' current policies relating to attracting and accepting foreign students, meaning first-hand data collected from Chinese administrators and Swedish students are both subjected to socio-political-economical surroundings in the current timeframe. For the quantitative results, the sample size was relatively small and involved Swedish students from Lund University. For the interviews, solely 3 administrators from 3 universities and 12 Swedish students from Lund University have been interviewed, which limited the hierarchical diversity of interviewees. Ultimately this relates to time constraints on research, which may be potentially challenging since China as a developing country are constantly undergoing changes and reforms throughout society.

2   Literature/Theoretical Review

2.1   Higher Education

2.1.1   Marketization

A number of research studies are focused on how to identify modern education industry. Education was primarily designed to select individuals, without really influencing their productivity in future professional life (Spence, 1973). Scholars had earlier put forward the ideas that education is not a product, but a service (Nicholls et al., 1995). Relatedly, service marketing is sufficiently different from the physical goods marketing. More recently, education has been regarded as a product of the modern nation-state (Scott, 1998). In a larger context, the nation-state remains the site of policymaking and influences global capacity of higher education sector. Damme (2001) further states that universities promote human civilisation.

Academically, there are increasing studies focus on marketisation, competition and management in HE. Indeed, university promotion emphasizes advertising to gain a competitive advantage and market differentiation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999; Czarniawska & Genell, 2002; George, 2000; Oplatka, 2002). Empirical studies and theoretical papers tended to employ higher education sector design by simply implementing marketing tools and strategies on competition and segmentation (Tonks & Farr, 1995; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Farr, 2003; Rindfleish, 2003), targeting (Farr, 2003), positioning (Nicholls et al., 1995; Ivy, 2001; Farr, 2003) and branding (Gray et al., 2003). Schofer and Meyer (2005) indicate that the expansion of education particularly amplified within the tertiary sector has been one of the most notable social trends in the past half century.

Meanwhile, there are considerable debates surrounding the marketization of HE, for instance political and ethical controversies. Marketization and globalisation altogether are influencing the competition in HE (Marginson, 2004). All in all, the days of HE marketing relying merely on school prospectus and open recruitment days are in the past (Tapp et al., 2004). With increasing competition, more resources referring to student attraction and retention are and should be deployed (Tapp et al., 2004).

2.1.2   Internationalization/Globalization in HE

The tide of marketization should be regarded as a differentiated universal trend in each nation as global engagement varies from country to country. On a supranational basis, some scholars contextually analyzed higher education issues in terms of globalization, internationalization and Europeanization (Blumenthal et al., 1996; De Wit, 2002). From a historical perspective, internationalization exists long in HE as a method of "broadening one's horizons through intellectual sampling and reflective comparison" (Teichler, 2004, p. 11). The rhetoric of internationalization norms reflects global engagement as a two-way flow between stakeholders. Considering international mobility, global comparison and global ranking, HE

sectors are becoming visible worldwide, and commenters are concentrating on internationalization of institutions and system. OECD conducted reports respectively on Internationalization (2004) and Globalization in HE (2009).

Globalization in HE has been regarded as an alternative to the old internationalization, and the concept was introduced in the second half of the 1990s gaining ground from 2000 onwards (Marginson & Wende, 2006). Beerkens (2004) states that globalization differs from internationalization when it comes to whether systems are more integrated as suggested by globalization, or more interconnected as with internationalization. Critically, the differences between these two theoretical concepts are sometimes overemphasized. However, they do not necessarily exclude each other. Internationalization has been viewed, as a cooperative concept in higher education sectors, whilst globalization is understood primarily regarding a greater knowledge-based economy and educational trade (Marginson & Wende, 2006). There is no evidence to support that all universities should be international, but all are subject to the same process of globalization (Scott, 1998). Much of what begins as internationalization has implications for globalization. In a globalizing economy, internationalization in HE will continue to expand.

New concepts like *glocal* (global and local combined) (Robertson, 1995; Kellner 2000), *glonacal agency* (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) can also be scrutinized. Appadurai (1996) creates a more complex view of globalization's features and outcomes by using *vernacular globalization*. Globalization as "the widening, deepening and speeding up of all kinds of worldwide interconnectedness" (Held et al. 1999, p. 14) has been translated as an external transformation driver in HE Arguably, it is notable that scholars did not pay sufficient attention on other elements, for instance: global village, global understanding, knowledge and society or global learning (Teichler, 2004). 'Transnational' education has also been coincidentally discussed with reference to globalization and internationalization (Teichler, 2004). Instead of considering transnational education as a one-dimensional movement from "the state" (non-market and bureaucratic) to "the market" (non-state and corporate), one should contextually analyze the interaction between the critical elements in shaping the local context and the impetus for transformation driven by global trends (Mok, 2003).

Relatively, research concerning international HE marketing is still at a pioneer stage, and there is still much research to be done both from an exploratory and strategic perspective.

2.1.3   Transformation of Chinese higher education

Chinese HE today is becoming more integrated to the world than ever. HE can barely be isolated in the era of globalization (Li, 2010) as the Chinese government has implemented a number of major market oriented reforms. A spectrum of literature provides evidence of marketization and decentralization of HE sector in China (Williams et al., 1997; Mok, 1999; Mok, 2000). The reform of 1978 was the clear shift in Chinese general public policy, notably the transformation in focus from party politics to economic structure. In June 1999, China began to expand the HE sector in order to revitalize China's economy and accumulate talent

for China's future economic prosperity (Mok, 2009; Wang & Liu, 2010). Through embracing the market principles, the relatively "flat" structure of the system is more vertically differentiated (Wang & Liu, 2010).

Moreover, it is essential to pay attention on the aspect of external driving force. Both the global influences and internal concerns are driving the on-going HE reforms in China (Cai, 2004). Mok (2009) indicates that the on-going restructuring aims to enhance global competence as the World Trade Organization consider HE as a "private good" (Knight, 2006; Mok, 2007). After China joined the WTO and subscribed to the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) agreement, Chinese HE became further involved in competing with overseas institutions. Considering that more international players would participant in China's education markets, Chinese government intended to promote its HE sector internationally. The authorities encouraged overseas universities to jointly develop academic programs with Chinese institutions (Mok, 2009). Huang (2007) also agrees that transnational HE has developed rapidly in China. Currently, this transformation has crucial implications both for the global educational structure and the global economy itself (Li et al., 2011).

Foremost, China has been a popular destination for international students (Li, 2010). Research from the Institute of International Education reveals that China ranks fifth as a destination country for international students (Kelsey, 2013). More than half are undergraduate study abroad/non-award study international students, and 57.5 % chose Humanities as their major (see Appendix A). In that case, most international students come to China for the exchange experience but not for the degree. Secondly, increasing Chinese universities join the ranks of the elite universities of the world. Government policies have been implemented with an emphasis on building world-class research universities. Institute of HE of Shanghai Jiaotong University is the precursor of an academic ranking of universities worldwide, and China is the initiative country for hosting the "First International Conference on World-Class Universities (WCU-1)" (Buela-Casal et al., 2007). The elite sector received financial support through the major initiatives, such as "211 Project," the "985 Project," the "863 Project" and the "973 Project (Fleishman, 2013; Li, 2010). The elite universities are considered to have the best students and the capability and capacity to mature into major global educational institutions. In that case, they have also shown greater openness, and are aiming to partner with world-class universities to promote their elite status amongst globally recognized universities (Li, 2010). However, despite the Ministry of Education plans to fund 50,000 scholarships for overseas students by 2015 (McCafferty, 2013), critics still argue that the imbalance development between the elite and the other universities are increasing.

2.1.4 Strategies to Attract Overseas Students

China is developing strategies to promote HE internationally. Altbach and Knight (2007) state that universities are implementing programs to attract students and to export educational institutions. For China, establishing overseas centre, recruiting policies and providing scholarship can be seen. With the purpose to strengthen research collaboration with European HE sector and promote Chinese culture, Fudan University established a "Fudan-European

Centre for China Studies" in Copenhagen. Chinese HE recruiting policies reveal the ambitious to speed up the process of educating more international students and building world-class programs. Universities are attracting both international scholars and well-established Chinese faculty from overseas. The Ministry of Education launched the Changjiang Scholar Fellowship Program with 94 % of recipients being overseas scholars (Gu, 2012). Natural National Science Foundation of China (NSFC) finances international scholars to conduct research in China (Li, 2010). Multiple similar projects including Chinese Government Scholarship program promote the development of positive, long-term, friendly relationships between China and the holders' home countries (Dong & Chapman, 2007).

Furthermore, most strategies are intended to spread goodwill and strengthen China's soft power that Li (2010) regards as positive to HE in the world for its investment. It is also notable that the international environment has influenced China's HE growth (Li et al., 2010). The internationalization of HE brings with Chinese HE Western philosophies and values. The challenge aligning with this could be how to choose a suitable approach to resolve the tensions between Western ideologies and Chinese traditions (Cai, 2004). Critically, transformation would hardly change the situation that Chinese HE is dominated by the Central government due to distinct Chinese socio-political surroundings. Considering the Chinese educational system, the regulatory regime should be developed to respond sensitively and match appropriately the local administrative cultures and political circumstances (Mok, 2009). HE sector should conceptualize more innovative strategies to gain competitive advantage and advance into the top tier of universities worldwide.

2.2   Marketing Theory Framework
2.2.1   Reviewing Relationship Marketing (RM)

A new marketing paradigm has evolved and subsequently pushed to the frontiers of the discipline in the 1990's and continues to garner much attention- that is relationship marketing (RM) (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1997; Ravald & Grönroos, 2011). Initially, the term RM was contributed by L.L. Berry (1983) in relation to services marketing (Ballantyne et al., 2003). This coincides with research dating from the 1970's from the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP), a dominantly European academic body focusing on soft-sides of interactions, webs and networks (Ballantyne et al., 2003). Gummesson (1997) explicitly traces the development of RM as an extension of the "Nordic School" on services marketing and network approaches to marketing by IMP (Håkansson & Ostberg, 1975; Håkansson 1982).

Looking back, the marketing mix paradigm has long dominated the marketing sphere in both research and practice, but the globalization of businesses and evolving economic trends have further strengthened a shift in the marketing discipline (Grönroos, 1994). The marketing discipline has been highly static in its marketing mix and the 4P concept (product, price, place and promotion) when it was introduced around 1960 (Grönroos, 1994). The marketing mix became a near indisputable paradigm adhered as "the holy quadruple" (Kent, 1986). Thus,

regarding the impact on the introduction of RM- Ballantyne, Christopher and Payne (2003) has gone so far as to declare: "Marketing as a discipline is forever changed."

The growing interest in RM reflects the increasingly integrated markets today and advance of technology that quickens exchange links on data concerning consumer behaviors. Globalization continues to impact marketing on an unprecedented scale, and the trend of market deregulation brings a higher level of uncertainty in terms of past marketing prescriptions to success (Ballantyne et al., 2003). This overall contributes to a larger degree of complexity and instability within and between organizations (Ballantyne et al., 2003). Therefore the necessity of developing closer ties with consumers and various stakeholders are recognized, and such process of relationship maintenance concerns strategies for growth in a competitive climate. The development of information technology also implies an age of big data, in which information concerning consumers and their preferences can be gathered in masses. In this perspective, the traditional transactional marketing notion is no longer adequate to assess and utilize such information (Ballantyne et al., 2003).

Under this context, there is increasing interest on the RM model, and the rapid development in services marketing also seems to have gained further ground. Scholars reinforce the potential application of relationship marketing in HE sector (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 2004). Indeed, decades long ago the shift from a product-centered view to a marketing-centered view was already suggested, indicating an emphasis in the process of satisfying the customer (Levitt, 1986). Looking forward, the concept of value exchange between stakeholders will remain the foundation for growth in RM (Christopher et al., 2002). A value-creation relationship can be categorized with three features, it is (i) a supplier-managed relationship; (ii) a mutually interactive process; and (iii) emerged from within networks of relationships (Ballantyne et al., 2003). Additionally, the scope of RM in customer relations is further compelled by the role of part-time marketers- those who carry marketing activities but do not belong to the marketing or sales organization (Gummesson, 1991). Ultimately this recognizes anybody to have the potential influence on customer relations and satisfaction.

Furthermore, the complexity and on-going development of RM is exemplified by the existence of twenty-six definitions of RM in academic literature (Ballantyne et al., 2003). One particular understanding of RM is the exchange of mutual value within a six markets (refer to Figure 1; Christopher et al., 2002). Under this framework, the six markets are an interactive link of great subtlety and thus form a network of relationships. The six markets relationship network provides a more systematic method of interpreting RM, specifically approaching inter-relationships, recognizing value-creation opportunities and delivering value (Ballantyne et al., 2003). The framework allows a less rigid response towards marketing relationships and the more subtle interdependency between the consumer and service provider. Essentially, marketing value is created via interactions between such networks of relationships (Gummesson, 1999).
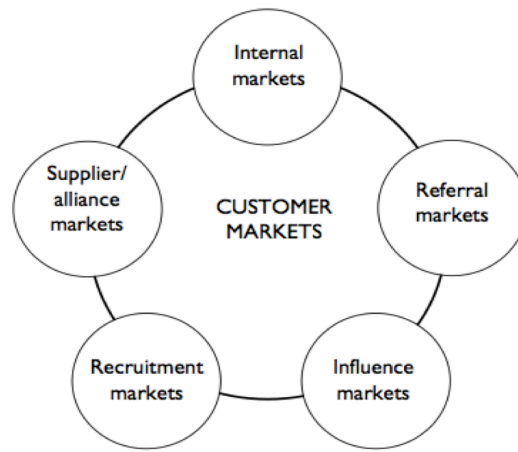
Source: Christopher et al. (2002)

Figure 1 Six markets (Christopher et al. 2002; Ballantyne et al., 2003)

2.2.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Emerging developments in customer relationship management (CRM) would also be explored in the context of higher education. In regards to relationship marketing, CRM can be described as an integrated approach towards managing relationship with an emphasis on retention and further development on existing relationship (Chen & Popovich, 2003). This integration evolves from the notion of conducting business in a manner that represents the way customer's wish to be served (Yim et al., 2004). The paradigm exists with the belief that customer relationships can be managed and developed, essentially originating from three concepts: customer orientation, RM and database management and marketing (Yim et al, 2004). The rise on the customer focused business model of CRM is also related to the growing complexity of customer relationships. In the mid-twentieth century, maintaining and developing intimate relationships with customers and stakeholders of one's business were relatively outdone by the emergence mass production and mass marketing (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Under this context, the purchasing process greatly diminished the interaction between the supplier or service provider and the consumer is reduced to a particular "account number".

