Status of International Study Tours in China:

The students' and parents' perspectives.

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Abstract

International study tours have a place in both the tourism and education markets. In recent years, international short-term study tours have become increasingly popular in China. A large number of students choose to participate in international study tours during the winter and summer vacations each year, and China's study tour market is growing. China's overseas study tour market has a bright future, and a deeper understanding of the current development of the market helps promote the rapid and healthy development of the industry. The Chinese education system has always allowed children to absorb as much knowledge and learning as possible, but knowledge and insights are two different concepts. Knowledge can be acquired through learning and rote memorisation in the classroom, but insights gained through travelling is different. It relates to wisdom, an understanding of the world, and to expanding children's minds. Children's personal insights cannot be obtained only through classroom knowledge, but more through their experience and understanding of real life.

Study tours have a history dating back hundreds of years in Europe and America. More recently, China's study tour industry has entered a stage of vigorous development with the overall improvement of economic and social standards. Chinese parents choose to let their children participate in international study tours. They hope that exposure to different educational background experiences, different customs and habits, educational forms, and different international student communications will inspire students to gain a broader international vision and passion for the future. From another perspective, in the contemporary globalisation process, people's visions determine their future development directions. For students, a memorable life experience in their adolescence stage can provide them with a positive attitude, which can stimulate their thinking about life, and help clarify their future goals and life orientation.

This research aims to understand the reasons for the popularity of short-term international study tours with Chinese nationals, and the views of parents and students

on study tours. The research used mixed research methods. Quantitative methods were used to analyse demographic characteristics, and qualitative methods were used to analyse 180 comments on study tours by students participating in international study tours, and their parents' perspectives. The data were extracted from the New Oriental International Study Tour Organisation (NOISTO) website and official WeChat accounts in different regions. These comments provide researchers with key insights into the study tour experience. Thematic analysis was used to discover the reasons for the popularity of study tours, the attractive factors of the destination countries for students and parents, and the benefits of study tours. The research findings showed the different characteristics and family backgrounds of the students participating in the study tours sharing similar views. Their parents valued the education provided by the study tours, and supported their children to join again. They believed that through study tours, their children gained benefits, such as increased knowledge, improved English proficiency, and the development of a broader international vision.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

CBIE   Canadian Bureau for International Education

DBRC   Design-Based Research Collective

NOISTO   New Oriental International Study Tour Organisation

Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in acknowledgement), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Signed:

Date: 06/11/2020

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to China's study tours industry

As China's outbound tourism developed, the form and content of tourism gradually diversified away from predominantly sightseeing tours (Jia & Wang, 2019). Tourism products for various market segments began to develop and expand to include parent-child tours, honeymoon tours, photography tours, exhibition tours, immigration tours, and school tours were introduced (Evans et al., 2008). As part of this rapid development of niche tourism markets, study tours began to attract the attention of various institutions, from traditional tourism companies and training and education institutions, to online platforms, who quickly developed their own market. Lee (2019) observed that as the number of students studying abroad was increasing year by year, and the age of studying abroad was becoming younger, the demand in the international study tour market was also growing.

According to Zhao (2012), the education system in China has always expected children to absorb as much knowledge as possible. However, knowledge and insight are two different concepts. Liu (2016) argued that knowledge can be obtained through learning and rote memorisation in a classroom, but insight cannot. Insight relates to wisdom, the understanding of the world, and the expanding minds of children (Shen, 2020). Slotkin et al. (2012) also pointed out that an excellent vision cannot be obtained through books alone, but also through experiences and activities that help develop an understanding of the real world. In addition, if there is no diversified learning and growth space apart from the knowledge acquired in a classroom, there will be few advantages in the overall growth process of children (Li, 2019). Many parents now want to help their children have a more worldly vision, by learning through study tours. In the formation stage of a child's outlook on the world, study tours give them the opportunity to see, to feel, and to understand the world through their own eyes, allowing them to gain insights beyond classroom knowledge, by experiencing and understanding the real world.

1.1.1 An overview of China's study tour market development

In China, consumers are restricted by cultural traditions, educational concepts, and their stage of economic development, according to Liu and Wang (2018). Many parents are still in the wait-and-see stage before they accept the new modern education model of studying and travelling abroad. Lee (2019) mentioned that although the study tour market in first-tier cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, has gradually developed, it has not yet become popularised nationwide. However, Liu (2016) observed that in recent years, parents' awareness of study tours in China has continued to increase. Study tours have gradually become a keyway for parents to offer an international education to their children (Liu, 2016). With encouragement from various national policies and the development of the market, China's international study tours have the potential to develop rapidly in the future.