However, a form of revival concerning the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of individuals is seen with CRM. The significance of CRM can also be related with the aid of technological advancement. Whilst mass production has been made possible by machines, technologies now are helping companies and institutions reconnect with new and established consumers and customers (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Social media and online brand presence are examples of channels that companies are utilizing to interact with customers and promote themselves. CRM technology largely considers RM principles and integrating it strategically with front office (sales and marketing, etc.) and back office (operational aspects, human resources, etc.) functions to deliver a fast-paced and interactive communication between customers and companies (Chen & Popovich, 2003). These interactions can be referred to as "touch points", and such "touch points" could be seen online and offline as demonstrated in Figure 2 (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Figure 2 displays a CRM "ecosystem" concerning the integration of different functions in relation to managing a diverse set of customers with likely

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unique individuality. The build-up of substantial CRM performances is likely to maintain differential advantages and lead to higher firm performance (Wang et al., 2004).
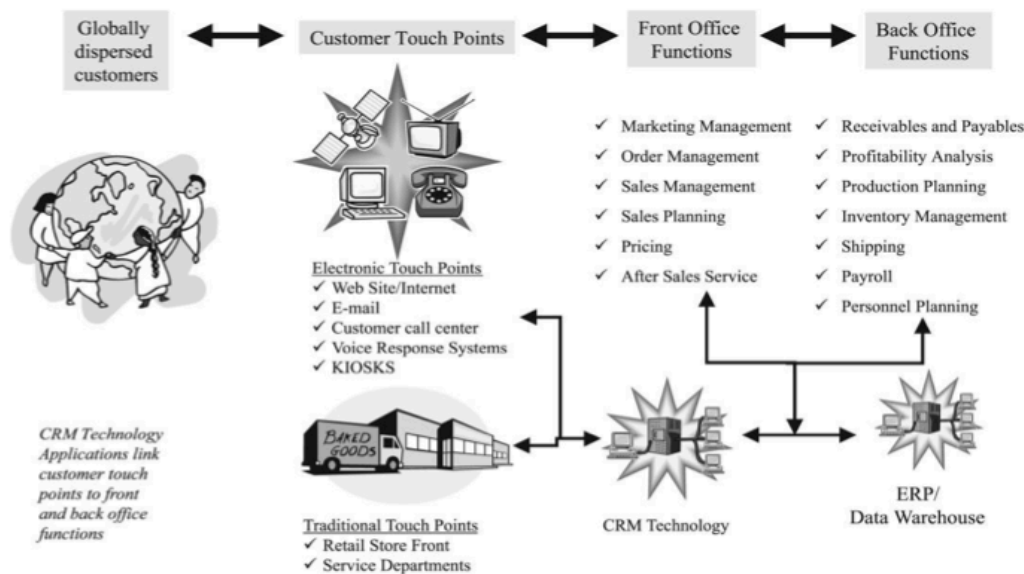
Figure 2 CRM "ecosystem" (Chen & Popovich, 2003)

Moreover, CRM manages and delivers superior customer value that is based on attempts to identify the different dimensions of customers (Wang et al., 2004). The competitive advantage of CRM is prevalent in the modern customer-centric era when customer-value becomes a significant factor in businesses (Wang et al., 2004). Overall CRM can be seen as a movement consolidating customer value by integrating their points of views across all business areas to maintain and develop a high level of service (Karakostas et al., 2005). This is supported by a mixture of strategies, techniques and innovative systems to enhance service with profitable customers whilst managing the cost with less-profitable customers (Tapp et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, despite ongoing research and literature reflecting the importance of CRM, this growing body of knowledge is fragmented with limited empirical studies and different perspectives regarding customer value (Wang et al., 2004; Yim et al., 2004). The definition of CRM is still debated and remains largely equivocal (Tapp et al., 2004). Fundamentally however, CRM is recognized to be cross-functional with a less rigid structure, aiming to develop more direct marketing towards customers (Tapp et al., 2004).

2.2.3   International Student Relationship Management (ISRM)

Mazzarol (1998) emphasizes the nature of service as a key characteristic for services marketing. In the context of HE, the sector is naturally "people-based", and thus crucial to establish and maintain relationships with students. Seeman and O'Hara (2006) also argue that students are customers in HE, considering the investment of time and money one spends for

their experience. However, the identification of customers could be debated. Research study shows that "students can be either considered as customers (with courses as the higher education products) or as products with the employers being the customers" (Conway et al., 1994, p. 31). Moreover, students or alumni could serve as part-time marketers to their alma maters and directly influence prospective students by sharing their experiences in school. Therefore the marketing of HE must be further expanded in a holistic perspective, truly integrating and recognizing the identity of different functions in the recruitment and maintenance of student relationship (Gummesson, 1990). Ultimately, Conway et al. (1994) asserts universities fail to address the complex identity surrounding students- considering the dual roles students may play in the educational sector.

Previous student-university relationships were considerably single-sided as universities largely dictated the content of studies and determining what students preferred (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Calls for change of perspective in the relationship has been raised though, with the identity of students being complemented as consumers as well (Nicholls et al., 1995; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Such shifts of attitudes in viewing students as customers are indicated to provide universities with a competitive advantage in attracting, retaining and serving their customers/students (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). In a different but equally innovative fashion, Kotler and Fox (1985) also consider students as "raw materials" with graduates the finished "product" and potential employers the "customer". These different views concerning the nature of student relationship management indicates the complexity and ambiguity in the roles and identity of students in the eyes of the university. Moreover, various stakeholders are always involved, and part-time marketers such as friend and relatives can also influence student relationships with their university.

From a RM principle, CRM implementation in a university can lead to a student-centric experience (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). Incidentally, CRM potentially impacts student loyalty and emotional attachment to their institution. Putting the student as customer into perspective, the implementation of CRM manages student relationships by placing a relevant system that allow interaction ("touch-points") in several technical fronts including admissions and financial aid (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). As managing relationships become a prime concern for HE institutions, a "customer management" strategy is aligned with recruitment and growth (Tapp et al., 2004). Opportunities for cross-selling of different faculties to the student exists due to an application database where universities could identify, segment and build relationships with students (Tapp et al., 2004).

However, CRM implementation in HE is not without challenges. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) criticized that long-term customer retention can be difficult to achieve due to the nature of higher education products. Similarly, Ivy (2001) argues that marketing strategy for HE should not focus on student loyalty because of low retention rates amongst undergraduate students for postgraduate studies. Furthermore, characteristics of student segments being young and novelty seeking makes it challenging for universities to cross-sell educational services at the same institution regardless of their relationship (Tapp et al., 2004).

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3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

Approaching the research question, a picture of administrators' and international students' perceptions should be given. The study aims to gain knowledge on several designed issues, and a qualitative method has been erected as the main method. By interviewing both Chinese administrators and Swedish students, their points of view will be revealed. Despite the extra time and effort undertaken, a quantitative method has also been integrated as complementary in the form of surveys (Easter et al., 2012). In order to best provide an understanding of the perceptions of Swedish students, both open and closed-ended questions have been planned in a semi-structured method. The final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information indicating that a mixed method has been implemented (Thomas, 2013). Given this approach, statistical and text analysis will be written, but the emphasis remains on the text.

Administrators represent the perspective from the policy-makers. Generally, administrators responsible for international marketing are guided by common internal policy. At this point, it is reasonable that we interviewed only one administrator from each university. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the Ministry for Education issues an overall guide and all public universities share similar perspectives. Large differences could be hardly seen from the public higher education sector, but preferences in accordance with universities' characteristics can be scrutinized. Hence, we selected two public universities according to their relatively distinctive factors, and one Sino-British joint-venture university.

For students, we discovered that individual differences could be more easily observed. We narrowed down the range of Swedish students with a specific focus on Lund University, and further integrate a non-probability sampling method. Despite the focus on one market (Swedish) that reduces the cultural differences amongst interviewees, our 12 interviews can hardly represent the viewpoints from students, and their replies tend to be more personal in nature (Easter et al., 2012). In that case, a survey based on the identified key elements has also been carried out. The purpose is to generate better understanding from Swedish students at Lund University.

3.2 Research Design

Bryman and Bell (2011) coin that five types of research designs can be utilized including the experimental design, cross sectional design, longitudinal design, case study design and comparative design. A comparative study in relation to multiple-case study will be undertaken to seek explanations for similarities and differences. Three cases on universities will independently confirm our propositions and further reveal complementary aspects of the research (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2004). The study involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data from both administrators and students. Through similar questions, perceptions from three different universities can be scrutinized. In terms of Chinese HE, three

case studies focusing on a broader issue generate information allowed for some comparisons between the three universities. Additionally, comparative evaluation will also be carried out between viewpoints from administrators and students. However, one distinct limitation could be our lack of samples being 12 interviews. Generally, if researchers compare more cases the fewer variables can be available (Przeworski, 1987).

The research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims (Easterby et al., 2012). The purpose is to gather views from a sample of administrators and students likely to have different perspectives and experiences. The decision is to interview only one administrator from each of the three-selected Chinese university as case studies, and interview 12 Swedish students from Lund University. We will send a survey to produce generalizations about students by collecting information from samples (Thomas, 2004).

3.2.1   Selection

Creswell (2007) discusses the importance of selecting the appropriate candidates for interviews. Research has been conducted on the basis of a goal-oriented point to select interviewees from both higher education sectors and students. Applying the knowledge gained from the literature review, we decide to concentrate on public and emerging joint-venture universities. E-mails have been sent to the international cooperation or international students management departments at several universities. The efforts result in receiving the responses from administrators in three universities:

(i) Fudan University (FDU) was one of the first universities to accept foreign exchange students since the Communist Revolution, established Nordic center as an exchange platform in 1995 (Fudan, 2015); (ii) Donghua University has an 'Outstanding International Student Scholarship', and established International Cultural Exchange School for the recruitment, cultivation and management of the international students in 2012 (Donghua, 2015); (iii) Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) is a pioneering international based on a partnership between University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong University.

Considering practical constraints, it is desirable to apply a non-probability method by employing the sample that includes every Swedish student we could get (Thomas, 2004). Given the limited timeframe and access, all interviewed and surveyed students are from Lund University. Nonetheless, large sample sizes are not necessarily to ensure that a sample will be representative (Thomas, 2004) and Lund University has been reported as one of the Sweden's most popular student city and a global meeting place (Lund, 2015).

3.3   Data Collection Method

The main theoretical concepts have been introduced in the Literature Review. Applying the frameworks in principle, our interview and survey have been designed to collect relevant insights and data from Swedish students and Chinese administrators. Interviews provide in-depth knowledge pertaining to administrators' and students' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic. We use language data to obtain insights into some social and organizational realities through discovering perceptions (Easterby et al., 2012). Bryman and Bell (2011) also argue that it is essential to conduct both the interview and questionnaire research.

With the intention to utilize administrators' knowledge, semi-structured interviews have been arranged (Thomas, 2013). This gives interviewees the freedom to elaborate and contribute from different angles. Probing questions in the means of follow-up have been asked, and administrators answered the questions in their own terms by providing additional information. The purpose of interviews with administrators is to achieve a clear picture of their perspective, to generate an understanding of their policies and recruitment strategy (Easterby et al., 2012). Considering the geography limitation, we implemented WeChat video (Skype in China) for interviews with three selected administrators (see Appendix B). These interviews lasted for thirty to sixty minutes. Considering geographical limitations, this method of interview could lead to a lack of contextual details. However, interviews have been carried out in both interviews' and interviewers' mother language, which ensures the better understanding of the questions, and enables interviewees to express their viewpoints freely and easily. All three interviews have been recorded and transcribed, which offers opportunity for re-listening. Two interviews in Chinese have been transcribed in Chinese and later translated to English.

To collect viewpoints from Swedish students, 12 face-to-face interviews (see Appendix C) and a survey (Appendix D) have been conducted. In order to explore students' own beliefs and further compare them with administrators' positions, semi-structured interviews have also be employed among students. All interviews were in-depth discourses with open-ended discussion. The choice leaves room for them to elaborate on thoughts and ideas. Turner (2010, p. 756) confirms that, "The open-enedness allows students to contribute as much detailed information as they desire". Interviews are conducted in English, which is the mother language of one author and one university administrator. The main purpose is to better understand the meaning that interviewees attach to issues. The other author observed and asked some questions by adding some uncovered points. Notably, interviewees are Swedish. Despite the high proficiency of English in Sweden (Local, 2013), English is not their first language. During the interviews, they have been encouraged to use the Swedish if they could not find a comparable English word somehow since one interviewer speaks Swedish. All interviews have been recorded, and all of them have been transcribed in English.

The choice of arranging a structured survey stems from the experience that respondents tend to talk for longer to answer open questions, which is immensely time-consuming and adds additional costs. Closed questions are easier to demonstrate the relationship between variables and make comparisons, and questions have been clarified so that interviewers can easily complete (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Participants are required to fill in a survey questionnaire. The design of the follow-up survey is based on some of qualities and answers from the 12

interviews. As a quantitative research method commonly employed in survey research, this method ensures that it is possible to combine the two sets of data, since both these interviews and the survey are proposed to answer the same research question on students' perceptions (Easterby et al., 2012).

3.4   Data Analysis

Both authors conducted the interviews and decided to adopt grounded theory to analyse the data since it is suitable to facilitate theoretical work in less well-researched areas, and most of the collected materials are qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By reviewing collected phrases and words, it is feasible to uncover similarities and compare the differences (Thomas, 2013). The main process of grounded theory can be seen in Appendix E.

To administer qualitative data, we summarized textual materials to statements in a shorter and simpler way. We then categorized data by implementing the technique of coding, as category labels are notable in subtitles of empirical results. Aligning with the research objectives, answers to open-ended questions have been summarized by a category label (Thomas, 2013).

Quantitative data can be summarized in the form of a graph or chart, and single survey question can be presented in each column. The cells contain the values documented for each variable (Thomas, 2013). Four questions have been designed based on the result generalized from interviews. The aim is to scrutinize the importance of these elements. By making patterns, relationships between variables can be explored. Patterns in the data have been illustrated by means of charts (Appendix G). We use pattern-matching method to compare patterns with those that have been predicted from theory.

However, limitations to grounded theory exist. It is difficult to be objective since our analysis is largely based on a sense of context (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When comparing patterns, certain elements in the data may be overlooked.

3.5   Validity and Reliability

The implementation of mixed method increases the validity and generalizability (Easterby et al., 2012). We will illustrate how we aim to achieve internal validity as a particular strength of qualitative research. Our findings align with the developed theoretical ideas. Comparative design is related to multiple case studies. Through the selection and the study of three different Chinese university cases, we generalized a broad issue on international marketing policy in Chinese HE and concentrated on the uniqueness of each case. Nonetheless, the study could hardly be replicated due to the impossibility to 'freeze' a social setting where qualitative data has been collected, whilst the way in which the research has been designed and conducted is replicable.

3.5.1   Question Design Validity and Reliability

We constructed the first draft of interviews and questionnaires collectively. Three pilot tests were conducted with participants who shared similar interests as those to be interviewed or surveyed. The results from these pilot studies will not be collected as the data for discussion. Researchers tend to refine questions by determining if weaknesses (i.e. flaws, limitations) can be seen within the interview design (Turner, 2010). After the pilot, necessary revisions was made. We had to simplify certain questions to make it more answerable so that parts of it would not be ignored. Secondly, some of the interview questions with students are overly descriptive. These overly long questions have been broken down into several shorter ones, which allow us to acquire meaningful answers (Thomas, 2013). Thirdly, phrasing such as "alma mater" was clarified since some of respondents indicated they could not comprehend the phrase. These modifications mentioned-above contribute to a better-designed interview and survey that are likely to yield accurate and reliable data (Easterby et al., 2012).

Moreover, the options in the survey are clearly presented alphabetically. Respondents are asked to rank their preference among several listed elements. The order that options appear in a sequence of questions could influence respondents' answers to it, and they tend to select the one towards the top of the list (Thomas, 2013). The neutrality of the alphabet would reduce the influence.

3.5.2 Interviewing Validity and Reliability

We knew two administrators prior to the thesis, to which Easterby et al. (2012) state that, 'good' data can be required through positive personal engagement. All interviews with Swedish students were also semi-structured face-to-face interviews. We ensured a quiet and comfortable place for meeting interviewees who openly and honestly share information without feeling restricted or uncomfortable (Turner, 2010). At the same time, face-to-face interview method is effective to encourage interviewees in their narration. Through casual gestures and eye contacts, communication tends to be more relaxed. Additionally, since it is notable that interviewers' characteristics, attitudes and behaviour influence the interviewees' responses, a very basic training for controlling the effect has been arranged (Thomas, 2013).

In order to maintain an unambiguous focus and provide maximum benefit to the proposed research study, the interview topic guides were drafted beforehand (see Appendix F). With presupposition, we were guided by these questions that sometimes change as relevant factors become uncovered as interviewees become more comfortable revealing themselves (Jones, 1985). This enables us to tailor some topics according to the responses immediately. With the purpose to follow interesting lines of study and to facilitate an unbroken discussion, there could be some deviation from the sequence. However, we intend to cover all designed points. This makes the data more systematic and encourages comparison (Easterby et al., 2012). Furthermore, applying a laddering down technique, the study required examples to explore interviewees' perspectives of a particular construct. Through such a process, themes contained in topic guides have been easily covered, and crucial insights have been obtained (Thomas, 2013).

4 Empirical Results

4.1 The Case of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)

The interview with Kristy Mattinson, Head of International Student Recruitment and Support at XJTLU, revealed particular insights on the international recruitment strategies of a unique and highly innovative model university in China. As a joint-venture university between Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Liverpool, XJTLU is the first of its kind as an independent Sino-Foreign cooperative university approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education. A cooperative agreement between Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Liverpool was signed in 2004, and the subsequent establishment and approval of XJTLU by the Ministry of Education was in 2005 (XJTLU, 2015). The university is located in Suzhou and was the result of a "match-making" process with a lot of support from the Ministry of Education and local authorities (Mattinson, 2015). In terms of student population growth in the near future, XJTLU is expected to "reach 14,000 by 2019, of whom, 10% to 20% are postgraduate students and another 10% overseas students" (XJTLU, 2015).

The university's curriculum is taught entirely in English except for general and basic courses, an interesting element that is unprecedented in current Chinese higher education sector. Almost 60 degree programs are offered in subjects such as Business, Engineering, Urban planning, and Language & Culture (XJTLU, 2015). Like other Chinese universities, XJTLU has segmented tuition fees differentiating degree seeking, non-degree seeking and visiting students. XJTLU's tuition fees for degree programs are set at 77,000 RMB for local students and 80,000 RMB for international students. Such an amount rivals universities from the United Kingdom and is almost five times more expensive than other Chinese universities (Mattinson, 2015). For non-degree programs such as Chinese Language other summer programs the fee is much lower; 8500 RMB for one semester whilst visiting students are degree seeking from their own university and the credits are transferred. Scholarships are also available to international students both in undergraduate and graduate programs, with roughly 20% of XJTLU international students receiving scholarship (Mattinson, 2015).

4.1.1 International Recruitment Strategies

This pricing strategy undoubtedly characterizes XJTLU, and though being a particularly young, private Sino-British joint-venture university, Mattinson (2015) exclaims, "We've probably got the biggest budget in terms of China for international recruitment- it's a strategic priority." Mattinson (2015) goes on to explain this prioritization of attracting foreign students is not just about the money but also rather for integrating a better academic environment for students:

> *"...I think this is the same for most Chinese universities… [International recruitment] is not about income. There is no shortage of Chinese students who are*

willing to spend. The reason is we want to have a mixed environment… The environment changes with international students. Those who come here aspire for an international experience and we want to achieve a more diverse student population."

Furthermore, this strategic priority for attracting international students is supported by a university-wide network that consolidates resources for an international recruitment office established in 2013 and a developing alumni office (Mattinson, 2015). These services can be considered as "touch points" for interaction and maintaining relationships with students. As Mattinson (2015) indicates:

"We put a lot of effort into student support and engagement. When they [international students] apply we provide a lot of information. We have a team providing international student support and all students receive a welcome guide in early January that answers most questions… There's also a support group via Skype where we answer some questions… For some major countries in the spring period we go back for welcome sessions for students who said they want to come but have not fully committed… This is more of a marketing thing."

Retrospectively, many "touch points" are established even before international students arrive in XJTLU. Part of the recruitment strategy is to actively engage, attract and identify potential students to XJTLU. All of this is evidently student-centric and very much service oriented. As Mattinson (2015) reiterates, student services are a factor in international recruitment:

"In advance we book all their [international students] accommodation, their visas, and we pick them up in the airport. And when they come they come a week in advance where we provide an induction week. Here all the international students are given a local buddy; this worked very well. They're also given a set of induction lessons, workshops, etc. There's also an international lounge where the staff can help them solve any ongoing issues. In general, student services here aren't as developed as the West and this can be a problem. As a whole in China student services aren't up to international standard."

A notable concern for student services is maintaining the well-being of their students whilst the international recruitment office "sells" the well-being of the university. Segmentation occurs again between different target customers or students in terms of recruitment strategies and subtle messages during interactions with prospective students. "For other developing nations like India we talk about our [XJTLU] clean and safe environment. For Europe and the US you don't want to talk so much about being safe but rather about the excitement and the adventure aspects. We talk about Shanghai and its modernity- and of course we talk about the international quality of our programs" (Mattinson, 2015). Furthermore, the international students' physical well being in terms of accommodation is another element Mattinson (2015) emphasizes: "Practically speaking in China the dormitories can be an issues as the conditions are poor. International students would by choice want private rooms, which by default separates them with local students. But now we are also seeing a trend... As Chinese students

become more privileged they are now asking for private rooms too. I cannot make international students rooms stay in those dorms but I can easily make Chinese students stay in private rooms."

4.1.2   Managing International Student Services

Likewise, the university has also opened a China Studies Department to attract more students from the West following a reflection on student records and data. "...All the Americans are enrolled humanities while the European students are enrolled in business or humanities… Students from Asia- India, Indonesia- their parents are like Chinese parents where they want professional degrees like engineering, and I mean business programs are always popular anywhere in the world" (Mattinson, 2015). On the university's part, this integration of data shows an implementation of CRM-based technology that enhances mutual value-creation for students and the university. A sufficient database allows for the international recruitment office to better understand and interact with student customers and subsequently adjust recruitment strategies accordingly. However, there are cases of outliers that don't match the data sets concerning students. For instance, an initially local-targeted course called "English and Finance" actually attracted several overseas students. As Mattinson (2015) puts it, "I don't understand this either; coming to China to learn English is not a strong message. Obviously all our programs are in English, but business, architecture, financial mathematics and computer sciences are popular programs. I mean, international students are really in all our programs."

4.1.3   Challenges in International Recruitment: Policy, Bureaucracy and Infrastructure

Mattinson (2015) also raises a lot of difficulties when recruiting for international students at XJTLU and generally in China. It is suggested that national policies from the Central Government plays a hand in influencing university operations and subsequent recruiting efforts. Though data may indicate European students at XJTLU largely enrol in business and humanities disciplines, most of the university's subjects are in the science and technology areas that are more attractive to neighbouring Asian developing countries due to requirements from the Chinese government (Mattinson, 2015). Furthermore, current policies concerning postgraduate careers in China also hinder the prospect for international graduates to develop a career in China. While students from developing countries would prefer if they could to stay in China while those from developed countries may also prefer to work in multinational corporations in China, immigration and visa is a factor that cannot be ignored (Mattinson, 2015). For companies hiring international staff, it is required for the employee to have not only a Master's degree but also four years' experience. This is, "... A huge challenge for international recruitment because we [Chinese universities] cannot offer much post-graduate career, which is ironic as we all tend to sell China as a good destination for your career. This is a bit contradictory" (Mattinson, 2015).

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Another restriction in terms of foreign recruitment is the rigid bureaucracy largely present in Chinese universities (Mattinson, 2015). For example:

"Most Chinese universities have no idea how to start international recruitment in terms of marketing and branding. They are not given much budget and resources in international recruitment ad they cannot travel outside of China as easily now due to the ongoing anti-corruption campaign. They are very restricted in their operation and their salary level are way too low compared to private companies. Reflectively, the marketing skills in the Chinese higher education sector are in short supply" (Mattinson, 2015).

Indeed, bureaucratic restrictions towards reaching out to foreign markets to establish alumni chapters and overseas offices undermines further international growth of Chinese universities. Commercial offices or a presence in certain key markets would be ideal, and is a widespread strategy present in UK universities. Mattinson (2015) explains:

"What an offshore representative office really is, like the UK universities with offices in China and India, is a university employee based in those countries with no real office- they register a company there and work for you as a consultant. With no office they meet clients in hotels, coffee shops- they pretend they've got an office, but it's just somebody going around meeting parents, students, and setting up events, developing ties with companies."

This strategy, though largely successful in the West however, is not practical particularly in China largely due to different poli-social circumstances. This is a pity nonetheless, especially when Mattinson (2015) points out how a scientific university in Beijing with several hundred Indonesian students would likely double their current intake simply by establishing an office in Jakarta for promotional purposes.

"I don't think they [Chinese universities] will ever do it [set up offshore offices], it is just too complicated in their current environment. You know, setting up consultancies, paying money offshore- sending money out of China isn't easy, there's a lot of bureaucracy involved and regulations. I can already picture somebody saying it's a great idea, but it's too 'mah fan' (麻烦／troublesome). I mean the infrastructure in Chinese universities is not well established for international operations" (Mattinson, 2015).

Despite such bureaucratic restrictions described by Mattinson to be widely hindering international recruitment efforts in China, XJTLU have also shown signs of innovation and flexibility when reaching out to international students. Facebook, Twitter and other online social media whether legal or illegal in China are fully utilized with the university managing official accounts and interacting with potential students, parents and the wider public. Alumni chapters are also established in Shanghai, Beijing, London and Liverpool with the possibility

of adding Jakarta in the near future due to the large number of Indonesian students (Mattinson, 2015).

4.1.4   The Challenge of "Triple Sell"

Before ending the interview, Mattinson (2015) highlights one final aspect crucial to the development of international recruitment in China though it is notably beginning to change. International student recruitment in the West like Britain per say, are likely supported by big infrastructure in the country like the British Council and UK Education. There is a developed network of infrastructure and meta-marketing, meaning one merely has to persuade a student to come to one particular university and not Britain because that message is already developed for you. But this is not the case in China.