1.1.2 The growing market of study tours

Li (2019) estimated that the annual growth in student numbers in the study tour market was around 20%, with 1.05 million national study tours in 2018, and 1.3 million in 2019. In terms of the sources of study tours, consumers in first-tier cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou encountered study tours earlier and had a higher penetration rate (Li, 2019). These are the main tourist clusters in the study tour market. However, in non-first-tier cities in China, parents have become increasingly interested in study tours (Jia & Wang, 2019). Study tours and study abroad markets are often closely related, so with an already large study abroad market, there is clearly significant potential in China, for international study tours.

1.1.3 Study tours and young students

Duan and Zhang (2020) observed that with the increasing awareness of international study tours in the Chinese market, more and more students and parents are aware of the importance and necessity of participating in them. In recent years, elementary and middle school students have become the main market for China's overseas study tour market. According to the statistics from Li (2019), primary students and younger (under 12 years

old) account for 60%, middle schools (13 -15 years old) account for 25%, high schools (16 -18 years old) account for 10%, and universities (over 18 years old) account for 5%. There is a clear trend for younger students to participate in study tours. Shen (2020) considered that in many families, especially in first-tier cities, the care of children becomes a big problem during winter and summer vacations. Parents have to work, and there is often no-one available to help them take care of the children. International study tours can provide new opportunities for their children's development during these times.

1.2 Research aim and objectives

Study tours were selected as the topic of this research. The aim was to explore the reasons for the popularity of international study tours for young students in China, with a focus on the students' and parents' perspectives on, and attitudes to the study tours. Therefore, two questions were developed for this research:

1. What are the reasons for the popularity of study tours for young students in China?
2. What are the students' and parents' attitudes to, and perspectives on study tours?

In order to explore the development of study tours in China more clearly and in-depth, the following research objectives were established:

Objective 1: To identify the characteristics and needs of the students from China participating in the study tours; and

Objective 2: To identify the priorities for parents and students when choosing a destination country.

1.3 Significance of the research

From the literature review, it was found that there are few studies on overseas study tours from China. Most focus on tourism marketing, education, studying abroad, and outbound travel, but to my knowledge, there are no in-depth studies from the perspective of students and parents. The lack of systematic, theoretical research provides no support for the fast-developing industry in the future, and nor can it make up for the problems arising in the

development of the industry, affecting the effectiveness of youth study tours. Therefore, it is important to analyse and evaluate students' and parents' perspectives on overseas study tours.

As a new form of learning with the increasing internationalisation of education, the development of and research into Chinese youth study tours need to be improved. The public has noticed and is increasingly exposed to this form of learning, and recognises the development and benefits this form of learning brings to children. However, no research has been conducted on the reasons for the rise of study tours, the way study tours are run, and the longer-term benefits of study tours, so there is no cohesive theory relating to this topic. Therefore, this research, through synthesising, integrating and analysing the related literature, and analysing the comments of students and parents extracted from public resources, attempts to facilitate a systematic discussion and explanation of the theoretical basis for Chinese children's participation in study tours.

1.4 Research design

This research employs three steps. The first step was to search for academic articles related to study tours. The theories in academic articles helped provide theoretical support for the background and popularisation of study tours. In the second stage, thorough screening and analysis of the comments submitted by students and parents on related study tour websites and social media, produced the research findings. The selected data were from publicly available online information, such as the official websites of the study tour organisers, and official WeChat (Chinese social media platform) accounts. In the third stage, the results of the academic literature analysis of the first stage and the thematical analysis of the second stage were combined so research conclusions could be generated.

1.5 Research methods

This research used mixed research methods, as they are flexible (Kimmons & Johnstun, 2019). According to Grey (2018), mixed research methods can help answer different types

of research questions, using different data collection or data analysis methods. As described by Petrovic et al. (2017), qualitative data can be quantitatively analysed and presented, and quantitative data can be used to support a qualitative data analysis (Johnson, 2017).