> *"When you are trying to persuade a student to come to China, you have got to triple sell. You have to sell your own university, your course, and you have to sell China as a destination for studies and selling China is not well supported with any big infrastructure. The China Scholarship Council does not promote China as a brand at all. So you have to start from a much more difficult place"* (Mattinson, 2015).

Signs of change, however, can be seen. The Ministry of Education and provincial departments of education have realized the importance of promoting China and have begun establishing portals for their provinces and looking into things that sell China positively (Mattinson, 2015). Indeed, the government has realized in some countries the "China brand" has negative connotation and thus they must work to challenge that view, and this may be "A real game changer in terms of international recruitment in China" (Mattinson, 2015).

4.2   The Case of Donghua University (DHU)

The interview with DHU was conducted with Song Wei, Vice Dean of the International Cultural Exchange School. The International Cultural Exchange School is largely responsible for the recruitment, cultivation and management of the international students, indicating the school's desire for internationalization (Song 2015). The School currently has 45 staff to work with student enrolment and management, logistics management, student activities, etc. (Song, 2015). The complex bureaucratic nature of Chinese institutions can be also be seen with DHU holding a separate international cooperation department being responsible for sending visiting scholars/students, and facilitating cooperation with overseas universities. In this case, the two schools strive to complement one another in creating mutual value for the university and the students that come to DHU (Song, 2015).

A wide range of programs and courses are currently available for international students. The list include: 4 undergraduate programs majoring in International Trade, Business Administration, Fashion Design and Environment Design; 4 master's programs majoring in Textile Science & Engineering, Material Science & Engineering, Chemistry Engineering &

Technology and Computer Science & Technology; almost all the doctoral programs; and non-degree programs (Chinese language programs, English language programs, advanced study programs and short-term programs) (Song, 2015).

4.2.1   Student Segmentation

According to Song (2015), no specific attention has been given to different regions in relation to student recruitment. However, when scrutinizing the prospective elements that students look for towards HE institutions, subtle marketing strategies or messages differing from regions can be seen (Song, 2015).

In terms of undergraduate/graduate programs, the main regions DHU focuses are developing regions: Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Yet according to Song (2015), the demand for Chinese language study exists in diverse countries, particularly in Europe and America. In that case, DHU concentrates on cooperation projects with existing institutions in these regions. When it comes to the enrolment among Swedish students, the influence of policies can be seen with priorities being given to certain undergraduate programs that have been regarded as world-famous, namely: Engineering, Chemistry, Physics, and Material Science. To ensure maximal exposure for such programs in the Nordic market, DHU has published advertisements promoting the school and its stronger programs on Norwegian websites (Song, 2015). Bearing a more direct method to approach the potential students, Song have also personally visited Nordic countries, though no specific date was mentioned other than it being a long time ago.

4.2.2   International Recruitment Strategy

Under the direction of Ministry of Education, Song attended the Ministry of Education Work Conference on two-way international marketing, both for importing and exporting education. As for international student enrolment, the Central Department published "Studying in Chinese Plan", indicating that in 2020, international students studying in China should reach 500,000. Since the recent number is only 300,000, a joint effort amongst Chinese agencies and universities remains intact. To strive for this goal, the Ministry of Education has been consistently increasing national scholarships, largely benefiting Chinese universities and overseas students (Song, 2015).

Additionally, Song (2015) explains that the Ministry of Education includes the number of international students as an indicator for Disciplinary Evaluation Index. It is thus impossible to award a discipline, as world-class if no international exchanges exist. Individually, each university has its own policy orientation, but under this context it is not hard to see Chinese universities prioritizing international partnerships. Some universities may be more concerned about its degree programs, whilst some allocate more resources towards attracting international students in non-degree programs (Song, 2015). Characteristics of subjects should also be considered; that is whether they are subjects such as the Sciences that are largely

encouraged by authorities. The internal department settings for international marketing could also be different as well as the allocation of budget and resources (Song, 2015).

4.2.3   Interactive Channels

Song (2015) identifies four main interactive channels that influence student decisions: (a) Recommendation from relatives; (b) Online presence or advertisements web; (c) Cooperation projects; and (d) Overseas agencies.

As cases in point, several selected programs aimed at attracting international students have been endorsed on the Google advertisement column (Song, 2015). In terms of partnerships, through certain projects some exchange students became familiar with DHU via what Song (2015) ambiguously describe as friendly services that aims to make students feel at home, and thus subsequently choose to pursue further education with DHU (Song, 2015). Other than an online presence abroad, DHU has not established overseas office yet. Instead, DHU continues to cooperate with education consulting agencies in other countries, with Song (2015) particularly highlighting Southeast Asia as a strategic growth market.

Furthermore, Song (2015) considers the main channel for communication with students to be telecommunication, email and face-to-face. A "General regulation for the enrolment of students" has been internally and externally regarded as the guiding policy, published with approval from the university administrators as well as relevant government authorities. It is available on the English website. Through this channel, international students are able to locate contact information such as email address and mobile number. Some students would actually choose to visit DHU's Shanghai office before enrolment (Song, 2015).

Song (2015) also indicates there is limited information on Facebook or YouTube since these channels are not available in China. Extra costs are required to be invested if the school wishes access and communicate with students on these platforms, and it was eventually dismissed. Moving offline to scheduling face-to-face meeting with students to promote the school may not be efficient, but according to Song's (2015) experience it proves to be the most effective. The statement from Song (2015) indicates that the possibilities for enrolment would be higher if they can meet potential students individually. The reason has been described as:

> *"Every student is unique and distinctive. They came for us with their various demands. Lots of students found the general information on website and then sent the emails for specific questions. If they did not receive the response exactly as what they expected, they did not send back their feedbacks"* (Song, 2015).

This recognition on the student's uniqueness is in line with principles of RM as it aims to interact and draw personal networks rather than mass webs that fail to register individualism.

4.2.4 International Cooperation

The establishment of a national inter-cooperation centre will allow efficient channels for communication across borders and institutions. DHU also has a research centre in Africa under the guidance of the government. The motivation behind this is that DHU's notable research fields such as textiles and materials will significantly help these countries. DHU has established overseas Confucius Institute and has been selected as a member of the Central African 20 + 20 education cooperation projects by Ministry of Education (Song, 2015).

To seek more opportunities for cooperation, Song as a representative of DHU, attends international HE marketing events every year. In late May, she visited the UK and Ireland together with the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission. She also has the European Association for the Education, the American Education Association Annual Meeting on her agenda this year. As the major markets are Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, she was invited to participate in the Indonesian Education Fair arranged by Ministry of Education at the Deputy Prime Minister level.

The establishment of such centres and exchange projects exhibits the active engagement of DHU via strong support from the government. At the university level, positive feedbacks have been generalized. For instance, Song (2015) delightfully expresses that cooperation is not just about one region but also for wider influence for the school:

> *"It is obvious that the centre, projects and events create wider regional radiation by improving the visibility of DHU. It also plays a great role in enhancing student recruitment... This is mutually beneficial to the school and the region."*

4.2.5 International Student Scholarship

The Ministry of Education of China includes DHU as one of the key universities to accept international students with Chinese Government Scholarships (CSC) and Shanghai Government Scholarships (SGS) (Song, 2015). Scholarship programs are structured for attracting students from Southeast Asia and Africa. Most of their European and American students are paying their tuitions since they could financially support themselves. Song (2015) states that in 2014, DHU accepted 980 international students. At the undergraduate level, solely around 150 students received the CSC and SGS. Less than 10 of 150 master's and 120 doctoral degree candidates paid their tuitions. It is reasonable to conclude that scholarships are mostly awarded in postgraduate programs.

Critically, the uncertain distribution of scholarship illustrates the impact of the government policy. The university administrators are not able to ensure certain targets would receive scholarships with the government having the final say. To some extent, the university could hardly reap remarkable international marketing benefits by offering scholarships. Additionally, these scholarships might influence the enrolment in non-degree programs. Students from

developed nations may feel deterred to study in China at their own expense. Nevertheless, Song (2015) states that the university is glad to see the Central Government paying more attention in attracting overseas students. It is crucial to initially establish relationship with international students, despite that some of them not being targets from the university's perspective. If China becomes well know as a destination for overseas students, the individual university could possibly attract more students who would like to invest their future in China.

4.2.6 Relationship with Students

Song (2015) regards students as, but not limited to, customers. No large difference between "consumers" and "customers" has been discussed. She reiterates that despite that international students are educated at university, she will not identify them as products, and the university delivers a desirable environment and delightful service. She mentions that the university is not like a store providing goods, and they are working to generate international students as a big family. Essentially, the university attempts to create a friendly environment that advocates a culture of shared values (Song, 2015). It is notable that DHU integrates the strategy to set up good international student relationship. The department manages students under different catalogues according to different segmentations (nationality, faculties, etc.). Administrators hope students can find their second homeland here and the principle is providing a *"friendly service"* with the intention to treat students as family members (Song, 2015).

The knowledge regarding China and the connection with Chinese society would be crucial elements when international students start their career given the nation's epic economic rise. Song (2015) believes that no matter where international students will reside in after graduation, they will benefit from the experience studying in DHU.

4.2.7 Establishing Alumni Networks

DHU has a Kenya Alumni Centre and is planning for alumni associations in Laos and South Korea. Obviously, without such association, overseas activities are more difficult to support. In China, DHU invites alumni to formal and informal activities such as international cultural festivals, lectures etc. As Song (2015) explains, "The contacts between alumni will not only leverage their network, but also leave a significant impact on our overseas promotion, creating a win-win situation."

Song's department also has a database management system that aligns with CRM technology. Students are required to fill in online registrations for the applications. Then all information regarding admission, grade, accommodation, activities, student card, will be saved in the system. Student services will support in terms of dormitories, visa, and activities. At the same time, professionals from different faculties will ensure students to feel free to contact them at any time and extend DHU's "touch points".

"We encourage students to arrange their own events, and recruit teachers specialized in music and sports. We want to encourage more interactions between faculty and students... Our student-initiated organization, International Students Association, is well known in China" (Song, 2015).

Song (2015) also raises that DHU offers full financial support on student projects, and a particular success was the student-led newsletter publication: Donghua Students Times. The department received much positive feedback through the newsletter for its support to students (Song, 2015). Nonetheless, it is not suggested that DHU embodies such publications as endorsements: "The main purpose is to allow students to experience more during their stay in China. We hope they can live a better life abroad in China, which will also increase the overall security and stability" (Song, 2015). Various publications are not available on the website, but only upcoming formal and informal events.

4.3   The Case of Nordic Centre, Fudan University (FDU)

Xu (2015) describes the Nordic Centre as a joint cooperation center between Chinese and Nordic Universities. Aimed to be an academic strategic platform for China and Scandinavia, Fudan University and 14 other Nordic universities founded the Centre in 1995. The purpose of the Nordic Centre is to facilitate research co-operation, international student exchange and collaboration with Shanghai-based Nordic companies and national representations.

Currently there are 26 members in Scandinavia. In Sweden higher education institutions include: Lund University, Uppsala University, Karolinska Institute, KTH, Linköping University, Stockholm University, Umeå University, and Gothenburg University. Other members come from Iceland (1 member); Norway (5 members); Denmark (6 members); and Finland (7 members). To some extent, Swedish students are the most important target group due to the initial structuring of the Nordic Centre, which relates to Sino-Swedish government relations (Xu, 2015).

4.3.1   A Regional Strategy

Academic projects in the Nordic region include student and teacher exchange, academic conferences, research cooperation, seminars and campus activities. Chinese and Nordic researchers and academic institutions will also contact the center as a platform to arrange their own projects. The Centre focuses in the areas of technology, education, culture- determined largely by the governments and universities. In collaboration with higher institutions, the Nordic Centre offer courses introducing Scandinavian countries, emphasizing on culture, traditions, society, economy, politic and history (Xu, 2015). Again, this is largely supported by the Chinese government- showcasing the influences and effects of political interests in higher education.

Furthermore, Nordic students will also go to Fudan University in Shanghai to attend lectures with local students (Xu, 2015). In 1999, over 30 students were initially invited, and now the number extends to over 70. Some students will visit the Centre through projects cooperated with member universities, for instance, the Master's program at Lund University in "Economy with a Focus on China". The Centre serves as a bridge between Lund University and Fudan University as it assisted professors and administrators in arranging events during the program's study visit in Shanghai at Fudan University (Xu, 2015).

4.3.2   Managing Student Relationship

The Nordic Centre can be used to lectures too, facilitating interactions between Chinese and Nordic lectors or the students, intellectuals and business people from Europe and Asia that attends the lectures (Xu, 2015). Past events have been arranged for associates of the Nordic Centre to take business visit, meet local business people, and go for cultural sightseeing in Scandinavia and China (Xu, 2015). They not only learn a lot but also experience a unique culture first-hand, all the while fostering relationships between different students and institutions. The scopes of interactions are large, thus increasing accounts for potential part-time marketers for the Centre and Fudan University. Such resources are well noted by Fudan University, and the Centre seeks to maintain such relationships with current and past students (Xu, 2015).

Moreover, social science courses related to political and economic studies, such as "Doing Business in China" are highly popular for Swedish students (Xu, 2015). Other popular programs are Chinese culture, gender studies, and sociology. Besides the social sciences- city planning, urban research and public health are also popular amongst both Chinese and Scandinavian students (Xu, 2015). The Nordic Centre is a unique feature in not only the Chinese HE but also Scandinavia since it connects multiple schools, allowing an integration of resources that creates further value for the student and university alike. "Introduction on Modern China", a highly successful introductory summer course that has been given since 1999, highlights the Centre's continued success in promoting shared growth from two particular regions.