In this research, a quantitative data analysis was used to analyse the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study tours, and those of their parents. A qualitative study was made of comments by parents and students, and an in-depth understanding was provided using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis, in order to meet the objectives of the study. Quantitative data analysis methods were used to determine the characteristics of Chinese students participating in international study tours, and qualitative data analysis methods were used to explore the factors relating to the students and their parents in relation to choosing study destinations and evaluating the study tours.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation focuses on international study tours in China, and is presented in six chapters. First, in the introduction chapter, the overview and structure of this paper were explained. The second chapter reviews and discusses the literature related to study tours, and discusses the historical background of study tours, the types and purposes of the tours, the influence of globalisation, and the future development of study tours. The next chapter explains the research methodology and philosophy underpinning the research, including the ontology, epistemology, and paradigm. It also describes the mixed methods used in the quantitative and qualitative research. Chapter four presents the quantitative and qualitative findings from analysing the data collected from online reviews. The following chapter is the discussion section, which discusses the arguments reviewed in the literature, in combination with the findings. Finally, chapter six synthesises the entire research results, reviews the research objectives, discusses the significance and implications of the research, and suggests future research on study tours.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

For many decades, school groups have actively participated in experiences beyond the classroom (Williams & Best, 2014). Recently, Manspeaker and Wallace (2019) mentioned that school-led tourism has been expanded to include international school trips, especially to developed (Western) countries. Miao and Harris (2012) noticed that these trips focused on foreign language and cultural learning. However, Mills et al. (2010) explained that study tours have now diversified, and include various topics related to the curriculum and extracurricular activities. The purpose of this research is to explore the Chinese parents' and students' perspectives on study tours and provide recommendations for study tours along with guidance for future research.

Before undertaking the research, it was necessary to complete a critical review of the current literature. This chapter reviews and analyses the literature on study tours, presenting it in six sections. The first section introduces study tours by comparing the historical background of study tours in Asian countries with those in Europe and America. The second section analyses definitions of study tours, and the third section overviews the different types, characteristics, and modes of study tours. The fourth section provides a detailed introduction to the purpose of study tours in terms of exploring different worlds, experiencing different teaching methods, cultivating innovative ability and diversified thinking, and improving cross-cultural communication and self-management skills. The fifth section reveals the influence of the process of globalisation on the development of study tours, and the sixth section reviews their future development.

2.2 The history of educational study tours

International research on student study tours has a long history, and the research content is relatively rich. In the West, such as European countries and the United States of America (US), and in developed Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, schools organise various study tours for elementary and middle school students. However, the

6

social backgrounds, educational philosophies, and economic development levels in countries vary, so there are many differences in the focuses of study tour research (Dejordy et al., 2019). Therefore, using the history of different countries as a starting point, it is helpful to review research on study tours from different countries.

2.2.1 Asian countries

In Japan, study tours are called "study trips." This activity, which originated in 1946, is one of the most distinctive activities in Japanese schools, and has developed into a part of the Japanese culture (Grimes-MacLellan, 2005). According to Zhang (2015), the earliest school trip in Japan was in 1886. Students from Tochigi Prefecture High School were led by teachers to visit the "Second Industrial Exposition" held in Ueno, Tokyo. The term "study trip" was named in this event, which attracted much attention and was published on 20th April 1887, in the *Dainippon Education Magazine No. 54*.

As a relatively affluent country in Asia, Japan has made remarkable progress in the practice and research of study tours (Akande, 2010). The requirements for study tours in Japan vary according to the educational stage of the students. Nakano's (2010) research found that more than 90% of elementary, middle, and high schools in Japan, organise school trips each year. Japanese elementary schools carry out study tours, most of which are after the end of the semester, and the scope of the tours is mostly limited to the areas surrounding the school (Nakano, 2010). At the junior high school stage, the geographical scope of study tours is extended to the whole country (Martinsen, 2010), and in high school, the school often organises students to carry out study trips abroad (Wang, 2010). Research has found that as early as 1998, 800 schools in Japan organised overseas study tours, with up to 150,000 students participating (Zhang, 2015). School trips, as part of Japanese elementary, middle, and high school education, have long been included in the national education system.

Zhang (2015) argued that international study tours are an industry that has emerged in China over recent decades. However, the concept of a study tour has a long history in China. Liu and Wang (2018) pointed out that since ancient times, the Chinese people have

attached great importance to the role of study tours in the cultivation of personality and the formation of knowledge. Chen and Lu (2019) claimed that many ancient scholars used study tours as a way to expand their cultural knowledge and enrich their life experience. Confucius led his disciples to travel around the world to enhance their knowledge, cultivate their qualities, and broaden their horizons (Chen & Lu, 2019). "Reading thousands of books, travelling thousands of miles" is an ancient educational motto that has been passed down through every household in China.