Moreover, Xu (2015) comments that managing student relationships are a priority. Due to socio-political reasons, certain social media such as Facebook are not available but nonetheless the Centre has established channels to maintain connections with students and researchers (Xu, 2015). Such efforts reiterates the Centre's strategic priority to maintain itself as a platform that adds value to all stakeholders, including Fudan University and participating students (Xu, 2015). The relationship can be further enhanced as Xu (2015) remarks, "A number of students come for exchange and then further apply for degree studies after attending some projects or courses."

Contact of former students and associates to the Centre should also be maintained (Xu, 2015). Xu (2015) recognizes that many of students will come to exchange and further apply for degree studies after attending some projects or courses, making the Centre a particular site for

Chinese universities to attract international students. FDU has since created a Facebook group despite the site's inconvenience in China with the hopes of keeping in touch with foreign students and prospective international students (Xu, 2015). Moreover, the Center strives to be the meeting place allowing students and members to establish their network, and maintain relationship with the university they studied abroad in. Xu (2015) reveals that win-win benefits have been reaped through the process:

"I believe the time spent here will not only add value to students but also to universities. The Centre is pioneering and unique. What is happening here is a very positive thing in terms of promoting Fudan University in Nordic countries for students and the academic society alike."

4.4   An Overview of Case Studies: XJTLU, DHU and Nordic Centre at FDU

Overall, the Chinese universities all perceive the recruitment of international students as a strategic priority. As China continues its process of economic reforms and the speed of higher education expansion grows in the East, the amount of Western students will continue to increase. The strategies concerning the marketing process Chinese universities' international recruitment, however, may diversify as seen in the cases of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Donghua University and Fudan University.

As one of China's unique few joint-venture universities, XJTLU's curriculum largely differs from other Chinese universities and acts as a private university dictating much of the allocation of resources. This allows the university to have larger flexibilities in its recruitment practices and targets itself towards affluent local students and international students who are willing to pay a premium for a Chinese university with an English environment. With an International Student office well aware of the internationalization of higher education and its relevant marketing consequences, the rigid bureaucracy preconditioned within Chinese institutions may be a factor that negatively impact XJTLU's attempt to further its recruitment reach overseas. Furthermore, tuition fees rivaling Western universities is a distinct characteristic of XJTLU and the impact of the university being less than a decade old may be large as well for students desiring a university heritage.

Compared to XJTLU, DHU represents a more traditional and well-regarded scientific university in China. To a larger extent their international recruitment strategies shadow the national policies (Song, 2015) and thus more bureaucratic in nature concerning attracting foreign students. Like XJTLU, DHU places international students as an important recruitment target and certain measures are in placed reflecting such internal policies. The *friendly service*, though largely ambiguous on detailed practicalities, embodies DHU's desire to promote and sustain the university as an international-friendly university welcoming foreign students to feel at home. Services are in placed largely to respond to whatever concerns international students may have- ultimately a particular student-oriented and tailored service. DHU's focus

and reputation in the scientific areas also means appeal is strengthened towards a more focused group of students in the area of science and technical expertise. Moreover, DHU's overseas reach are also targeting developing countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, indicating a strong desire to be a more active regional player in its process of internationalization.

Last but not least, FDU's Nordic Centre signifies an important cooperation between various Scandinavian institutions and one of China's leading universities. FDU is the only Chinese university to have any significant presence in the Nordic region, and further cooperation has encouraged a full Master's degree program with a focus on China being incorporated in the Lund School of Economics and Management. The Nordic Centre's unique presence in Scandinavia serves as rare "touch point" for Chinese higher education in the West, an important feature that would be crucial to encouraging and promoting Chinese universities internationally.

4.5   A View from Sweden: Students' Decisive Elements and Factors in Higher Education

On the basis of grounded theory, interviews with 12 students were performed in a semi-structured format that allowed interviewers and interviewees a relaxed and comfortable environment to openly discuss their perspectives on studying abroad and China. For the purpose of anonymity, interviewees are marked alphabetically from A to L and range from undergraduate to graduate students (see Appendix C). Furthermore, a survey result (see Appendix G) with over 40 respondents is included in our discussion on Swedish student's perspectives on the different elements of attractions for Chinese higher education.

4.5.1   Self-Identification

Older students (25+ years old) appear to be more inclined to view themselves as more than just students, i.e., customers or consumers (limited to sample pool interviews), whilst younger students are more comfortable regarding themselves solely as students. Tuition fee is a major factor in the discussion on self-identity, largely due to Sweden's generous welfare system where schooling is free for Swedes at home. Indeed, though the welfare system is supported by tax schemes, the symbolic meaning of not having to pay tuition fee appears to have a large effect on Swedish students concerning their self-identity:

> "I mean it would feel awkward thinking I'm a customer or consumer of some product when I'm not really paying for it. Well, technically our taxes are, but symbolically, tuition is free here. If I were to invest my time and looks for schools abroad, I think it might be a bit different. I would have gone out of my way and would probably need some financial planning." (Student B)

Furthermore, the interlink between the tuition fee and the identity of customer is further suggested by Student K. He reflects that he not only invests in his time, he puts himself into the hands of professionals, whom are the teachers and professors and so on:

> *"...So I think that the relation is in the form that we are customers, especially if there is tuition involved… And, I mean, we're also investing on ourselves and the school's degree ultimately- our time and money."*

In relation, respondents highlight that teachers should also view the students not only as subjects to a class but customers. However, the dynamics of student-teacher relationships are spoken in ambiguity and complexity regarding the nature of students as customers. For several interviewees, the notion of perpetuating a label of students as customers is uncomfortable, even if they would hesitate to deny their student identity as customers:

> *"...No, we're not entirely customers. I mean I would say we are still students foremost. Maybe we are customers to an extent too I guess. But I mean even if we are, it seems awkward to say I'm a customer of a school rather than a student. We may be customers, but I feel this is something that is a little ambiguous… I cannot really say to a professor I'm your customer even though it is true"* (Student D);

> *"Yeah, we are customers to an extent. We don't pay tuition fees in Sweden but then it's supported by all taxpayers. It [customer identity] would be even more obvious if we paid tuition fees… But then it seems morally wrong to emphasize ourselves being customers over student"* (Student F).

Overall the identity of student-customer is unclear, but recognition between interrelations of student being simultaneously customers exists. Moreover, some students add that they can recommend the university and improve the reputation of the university. At this point, they tend to view themselves as ambassadors in addition to their roles as students. Student C comments that, "It's often we talk to others after a good experience with a brand, so we share these fond experiences and this is pretty much free promotion". Some of these statements identical to Student C are evidently marketing oriented, expressing awareness of students on their potential roles as part-time marketers in relationship with their university.

Nevertheless, most of the interviewed younger students tend to maintain their current relationship with their university as only students. Through our interviews most of the younger Swedish students demonstrate less awareness on the international marketization of the HE sector. When asked if they will change their minds if they are required to pay tuition, a majority of them confirm that they will definitely demand more from the university, feeling it uncomfortable to see themselves as customers before students. In particular, some require more information about their programs by asking questions like "How many courses can I take?"; "What will be included?"; "Can I even get free books?" As a noteworthy case in point, since the welfare system finances the higher education sector in Sweden, Student H will not mind if he gets a day off due to the bad physical condition of his teacher. However, if he had

invested both his time and tuition fee, he will have a stronger intention to ask for a makeup lesson.

As for two respondents, their self-identification as students are imposed even with tuition paid. They still insist that they are only students, and they illustrate their examples as Student G pays the fee for guitar courses, and Student B studies language with a certain payment. Furthermore, Student F proposes an alternative perspective: "We often joke that students are more like products. After three to four years' education, the university will finish their products and ship them out everywhere." This innovative view integrates the view of students with that of a product, and future employers as the prospective clients. Yet other interviewees do not support this view, and as Student F later reflects, "I don't know if we really are products, because at the end of the day our studies is still up to us… the degree of our efforts."

4.5.2   Attractive Elements of Studying Abroad: China

Considering the selection of potential subjects to study abroad, half of our interviewees select the preferred subjects in relation to their majors. Notably several students have admitted the attraction of studying in China is mostly related to its economical rise and increasing influence in the world. According to the interviews and survey results, business related subjects in China appear to be a topic of interest for Swedish students. Student E cites:

> *"My background is in business, I would prefer to do something related to that. And it would be even better if I could do business courses related to China, its culture and so forth. So a subject or course like Chinese Business Management would be great… China's economic economical rise is much documented… I think this would be a main attraction for most Swedish students to go to China."*

Moreover, students appear to pay attention to the additional things they almost get for free from just studying abroad. All students perceive studying abroad as a promising investment since they gain more culturally experience, such as insights into a new language and maybe even a chance to learn that new language. Several students also expect to acquire self-confidence and self-motivation. As Student A puts it, "I would like to learn a new culture and a new language… It would be challenging, but self-fulfilling too. It's rewarding to get distinctive perspectives during the study period overseas."

The notion of acquiring "Good relationship with new friends and classmates" has been mentioned several times by interviewees, not only in terms of cultural exchange but also for establishing a wider network for a better career. Again, the prospects of China's economic rise are related: "I hope I can get a better job because Chinese is used in many different work areas… Personally I think it's always good to know different languages to get a deeper understanding of different cultures and the world in its whole. Particularly, if I would like to develop in China for maybe Swedish companies, my established network will help me a lot." (Student I)

The reason why they opt for China is not limited to culture but also socio-economical reasons. As Student C shares his story for going on exchange to Southeast Asia:

> *"When I went to Southeast Asia I went because I knew their economy was growing like crazy. There's definitely something going on there and I wanted to see for myself. That would be the same case for China. A lot of companies are operating in China for example, so learning how to manage business in that cultural setting would be a great advantage for anyone who wants an international career."*

Retrospectively, as the world economy continues to integrate in an unprecedented level, the rapid growth of developing economies will continue to garner further interest from the West. For students recognizing this trend and willing to pursue an international career, Asia as a destination for exchange and further studies will continue to gain further attention. Ranging from cultural or humanities to business and management related programs, the attraction of China as a higher education destination reflects an increasing consensus amongst students regarding China as a source of influence in the world economy.

Additionally the elements of: good reputation, global rankings, geography, career connections, tuition and facilities- have been repeatedly considered as key factors via interviews. A question on the survey was designed following such inputs, and later illustrates that most students admit they will choose a Chinese university with a good reputation. To some extent, the reputation of a university is linked with high global ranking. The geography factor is also crucial. Student H reveals that location is related to the size, internationalism, and growth of the region: "I think I would be more comfortable studying in larger cosmopolitan cities… Places like Shanghai… It's [cities] are more modern and would be more ideal for foreigners… it's [cities] where the economy is focused too- the larger cities like Copenhagen and Malmo."

It is notable that modern facilities have also been listed as a factor. Considering that China is still a developing country with limited modern facilities, students also take this element into consideration. A preference for private rooms can be seen from Student C's point of view:

> *"I studied on exchange in Southeast Asia before and the reputation and how good of a setup they have for international exchange program was important. Like how did they treat the international students was important. Facilities would also be important. I didn't go to a particular university in Japan because they could only provide shared rooms, but honestly it wasn't the largest factor. It's not the end of the world I mean. It was a factor though."*

4.5.3   Channels for Information: Student Preferences

Concerning the sources for information, students perceive the university website as biased in interviews but the survey also indicates it as a popular channel for information. This is likely due to the practical limitation where attempt to acquire certain university data is usually most

feasible online. A lack of formal channels as "touch points" for students mean that the university website, though perceived biased by some students, will remain an important channel for information. However, it is also notable that some interviewees will give priority to informal channels such as personal recommendations from friends and families if possible:

"Well I would probably discuss it with somebody, a faculty member or classmate perhaps? Something online like Liveatlund (student portal) may be helpful, I mean if it [information] were there I would probably notice. If not I could talk to someone and they would point me to these sites eventually" (Student D).

The rhetoric behind the perception of bias within university website's is due to it's ever-positive portrayal of the institution. University Websites are considered a "touch point" within the marketing process, and not entirely a viable nor neutral third party influencing a student's decision. Recommendations from friends and families on the other hand could testify some descriptions and illustrate some realities too. Emotional ties and personal attachment from individuals and family members were also discussed as a potential factor influencing their decision to study overseas. Student L made his decision partly because his father graduated from the same university he now attends. He states, "It is all about trust and personal attachment… I trust the academic system here and I feel like I belong here".

While it is no doubt desirable to receive personal recommendations, the more details the universities are exhibiting via different channels the better a relationship can be built with students:

"I would prefer to talk to a lot of people in the international office in my university before I make my decision. If they have a Facebook page or a blog, that would be great. Something that shows the student life would be a plus. Information by students are always great, it's a good perspective in the sense that it's a richer view" (Student L).

Furthermore, concerns regarding consultants or third party agents are mentioned, indicating a desire for a channel to directly communicate with universities. The process of decision-making is sequential with high information. The attention has been focused on the efficiency for collecting information. As Student J remarks:

"Would that be hiring a consultant just to work and figure stuff out for you? I can't really say from experience for such an agency. So it's hard to say from which way they could facilitate. I mean if it comes to paperwork, they might facilitate to make the application process smoother. Is that would they do? Okay. If there were an office I could turn to it would be helpful. I mean if I talked to university administrators or professors, they would probably only know one or two universities. But if there was an agency, or an office that worked with these institutions, I mean it would be more effective overall."

Nonetheless, direct channels of communications between students and universities abroad are lacking largely due to low exposure on the latter's part. Students deliver the concern that there is a low level of active recruitment from Chinese universities, and applications to study overseas largely depend on students' incentives:

"I would say it's largely inactive for universities abroad to recruit. In my own experience, it's largely dependent on the student I think. It's really up to students to find the right channels... To be honest since it's not a priority right now for me so I haven't really looked into any of those channels myself. I feel this is the same for most students" (Student K).

Looking closely at the incentives, interviewed students report perception for studying preferably in Chinese universities that have existing partnership with the current school due to practicalities (i.e. credit transfers, application process): "It just makes more sense to go to a school where credits could be transferred… I feel more secure to" (Student J).