The main purpose of a study tour is to allow students to not only have a pleasant experience during travel, but more importantly, gain knowledge that cannot be learned in a classroom or from books (Zhang, 2015). Chen and Isa (2003) mentioned that research has focused on learning tourism as a tourism activity rather than as an educational product. Wang (2010) proposed that people trained by traditional exam-oriented educational systems struggle to adapt to the contemporary environment. Dejordy et al. (2019) believed that in the coming era of artificial intelligence, society needs a comprehensive range of talents. Through research trips, students can get out of the classroom and experience their environments more realistically. The purposes of study tours are to help students apply what they have learned and merge their knowledge and activities through personal practices of studying and learning.

2.2.2 Western countries

Terzuolo (2018) observed that study tours have a history dating back hundreds of years in Europe and America, where their value is generally recognised. Lee (2019) noted that the United Kingdom (UK) was the first country to conduct research tours. As early as the 17th century, the British royal family employed teachers to lead princes in travels around the world (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). In the 16th and 17th centuries, in order to learn foreign languages and observe foreign culture, etiquette, and society, the British people flocked to the European continent to study and travel (Martinsen, 2010). As part of the educational process, overseas and educational travel have become a customary and popular practice for British gentlemen (Long et al., 2010).

From 1830 to 1900, the US sent travellers on study tours to Paris (Kinginger, 2008). Kinginger (2008) noted that a group of aspiring American youths expressed their admiration for France's advanced scientific level and artistic achievements at the time, and were eager to seek broader development for their future. Hoffa (2007) also pointed out that tourism in the US for reasons of education can be traced back to the 1880s. In the 1920s, these trips had begun to provide students with educational credits; in the 1940s and 1950s, teacher-led learning journeys for specific courses or professions were further developed, but mainly for wealthier students (Hoffa, 2007). In spite of people's motivations for travel have changed significantly in the 20th century, education and knowledge enhancement are still important reasons for travel (Seeler, 2019), although they are often underestimated and perceived only subconsciously (Hoffa, 2007). Tourism has been identified as an open education system, and scholars have commented on a general trend from pure relaxation to more educational and communicative forms of travel (Mandel, 2011).

Although there are differences in the research focus of study tours in various countries, study tours are currently highly valued by governments and various international organisations around the world. Study tours have long become a trend that combines education, tourism, and culture, and is highly welcomed by students from all levels of schools around the world.

2.3 Defining educational study tours

According to Ryan and Zhang (2006), overseas educational study tours are an emergent trend in the tourism industry, organised by elementary and middle school students, and involving children to study languages and other short-term courses abroad (Miao, 2006). McCabe (2001) mentioned many types of educational study tours from traditional immersive experiences to short-term educational visits. Miao and Harris (2012) explained that the duration of study tours varies and that they can be used for a variety of purposes, the most common being to learn languages and different cultures.

McCabe (2001) argued that there are two types of learning journeys: experiential learning

and location learning. McCabe (2001) further explained that in *location learning,* students are concentrated in a fixed place, such as a classroom, to passively accept knowledge. *Experiential learning* is a process in which students seek to understand their experiences, and actively apply and try new understandings (Miao et al., 2005). Gomez-Lanier (2017) noted that experiential learning or practice is used to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Olson (2020) also explained that experiential learning can enhance students' knowledge and understanding of multicultural issues.

Miao et al. (2005) pointed out that a study tour can be more natural, unconscious, and uncontrolled than learning in a structured educational environment. Miao and Harris (2012) emphasised that a physical journey offers more learning than education, because the nature of a learning journey is experience and context, requiring learners to discuss phenomena that are not always specified in structured classroom courses. McCabe (2001) further stated that situational learning is the result of activities in a specific environment and culture. Contrary to intentional learning, it is mainly unconscious learning. These travel activities can broaden students' international horizons as well as be beneficial to their growth and development.

A study tour is neither pure tourism nor pure study abroad (Iwami, 2001). McLeod and Wainwright (2009) explained that its content includes language learning and visits, and is between travel and study, while at the same time integrating the content of study and travel (Manspeaker & Wallace, 2019). Study tours can broaden children's international perspectives (Lowe et al., 2014) and enrich their life experience (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2017). Dewey et al. (2012) mentioned that study tours can enhance children's initiative, and cultivate their personality. According to Lee et al. (2012), international study tours not only broaden cultural concepts and thinking habits of students, but also train them to be relatively independent and develop financial management skills. In addition, Liu (2016) noted that study tours help Chinese children to learn and think about how to cooperate with others. The influence of a Western education system and educational concepts can also enhance students' knowledge of foreign schools, education models, and their quality (Mills et al., 2010).

Therefore, study tours are seen as a combination of travelling and studying, which can make up for the lack of practical teaching in classroom learning. They combine theory and practice to increase students' cultural heritage and broaden their horizons during the travel process.

2.4 Types, characteristics and models of study tours

2.4.1 Types of study tours

According to Liu and Wang (2018), overseas study tours can generally be divided into the three categories of *learning*, *experience*, and *full experience*. Among these three types of study tours, *learning* is the most popular.

Dewey et al. (2012) proposed that study tours that mainly focus on learning, generally have a fixed theme, and often language classroom learning is carried out around this theme. This kind of tour is supplemented with lectures by experienced teachers, visits to cultural attractions, and other activities (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2017). Long et al. (2010) indicated that students participating in this type of study tour generally live in a homestay, and the organisations select qualified families to arrange the students to live with. Thus, students can better apply their language course learning to the real environment, and experience cross-cultural communication in a home environment (Gomez-Lanier, 2017).

Curtis and Ledgerwood (2017) noted that *experience* tours are simple experiential study tours with fewer courses and more spare time (Liu & Wang, 2018). Manspeaker and Wallace (2019) pointed out that experience tours offer students more time to experience the cultural atmosphere of a destination country, than is possible in a schools' classroom. In addition, Miao (2006) explained that a *full experience* is a study tour mode for students preparing to apply for study in other countries within the next two years. This type of study tour can be including formal learning with the destination countries' students (Olson, 2020) living in student dormitories, so that they can learn to adapt to school life abroad in advance.

2.4.2 Characteristics of study tours

Long et al. (2010) identified the major characteristics of overseas study tours: using renowned private schools for classes, taught by senior teachers at the school, and experiencing the learning atmosphere of the foreign schools; conducting high-density listening, speaking, reading, and writing training; and integrating study tours into the classroom.

Ryan and Zhang (2006) noticed that in classes, teachers build vocabulary through reading dialogues, news, documentaries, dramas, and other media documents, so students can better understand foreign language expressions, based on current topics, group discussions, speeches, and teacher evaluations. Miao et al. (2005) explained that study tours are generally arranged with relevant language courses in the mornings, and cultural visits and activities in the afternoons. Students who successfully complete the courses can obtain a certificate of completion issued by the school's sponsoring department (Manspeaker & Wallace, 2019).

Dewey et al. (2012) pointed out that students can also participate in lectures on relevant national history, geography, and cultural topics, and conduct cultural visits to the local or surrounding cities. Williams and Best (2014) also found that for some overseas study tours, students stay with local host families, so they can have a more immersive experience of the country, where they study and experience the local cultural life (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2017).

2.4.3 Models of study tours

To explain the growing popularity of the study tour market, the next sections introduce three mainstream models of study tours:

The school-to-school model is the earliest study tour model (Dewey et al., 2012). According to Liu (2016), this model directly connects domestic schools with foreign partner schools, and exchanges students from local schools with those from foreign partner schools for short-term overseas school life experiences (Weiler & Black, 2015).

LeCrom et al. (2018) also noted that the relationship with partner schools guarantees student safety. However, Mills et al. (2010) mentioned that the disadvantage is that neither schools necessarily possess travel resources, so students mostly stay at school instead of visiting attractions.

The second is the intermediary model. Dejordy et al. (2019) indicated that this model mainly involves the participation of education and training institutions, acting as intermediaries to contact the overseas study abroad resources (Gomez-Lanier, 2017), as well as attracting local customers (Liu, 2016). This model is mainly aimed at overseas study tours during holidays (Miao et al., 2005, Mills et al., 2010). Schools do not actively organise overseas study tours. Therefore, a large number of students seek intermediaries for travelling and studying overseas. Ryan and Zhang (2006) agreed that the advantage of this model is that there are many product types and language courses, but the disadvantages are also obvious, as the costs are high (Liu, 2016), and many travel services are provided without the qualifications needed for outbound tourism (Pera, 2017), which means the arrangements are transferred to a travel agency at the destination (Lee et al., 2012).