4.5.4   Nature of Higher Education Relationship

In terms of connecting with one's alma mater as alumni, both informal and formal contacts (touch points) have been scrutinized. The use of online medias (CRM technology) has been emphasized as a crucial point to maintaining alumni relationships with the university.

From our interviews, viewpoints concerning the nature of relationships in higher education can be loosely divided into two categories: informal and formal. Informal contacts and relationships are those between classmates and other friends. All interviewees emphasize that it is crucial to stay in touch with them, since they shared a lot of memories and they have both invested towards the same institution. Student L states the importance of maintaining close ties with one's friend and classmates post-graduation: "They might be helpful for your career in the long-term perhaps… Who knows? Friends we meet in university could last a long time". As for maintaining relationships with the university and administrators (professors, administrative staffs), nearly all of the respondents would prefer more a formal contact. Student F claims that: "...Like I don't think I would engage in too much activities after graduation with the university per say. It would be nice if there were some activities perhaps but for me personally it doesn't have to be monthly or even annually." In terms of the desired channel for communication, widespread formal applications online such as LinkedIn have been repeatedly mentioned as a desirable platform. Aligning with this, Student H points out that "Facebook won't be my style for instance in my communication with the university. A LinkedIn group or something like that is more appropriate for my career after graduating."

Additionally, Student C and G mention that with closer relationships with individual students they would invest more to maintain their relationship. "Probably call them, or text them more. Get-togethers would be more often than others"(Student G). It is obvious that social media is a big facilitator, and it's natural to use it as an online medium. Student A explains, "Online social media would perhaps be even more important if I were to study in China, given the

geographical circumstances. To have Internet connections as we move around would be important."

Overall, these students view any type of networking as a good investment. In terms of the diverse geographic features, networks would even impact more, particularly, if they would want to stay for further education or start their career aboard. Student G agrees that "if you're going to do further education you may want to go back. Or maybe you would want to recommend your university to others too, so you would be impacting others."

5 Analysis

5.1 Closing the Empirical Gap - Implementing CRM

The implementation of CRM into the international recruitment strategies of XJTLU, DHU and FDU is expected to further enhance the school's appeal towards international students. To some extent, certain front office and back office functions supporting various touch points between the university and student exists. However, the respondents from Swedish students have suggested that more effort could be made to aligning a CRM model with the principles of RM. Crucially, student perspectives are crucial to CRM as the model seeks to identify the multiple dimensions of customers (Wang et al., 2004).

Foremost, participating respondents indicate a "Good reputation in their respective subject" and "High global ranking" as key elements of attraction for studying abroad. Retrospectively, the two criterias largely go hand-in-hand. In this essence, the century old and internationally ranked FDU are clearly better positioned to attract foreign students whilst DHU focus on scientific subjects may be better suited targeting students in engineering or science disciplines. XJTLU, on the other hand, being such a young university will have to do much more in attracting and connecting with prospective students. This is also reflected by XJTLU having one of China's largest budgets for international recruitment (Mattinson, 2015).

All students from the interviews have also spoken of collecting information online, demonstrating a strong necessity for universities to have a presence online for interaction with students. The university website serving as a major tool for student recruitment, or a in essence a "touch point" is thoroughly recognized throughout the three cases. Retrospectively, CRM technology can be a sequence of "touch points" that allows an integration of different points of views across business areas to maintain interaction and high quality service (Karakostas et al., 2005; TDWI Industry Study, 2000). From the surveys, Swedish students responded to address university websites as a major channel to understand respective institutions. A more in-depth conversation with students however reveal an inclined view of understandable positive bias of information content that promotes the university on their official website. Nonetheless, due to a lack of formal channels online, the university website and its content remains a crucial element of attraction.

Informal channels, however, prove to be even more complex in nature due to China's restrictions on certain websites that are popular abroad. While WeChat, Weibo and other social media tools are extremely popular in China, cultural and socio-political differences mean not necessarily the same applications are used everywhere. In all three case studies, the school's recruitment teams have made efforts to establish a presence in social media websites such as Facebook though one school (DHU) also admitted the difficulties in operating and maintaining the account due to its ban in China. For a private institution such as XJTLU, the school has purchased a VPN to bypass such restrictions to access Facebook and other academic sites such as Google Scholar, though the administrator noted the irony in operating

on banned websites (Mattinson, 2015). Overall, informal channels online are widely available due to the presence of part-time marketers but formal channels are largely limited due to a lack of established infrastructure promoting Chinese higher education online (Gummesson, 1991). University websites and direct e-mails are almost the only formal interactions available for students - reflecting survey respondents and interviewees extensive use of university websites.

Furthermore, informal channels relating to marketing higher education is a crucial element in attracting international students. Personal recommendation are reflected by interviewees as an important influence in their decision process, meaning institutions must look further into the role of part-time marketers. Current students, alumni and all those associated with the school could all serve as part-time marketers prospective students, indicating the importance for the university to maintain a positive relationship with various stakeholders and not just students. Ultimately, a mixture of strategies, techniques and innovative systems should be installed akin to CRM, utilizing all resources available (Tapp et al., 2004).

Whilst substantial efforts have been made by all three universities to attract international students, the impact of current strategies are largely unfelt by Swedish students in one of Sweden's largest university due to a lack of convenient "touch points" of interactions. A lack of locating Scandinavia as a strategic priority for attracting foreign students by the Chinese government also carries some weight. An overwhelming majority of interviewees supported by the survey responds that recruiting activities by Chinese universities and other overseas universities are almost non-existent. Exchange programs and degree programs abroad are available, but this information is not actively advertised and thus largely dependent on students to find themselves. Needless to say, the lack of established formal and informal channels and "touch points" of interactions between Chinese university and the students of Lund reflect a great loss of prospective students to study in China.

Moreover, several interviewees mention the importance of having modern facilities and other international student services as key elements to attractive Chinese universities. Physical presence concerning overseas offices and modern facilities are important touch points that assures prospective students and current students that the university is well positioned to make their studies in China a positive experience. Indeed, DHU's Song (2015) remarks that the best way to attract a student is for them to see first-hand the university campus and convincing them they belong in a university that recognizes their individualism and uniqueness. The campus tours, though not necessarily efficient, create a highly interactive experience that could enhance the student's personal feeling and attachment towards the surroundings. Other intangible touch points are largely off-line supported by back-office functions.

For student services, several interviewees have exclaimed it to be an important element when considering studying abroad. For XJTLU, front-office and back-office functions are sometimes loosely defined between actively recruiting students to maintaining the well-being of students during their time in China. However, as Mattinson (2015) admits, this could

sometimes be difficult as international students may not be satisfy with only general student services widely offered to local Chinese students. In the case of DHU, the *friendly services* are back-office functions or CRM "touch points" that serve to maintain a positive relationship between the school and the international student during his or her time in China and beyond. This process is largely value adding for both parts, and is well worth the investment of the university.

Additionally, partnership and tuition fees are other factors mentioned by interviewees. The former factor can be understood as related to convenience; partner schools allows the exchange and information access largely transparent and clear. The latter is closely related to the socioeconomic surroundings of Sweden being a social welfare state where tuition is free. The identity of students and customer or a hybrid of both should be a particular interest for the three universities as they maintain student satisfaction an important part of foreign recruitment, especially considering tuition is not free in China. In CRM terms, the return on investment has to be felt by students who pay tuition in order for it to be a mutual value-adding experience. The school earns a student's tuition by offering him or her something they value in return- in the long run the relationship between the institution and alumni is strengthened thus simultaneously promoting the brand of the program. Ultimately, a recognized program of excellence is mutually beneficial for both the university and the student. While the larger geographical locations desired for partnerships may be guided by the Chinese authorities, the exact partnering schools should be actively pursued by Chinese universities. With HE going through internationalization around the globe, it should be reasonable to expect institutions eager to comply with a mutual value-creating partnership.

5.2   Contextualizing the CRM model to HE

Finally, special attention is made towards the rise of CRM technology seen in the three cases. All three universities have gone out of their way to bypass local restrictions on reach out to international students. This is an example of CRM technology being integrated into international student relationship marketing, signifying the universities realize the importance of seeing each social media user interacting with the school as a potential customer. Questions could be raised and answered directly, bypassing any agents along the way.

The result and analysis can be incorporated into the CRM model. Therefore, a preliminary model, ISRM that can be used for both the international student recruitment and ancillary service environs, has been contextualized (refer to figure 3). This study illustrates the suitability of ISRM model as a means of drafting international students' recruitment strategies, enhancing relationships with prospective and current students and ultimately creates a mutual value-adding experience between the university and students. The model depicts how the determinants of relationship management within higher education sectors may lead to organisational performance changes. Relevant administrators are recommended to scrutinize ISRM elements as a matter of priority. Nonetheless, more information from multiple universities should be collected in order for certain specific determinants to be identified. This

model could be further developed and enhanced continuously with a larger study involving more international students besides Swedish students.
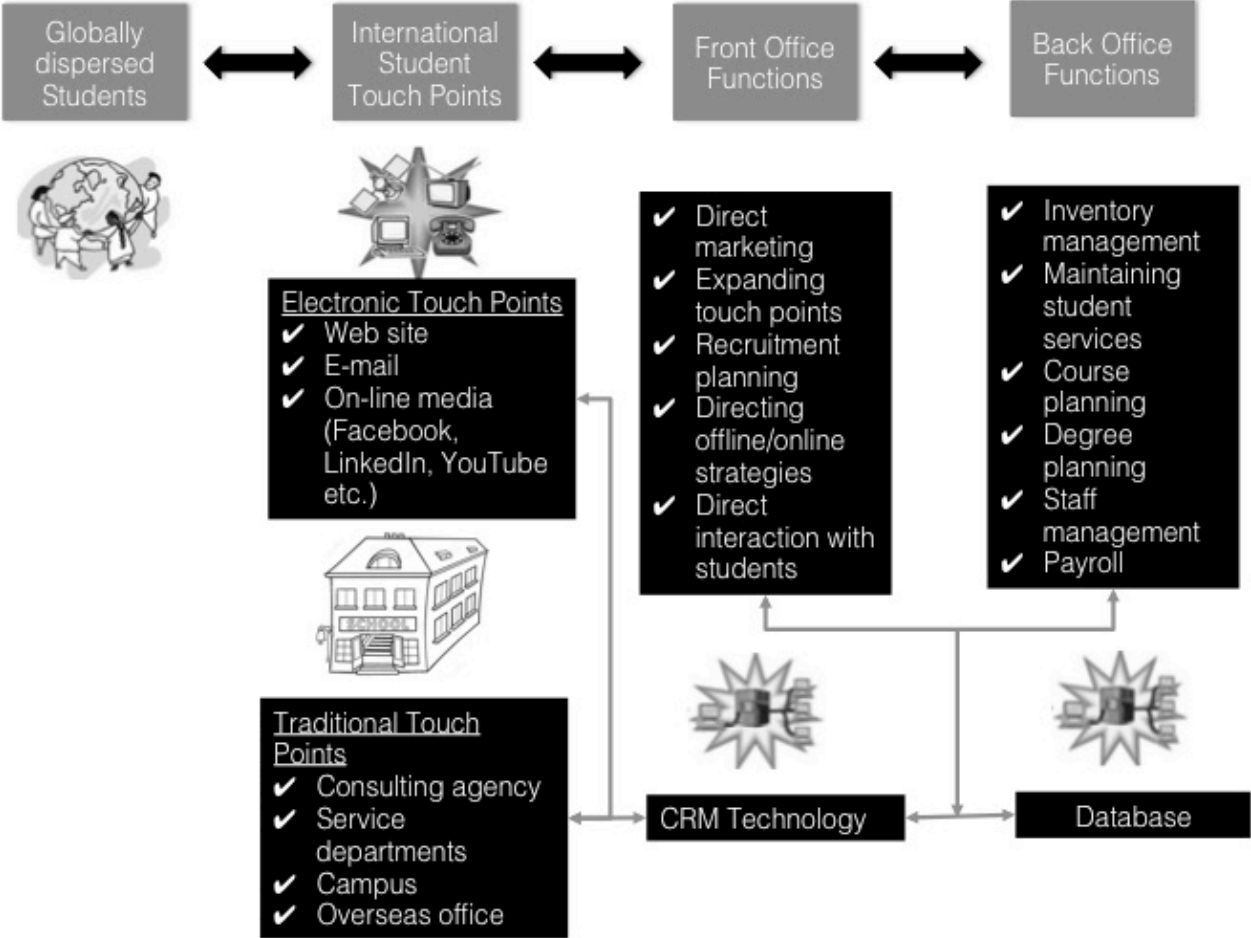

Figure 3 International Student Relationship Management (ISRM) Model

6 Discussion

6.1 Revisiting Literature Review & Comparing Analysis

This section of the thesis briefly revisits the current literature on international higher education and the growth of RM and CRM. Foremost, there is a notable trend in the marketization of higher education sector. From our analysis, the administrators from the three universities are discussing recruitment strategies by implementing marketing methods, such as segmentation techniques (different regions, subjects, etc.), marketing tools (online endorsement, websites, etc.). Marketing strategies targeting a specific region of students can be seen, and a heavy emphasis on university branding can be seen. Secondly, political influences in the three cases can be observed, ranging from creation of XJTLU to FDU's Nordic Centre and DHU's focus on the African region. As seen from the cases, Chinese universities are seeing more active recruitment in Southeast Asia and Africa compared to Europe and the North America due to heavy support and guidance from the Central Government.