The third model is the outbound travel mode of travel agencies. Mills et al. (2010) pointed out that this model was developed mainly by travel agencies with qualifications for outbound tourism operations. Riggan et al. (2011) emphasised that because of the participation of travel agencies, this model has professional advantages in relation to itinerary arrangements and accommodation safety. However, Weiler and Black (2015) argued that there are often no particularly good learning resources for students. As a result of unprofessional course arrangements, it is easy in this model, to fall into the awkward situation of travelling without learning very much (McLeod & Wainwright, 2009).

2.5 The purposes of study tours

2.5.1 Exploring a different world

According to Liu (2016), English education has been popularised in China's education

system, and overseas study tours for Chinese students usually target English-speaking countries. These tours aim to provide a real language environment for students who have received many years of English learning (Yu et al., 2005). Overseas study tours have opened doors for students who have been locked in an "ivory tower" for a long time (Iwami, 2001), allowing them to venture out and see the outside world. Liu and Wang (2018) indicated that students can have more insights into overseas life, make friends from foreign countries, understand the world better, and give themselves more of an international perspective. Gains from overseas study tours may not be immediate and effective in the short term (Manspeaker & Wallace, 2019). However, during their travels, students observe, experience, perceive, judge, and see a world that is different from that of their previous environment (Olson, 2020). The value of this impossible to calculate. Pera (2017) demonstrated that when students are in a foreign country, what they see and feel will leave a strong impression, which is totally different from knowledge gained from books. Maybe one day in the future, as Slotkin et al. (2012) stated, a decision would be made was because of some things seen, some people met, some words heard, and some breath felt, in another country. What could be more important than what students learn as a life experience? (Seeler, 2019).

In addition, Slotkin et al. (2012) suggested that study abroad, even for a short time, is a good opportunity to get in touch with foreign languages, and experience foreign language cultures first-hand. Miao (2006) considered that entering a real language environment is no longer about memorising words by rote, but about applying what was learned in real life situations. For example, a long list of product nouns listed on a vocabulary list, is often difficult for students to remember. However, in supermarkets in English-speaking countries, students can remember many words while looking at and choosing real products, learn a lot of words, and apply what they have learned relatively easily.

2.5.2 Experiencing different teaching methods

Ryan and Zhang (2006) discovered that Western teachers pay more attention to the initiative of students in learning, hoping that students will actively participate in the classroom. Classrooms are mainly placing for teachers to guide students, for students to

participate in discussions, and cultivate the habit of actively integrating into the classroom environment (Lowe et al., 2014). Each course focuses on the sharing of discussion results, allowing students to express their ideas to group members, creating conflict between the multiple approaches to thinking (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). Varela (2017) believed that everyone can play the role of group leader, which not only improves self-leadership ability, but also cultivates the ability to speak in logical terms, and improve communication. Foreign teachers attach importance to the ideas put forward by students, and actively guide them (Liu, 2016). In class, students can express their ideas at any time. In China, as Liu and Wang (2018) explained, most knowledge is instilled by teachers, and students' learning is passive. In foreign classrooms, Slotkin et al. (2012) identified that students play various roles, expose themselves, share their ideas, and learn to listen to the voices of others. There can be equal dialogues between teachers and students, and between students and students in Western classrooms.

Another important point is that on a study tour, "classrooms" are mainly created by the collaboration of students and teachers (LeCrom et al., 2018), manifesting in the cooperation between students and the construction between teachers and students (Gomez-Lanier, 2017). Compared with courses that just stay in the classroom, this kind of course arrangement is more flexible, and full of energy (Miao et al., 2005). As a result, students can easily and quickly improve their listening as well as oral fluency during the study tour. Similarly, Riggan et al. (2011) observed that study tours actively encourage and guide young students to different people, visiting them and immersing in a different cultural environment. Therefore, learning and understanding through personal experience, non-native language, culture, and historical traditions, can strengthen and improve foreign language skills (Slotkin et al., 2012, Tucker & Weaver, 2013).