Overall, Chinese universities in our cases have paid attention to internationalization and considers it a strategic priority. All universities from our cases have allocated resources for a unique department regarding international student services and recruitment. Meanwhile, DHU have two departments concerning international students- one for incoming students and the regarding exchange programs overseas for local students. FDU even has a sub-department or platform (Nordic center) established for particular targets. Additionally, students regard studying abroad as a valuable investment, and tend to further pursue international education if given the chance under reasonable circumstances. Due to globalization (increased university partnerships) and the rise of the Internet, information on overseas universities can be easily found, and cross-border mobility of students will continue in the short and long run.

In terms of higher education transformation in China, the process for decentralization can be seen as each university has its unique policy for international recruitment and management of foreign students. Additionally, Chinese higher education is increasingly becoming a global player. Numbers of international students are increasing every year according to the statistics provided by interviewed universities. Swedish students from our interviews also consider China as an increasingly attractive destination due to its dramatic economic growth and sometimes exotically portrayed culture. Furthermore, cooperation or joint-venture projects such as XJTLU and educational events (i.e. education conferences, exhibitions) will continue to have significant implications for the international higher education sector. Regional centres have been established (i.e. Nordic Centre), representing a knowledge-based economic-value exchange that contributes to the global economy. In the long term, the Chinese government will likely continue to promote its higher education sector in the international market by issuing various scholarships and implementing policies such as "Studying in China Plan" from DHU.

Furthermore, both students and administrators have confirmed marketing value is created via interactions between these networks of relationships. This is in line with RM literature that concentrates on a shared-value-creation relationship. The necessities of developing closer ties with students are recognized by all three universities in our cases. The view of the student as ambassadors additionally illustrates their potential role as part-time marketers and the proposed hybrid view of the student-customer.

In retrospect, CRM and its relationship management with an emphasis on retaining and developing existing relationship, fits the Chinese higher education environment. CRM emphasizes uniqueness of students and the maintenance of long-term relationship, and strategies aligning to this principle can be seen with universities establishing "touch points" to interact with individual students throughout the recruitment process. The tendency to maintain and develop a high level of service has also been noted in our analysis, especially concerning the identity of the student-customer. The values of students are also largely based on identifying the different dimensions that contributes to the value of the university. This is ultimately a mutual-value adding process where both stakeholders are involved. Notably, databases about students have been established in FDU and DHU to further understand their student-customers in an example of implementing CRM technology.

Moreover, the study demonstrates the debate on the identification of students: either as customers or students. The preference can be reported as a hybrid of both, with all interviewees recognizing the identity of "customer" in addition to their role as a student especially when tuition is involved. Meanwhile, a student-centric experience, such as international student services and the so-called friendly service in DHU is identified as a priority in our case studies. All three universities have mentioned the desire to create a better learning environment within their respective campuses, and such messages are being delivered via different "touch points" during recruitment. Such interactions are aligned with RM principles, and with the universities recognizing the importance of seeing each prospective as unique individuals, more efforts will be placed in the future to implement CRM-related strategies into practice.

Ultimately, the notions of emotional attachment and strategic "touch-points" enhancing international student recruitment are also notable in the research. The emotionally uncertainty of many interviewees' responses concerning their self-identification illustrates the complexity of student-university relationships. Even with increased "touch points" to recruit new students, customer retention in the form of students staying in their current schools can be difficult to achieve due to the nature of higher education products and its limitations (i.e. limited degrees).

6.2 Recommendation to Policy-makers and Administrators

Recommendations are suggested to further enhance the model of ISRM and principles of RM into international student management and recruitment. In both front and back-office

functions, additional "touch points", especially in physical terms are greatly needed to attract more Swedish students from Lund to go to China. Other than FDU's Nordic Centre, neither DHU nor XJTLU have much a presence in Scandinavia. Establishing anything similar to the Nordic Centre platform would be difficult in the short-term, and emulating the success of it would likely take some time and even longer with the necessary support from the Ministry of Education from China and its equivalence in Scandinavia.

A more feasible option may be to carry on cultural exchanges between universities and for certain administrators to visit Nordic universities to promote their institution in China. Such personal interactions build relationships and this effort of personal contact may pay off in the long run as the school's representative is able to market their university individually and extensively in person. Even so, with the bureaucratic nature in the Chinese higher education sector, sending officials to promote universities may even prove to be difficult. Thus more allocation of internal resources must be made towards marketing purposes and establish further partnerships overseas to create "touch points" that students will find convenient.

Furthermore, the marketing efforts by XJTLU, FDU and DU will be greatly enhanced and supported by better meta-infrastructure from the Chinese authorities. While there are governmental scholarships that attract international students, a consolidated marketing effort to market "China" as a brand is strongly necessary. The China Scholarship Fund, for instance, largely ignores any marketing and solely focuses on assessing the profiles of potential scholarship recipients. If the government can move to assert a more active role in branding China overseas, universities such as the ones from our cases could use their resources to merely promote their university.

Establishing overseas "touch points" should also be a strategic priority, though for traditional universities like FDU and DU this is largely overshadowed by national interest that dictates most institutions' outward policies. For instance, DU's emphasis of African recruiting efforts are as Song (2015) exclaims, largely government supported and led. This is a practical limitation that Chinese universities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education will all have to face, thus garnering the support of authorities in the respective university's plan for foreign recruitment is vital to its successful implementation. Likewise, the focus on scientific subjects in universities are largely government led, and will remain so unless the Central Government decides otherwise. Creating hybrid courses between culture and business that has been proven popular in the Nordic Centre and XJTLU and indicated by student interviewees is strongly advised.

As front-office "touch points" overseas may be difficult to realize, establishing "touch points" on campuses are a viable priority that would promote the university. From our interviews, a student is recognized to value personal recommendations, and when one's experience is largely positive at his or her alma mater, the role of a part-time marketer becomes very existent. In the long-term, marketing strategies integrating CRM and CRM technology will allow universities to better understand, attract, and subsequent remain in touch with their student-customers.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Research Aims and Objectives

Considering recent projection of a significant shift in HE development and expansion in the east, the study was focusing on China as a viable and interesting test bench. The interaction between Chinese universities and Swedish students illustrated the challenges and opportunities derived from the internationalization of HE. It is imperative that policy-makers and administrators equip themselves with the marketing methods and information to effectively respond to the challenges and capture the opportunities.

The aim of this research was to (i) understand how Chinese universities attempt to attract foreign students by (ii) bridging literature on higher education with relationship marketing theory and (iii) develop a model making it possible to identify determinants that have an influence on university international promotion in the long-term.

Accounting for the aim, the thesis has resolved these research questions, namely (i) how Chinese university administrators and (ii) Swedish students perceived the institution's policy(ies) in attracting foreign students, and (iii) how Chinese universities could improve their foreign students' admission policy(ies) by applying models of relationship marketing. Findings and analysis of the initial study comprising XJTLU, DHU, and FDU have been outlined. Follow-up interviews and a survey involving Swedish students within LU were employed to capture the data on prospective students. The empirical gap between these two perceptions has been bridged through analysis. The study further introduced and illustrated the potential of conceptualizing CRM into HE sectors. The new model ISRM was expected to function as an input for policy-makers and administrators formulating their strategic policies.

7.2 Practical Implications

The results of this research indicate that "touch points" are the critical areas that administrators need to focus upon. CRM and other principles of RM will become more prevalent as the international HE sector becomes increasingly competitive. The recruitment of students will be far and wide in terms of global reach, and with a shift towards East in terms of HE expansion, Chinese universities will see themselves implementing CRM strategies related to the individualization of students. The ability to interact with each unique prospective student will largely determine the success of international student recruitment. Also the contextualized ISRM model could be adapted and adopted by the wider HE sectors.

While certain interviewees remain unconvinced of their role as customers, almost all agree to self-identifying themselves as a hybrid form of student-customer. In this perspective, the customer identity is ambiguous as some students refuse to fully openly identify themselves as such. Nonetheless, Chinese administrators from the case studies have also shared some similar values in their perspectives towards international students. The "student" identity is continuously emphasized, and should continue be a focal point in CRM implementation in

higher education. That being said, a student-centric focus in relation to customer-centric is necessary for university administrators to create greater mutual-value in student recruitment and managing student services.

Overall, the impressions of student recruitment from overseas universities are low from our interviewees. CRM technology ultimately can improve such performances and is a more practical option concerning the rigid bureaucracy that limits Chinese administrator's foreign recruitment. The bridge between Chinese universities and Swedish students can be supported via CRM technology "touch points" to attract the latter towards physical "touch points" such as campus visits. Interactions between administrators and students must be prioritized. Advertising oneself online may be a genuine option and greater cooperation between Sino universities and abroad should be focused. Social media and online "real time" tools such as Skype and WeChat could be utilized by administrators to recognize potential students on an individual basis. Partnerships and a presence overseas would have to be a strategic priority as well. The Nordic Centre of FDU is a current model of establishing a "touch point" in Scandinavia and subsequently promoting Chinese higher education and attracting Nordic students and scholar to China. Other universities without such vast resources could attempt to partner with select institutions and enhance exchange programs. XJTLU, with its strong financial resource as a private university, would likely internationalize via such route.

Furthermore, Swedish students have listed tuition-fees as a major factor in their decisions to study abroad and in China. This is largely due to Sweden's welfare system and its subsequent benefits of having free education. Studying abroad may feel like a much larger investment compared to the more convenient choice of remaining in Sweden. Likewise, XJTLU with a tuition fee rivaling those of UK universities will continue to find it difficult to compete in the international market. However, XJTLU's competitive advantage would be their all-English curriculum, attracting a target group of students who desire to have a more Western-oriented curriculum in the Far East. Stronger scholarship programs and funding would help all three schools appeal towards Swedish students.

7.3   Future Research

It remains to be seen if a larger study in the future will confirm or expand the influence of ISRM across the HE sector. The implementation of ISRM and the degree of its impact in CRM, for instance increasing traditional and online "touch points" in school fairs and online websites could be further researched. CRM technology has seen growth in other industries such as retail, and the continued growth for CRM in the HE sector is expected as newer generations become increasingly Internet-engaged.

Nonetheless, the value of traditional marketing- that is "face-to-face" recruitment- is suggested to hold a strong place in international student recruitment. Our interviews with a handful of Swedish students suggests most still look to personal recommendations and value conversations with university administrators. This means the context of CRM should not be limited to technology, and further research on RM in traditional "touch points" for

recruitment, admissions and student services would provide a greater understanding on the student-university relationship.

Moreover, as the tides turn the East in higher education expansion, this paper places an emphasis on understanding Chinese universities' international recruitment strategies and the perspectives of Swedish students on studying abroad and in China. Future research could thus contribute towards understanding CRM in a different HE setting.

In conclusion, we note that this thesis is a small, preliminary attempt to understanding the implementation of CRM in HE - specifically in ISRM. There are ultimately many factors that may influence CRM performance. It would be therefore be useful for future research to integrate and test them within ISRM in the future. Similarly, future research could look into increasing the current sample sizes from several universities and research students from different nationalities for a larger picture in the international higher education sector.

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Appendix A International student enrolment in China 2013

Total international student enrolment: **356,499**

Do these counts of international students reflect both public and private institutions? Yes

Top 10 sending places of origin and percentage of total international student enrolment:

Rank	Place of Origin	Number of Students	Percent of Total
1	Korea	63,029	17.7%
2	United States	25,312	7.1%
3	Thailand	20,106	5.6%
4	Japan	17,226	4.8%
5	Russia	15,918	4.5%
6	Indonesia	13,492	3.8%
7	Viet Nam	12,799	3.6%
8	India	11,781	3.3%
9	Kazakhstan	11,165	3.1%
10	Pakistan	10,941	3.1%
	All Others	154,730	43.4%

Total number of international students from all places of origin by field of study:

Rank	Field of Study	Number of Students	Percent of Total
1	Humanities	205,030	57.5%
2	Business and Management	49,816	14.0%
3	Health Professions	48,703	13.7%
4	Engineering	27,369	7.7%
5	Social Sciences	8,183	2.3%
6	Education	7,267	2.0%
7	Fine and Applied Arts	5,096	1.4%
8	Mathematics and Computer Sciences	3,175	0.9%
9	Agriculture	1,860	0.5%

Total number of international students from all places of origin by academic levels:

Academic Levels	Number of Students	Percent of Total
Undergraduate Degree/Qualification International Students	107,288	30.1%
Undergraduate Study Abroad/Non-award study International Students	187,242	52.5%
(Post-)Graduate Degree/Qualification International Students	40,602	11.4%
(Post-)Graduate Study Abroad/Non-award study International Students	21,367	6.0%

Source: China Scholarship Council (CSC), 2015

Appendix B Interviews with administrators

Interviewee	Status	Format	Length	Recording
Kirsty Mattinson, Head of International Student Recruitment and Support (ISRS), XJTLU	Conducted via Wechat video 2015/5/12	Semi-structured	56min31sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
Song Wei, Vice Dean of International Cultural Exchange School, DHU	Conducted via Wechat video 2015/5/6	Semi-structured	38min06sec	Audio recorded, transcribed, and translated to English
Yvonne Xu, Assistant to Director at Foreign Affairs Office and responsible for the Nordic Centre contact, FDU	Conducted via Wechat video 2015/5/9	Semi-structured	29min02sec	Audio recorded, transcribed, and translated to English

Appendix C: Interviews with students

Interviewee	Age	Status	Format	Length	Recording
A	25-30	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/10	Semi-structured	30min20sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
B	20-25	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/11	Semi-structured	23min13sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
C	25-30	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/15	Semi-structured	1hour09min06sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
D	20-25	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/15	Semi-structured	23min01sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
E	20-25	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	24min12sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
F	20-25	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	16min44sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
G	20-25	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	17min32sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
H	20-25	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	33min19sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
I	20-25	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	07min09sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
J	25-30	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	10min28sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
K	25-30	Face-to-face interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	14min30sec	Audio recorded and transcribed
L	20-25	Face-to-face Interviewed 2015/5/16	Semi-structured	13min49sec	Audio recorded and transcribed

Appendix D: Survey with students

1. If you would apply to a Chinese university, through what channels would you prefer to collect information? (1 being the most preferred)
 Agencies
 Online news/publications
 Personal recommendations
 Social media platforms
 University's official website

2. What key elements do you look for when applying to a Chinese university? (1 being the most important)
 Chinese career connections
 Geography (i.e., weather and location of city)
 Good reputation in your subject
 High global ranking
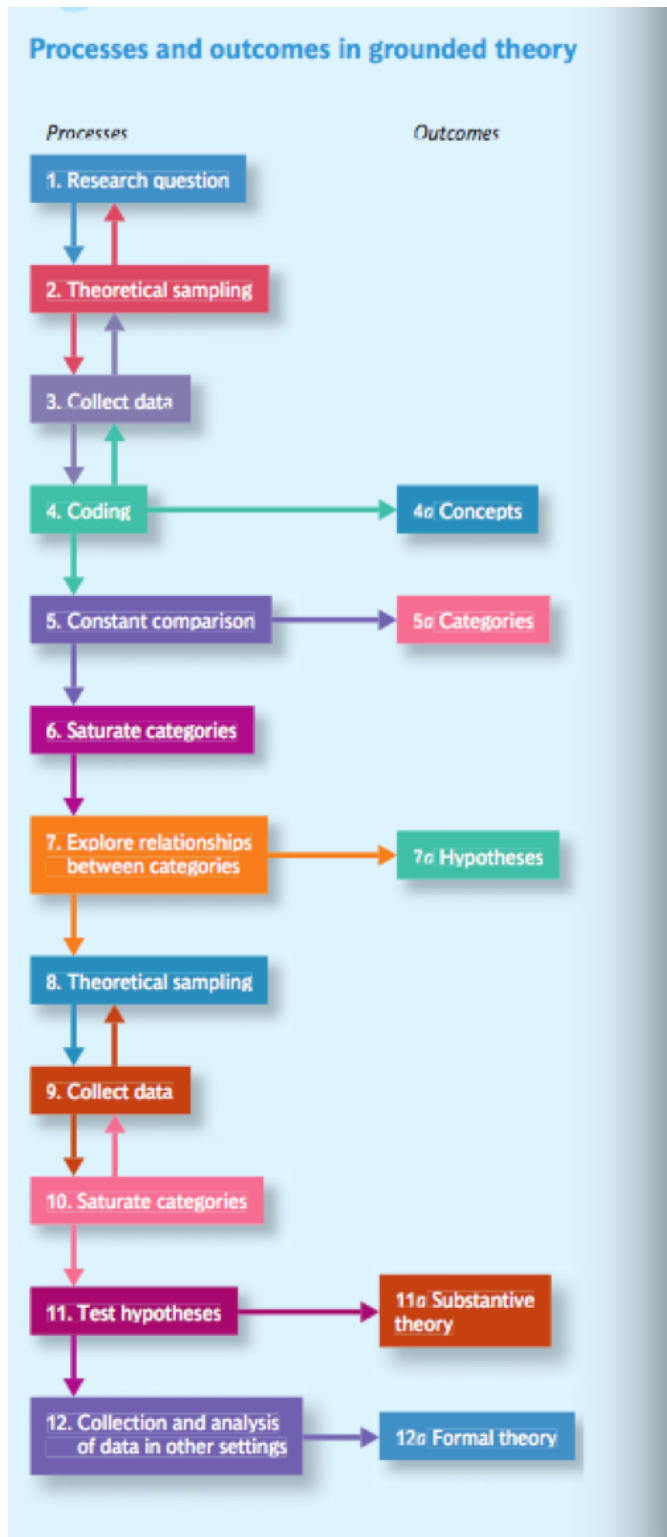 Low tuition fee or scholarship
 Modern facilities

3. What subjects would you be most interested in studying at a Chinese university? (1 being the most interested)
 Agriculture
 Business and management
 Education
 Engineering
 Fine and applied arts
 Health and medicine
 Humanities (e.g. language, anthropology)
 Mathematics & computer science
 Social sciences (e.g. economics, political science, geography)

4. Through which channel or platform would you prefer to remain in touch with your alma mater? (1 being the most preferred)
 Alumni events (e.g. Gatherings, workshops or celebrations)
 Online professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn)
 Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WeChat)
 Subscription to online publications (e.g. magazines or newsletters)
 Subscription to printed publications (e.g. magazines or newsletters)

Appendix E: Grounded Theory

Processes and outcomes in grounded theory

Processes | Outcomes

1. Research question

2. Theoretical sampling

3. Collect data

4. Coding → 4a Concepts

5. Constant comparison → 5a Categories

6. Saturate categories

7. Explore relationships between categories → 7a Hypotheses

8. Theoretical sampling

9. Collect data

10. Saturate categories

11. Test hypotheses → 11a Substantive theory

12. Collection and analysis of data in other settings → 12a Formal theory

(Source: Bryman & Bell, 2012)

Appendix F: Interview topic guides

Administrators

Intro

1. What is your existing policy concerning the recruitment of international students?

2. Are the basis of your existing policy or strategy aligned with the central government or largely influenced internally by the university?

3. Are there segmentations regarding the recruitment of international students, specifically perhaps Western Europe / (Scandinavian students)?

Main part

1. The role of international students at your university can be seen as: products/consumers/customers… or all? (Ask about relationship between university and international students)

2. How do you perceive international student satisfaction during their studies in China, and after?

3. Does your university have a an existing database concerning the profiling and information about current and past international students? If it exists, how is it managed?

4. What are your perceived key elements that attracts international students to study in China, and specifically your university?
   a. If the university has a special relationship concerning Swedish students, e.g. 'Swedish Centers', the question can be extended to what are the perceived attractive elements of Chinese institutions for Swedish students?

5. How do you perceive the time spent at your university in China a value-adding process for both the institution and the international student in the immediate and the long-term future?

The end

1. Concerning after international students' time in China, how do you integrate feedback for future improvements and how is the relationship between alumni's and the university maintained in the long-term?

2. Does you actively engage in retaining international students to pursue further education at your university? If yes, are there specific policy(ies) that are aimed at international students?

Students

1. Have you ever been to China? If yes, what was the purpose of your visit?

2. How old are you?

Main Part

1. In your perspective in terms of higher education, what key elements do you look for in an institution? What elements will deter you from applying for studies? How important to you are personal recommendations on universities? Or other forms of encouragement (perhaps online rankings, news clips, etc.)?

2. How important is studying abroad would you consider in your current studies? Why and why not?

3. To what extent do you think studying abroad in China will affect your studies and career?

4. What major would you like to study in China (specialization)?

The end

1. How important/Would you like to remain in close contact with your alma mater? (Alumni groups and events, etc)

2. Do you think the proximity of remaining in touch with alumni's from your alma mater will greatly develop your overall personal growth?

3. Would you consider to pursue your further studies (grad or post grad) at your current institution? Why and why not? (retaining current students)

4. How important is personal attachment to your alma mater? Why and why not?
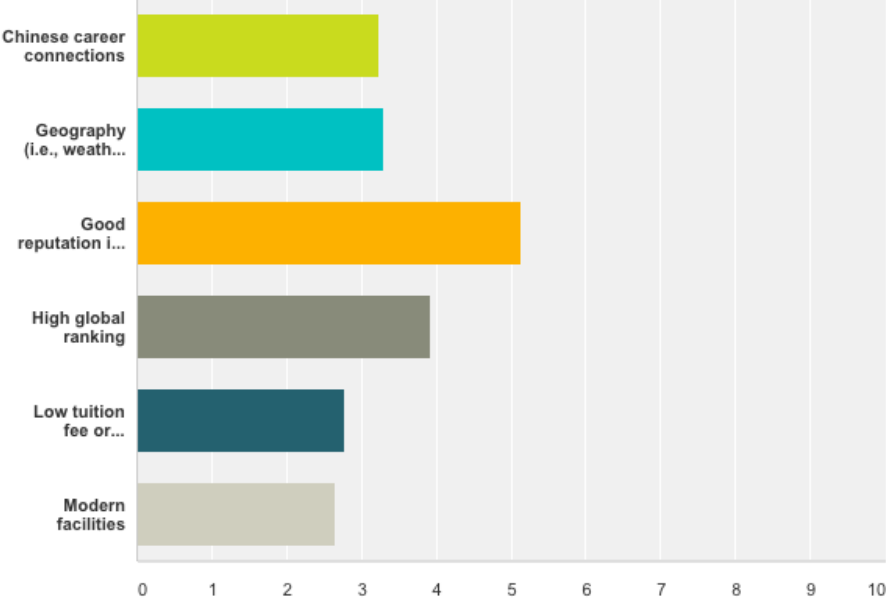
Appendix G: Survey with students

If you would apply to a Chinese university, through what channels would you prefer to collect information? (1 being the most preferred)
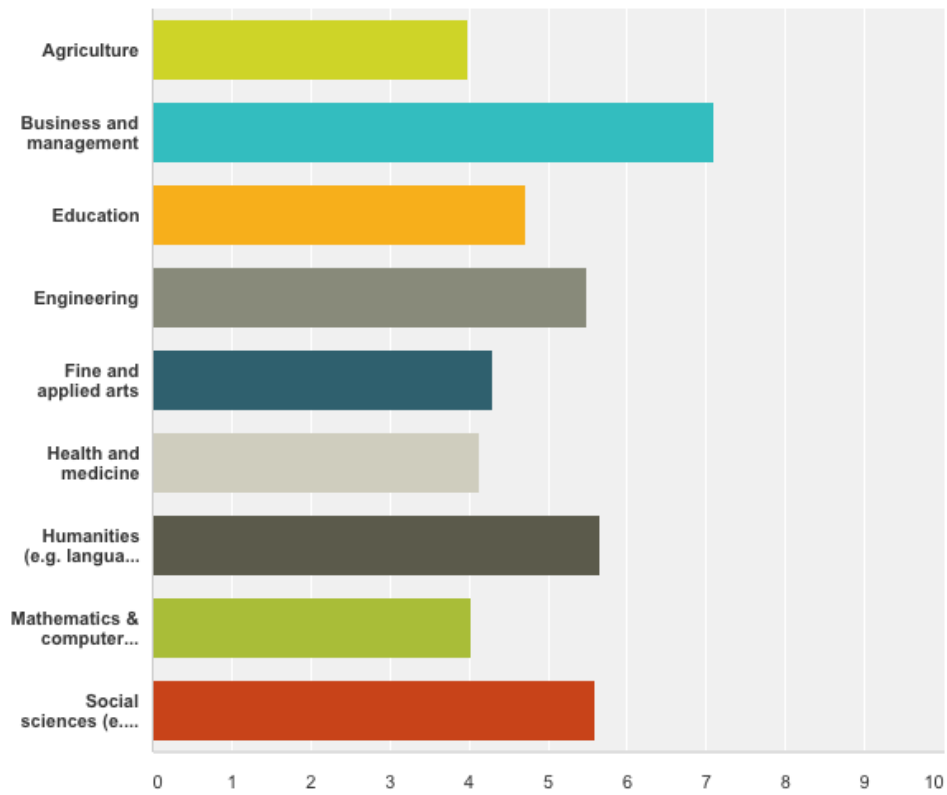
Answered: 40   Skipped: 0
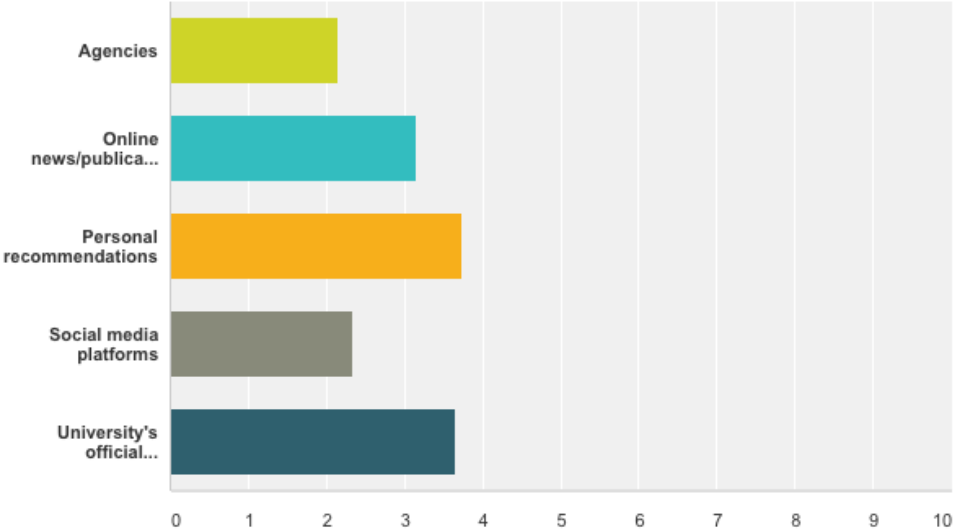
What key elements do you look for when applying to a Chinese university? (1 being the most important)

Answered: 40   Skipped: 0

What subjects would you be most interested in studying at a Chinese university? (1 being the most interested)

Answered: 40   Skipped: 0

Subject	Value
Agriculture	~3.8
Business and management	~7.0
Education	~4.6
Engineering	~5.4
Fine and applied arts	~4.2
Health and medicine	~4.0
Humanities (e.g. langua...)	~5.6
Mathematics & computer...	~4.0
Social sciences (e....)	~5.5

Through which channel or platform would you prefer to remain in touch with your alma mater? (1 being the most preferred)

Answered: 39   Skipped: 1

Channel	Value
Alumni events (e.g....)	~3.6
Online professional...	~3.8
Social media (e.g. Facebo...)	~3.6
Subscription to online...	~2.5
Subscription to printed...	~1.6