2.5.3 Cultivating innovative and diversified thinking

In the past, the educational environment in China was relatively closed. Hutchings et al. (2002) revealed that Chinese students generally study and live in a relatively fixed circle, with few opportunities for in-depth academic exchanges. However, the learning situation has improved in recent years (Liu & Wang, 2018). On an overseas study tour, students

can experience a different style of learning from that in China. Curtis and Ledgerwood (2017) pointed out that appreciating the style of well-known international teachers, understanding the world's cutting-edge information, and interacting with the teachers and students of a destination country, are all beneficial for stimulating innovative abilities. Dejordy et al. (2019) found that after full exchanges and discussions with the members of a study group, students not only opened up their thinking, and exercised their abilities, but also developed their cooperation skills. Compared with Chinese education, overseas teaching uses many methods (Liu, 2016), and develops a strong awareness, cultivating innovative abilities and diversified thinking (Dewey et al., 2012).

2.5.4 Improving cross-cultural communication and self-management skills

Stone et al. (2014) mentioned that the purpose of study tours is not just to gain superficial knowledge of another culture, but also to understand one's own culture through the experience. Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020) indicated that Chinese students are accustomed to focusing their time and energy on schoolwork, but often pay little attention to extracurricular activities and the cultivation of social skills. According to data on Chinese students studying abroad in 2017, 38.26% of students believed there were obstacles in social interaction and customs (Liu & Wang, 2018). Manspeaker and Wallace (2019) explained that although an overseas study tour project does not last long, it can test cross-cultural communication skills and adaptability to foreign customs. When students live with a host family, they have more opportunities to communicate with locals, learn to integrate into a new family, exercise their ability to actively communicate and solve problems (Slotkin et al., 2012), and practise independent living and self-management skills (Williams & Best, 2014).

2.6 The impact of globalisation on study tours

According to Long et al. (2010), a study tour in the sense of modern education, is an international cross-cultural experiential education model that emerged in the 20th century with the development of globalisation, and has gradually matured. McCabe (2001) stated that Europe and America first developed the international cross-cultural experiential

education model, such as that found in summer camps in the US. Other countries and regions have also gradually developed their own study tours (Manspeaker & Wallace, 2019); for example, Japan's so-called "school trips" are essentially study tours (Long et al., 2010).

With the deepening of international exchanges, Riggan et al. (2011) observed that Chinese students go abroad to participate in international study tours, or even choose to study abroad to enjoy a quality education. Basic education abroad has given Chinese families more choices for their children's growth (Ryan & Zhang, 2006), not limited by country, educational philosophy, or educational methods, the autonomous choice of education has been unprecedentedly enhanced (Ballestas & Roller, 2013). Hains-Wesson and Appleby (2017) explained that under the various forms of international education such as international study tours, Chinese students have improved their knowledge and abilities comprehensively. Cole (2017) also suggested that their career planning is now no longer limited to a domestic vision, but students can have an international vision and prospects.

Ryan and Zhang (2006) proposed that the main reasons for the rapid increase in the numbers of students participating in outward bound study tours from China, include the rapid development of the Chinese economy and the increasingly open approach of the relevant policies. As a result of its economic liberalisation policies, China has created a new and affluent middle-class group with a large amount of disposable income (Ryan & Zhang, 2006). Chen (2016) indicated that these middle-class citizens seek opportunities for their children to expand their horizons abroad. As a social practice way of leaving the familiar environment, study tours can help students better accept the influences of different cultural backgrounds (Brigham, 2011), and combine learning and tourism to achieve the objectives of learning practices (Miao & Harris, 2012). Curtis and Ledgerwood (2017) pointed out that years of practical activities have proved that primary and secondary school students' overseas study trips are helpful in improving students' international comprehension and enhancing their understandings of other countries.

Cai et al. (2015) observed that by providing young students with a journey of cultural exploration and discovery with far-reaching educational significance, a study tour

programme helps cultivate the civilisation and cultural tolerance of young students (Ballestas & Roller, 2013), enhancing their understanding and respect for different cultures, and enabling them to better deal with any cultural shock (Bodycott, 2009). Opengart (2017) also studied the positive results of language strengthening training, ideological and moral education, personality formation education, cultural knowledge education, and world peace educational. These results mean that study tours are highly valued by governments, education circles, and relevant international organisations and institutions all over the world (Dima, 2019). They have become a global trend that combines education with culture and tourism, as well as being generally welcomed by young students globally (Cole, 2017).

2.7 The future development of study tours

Bodycott (2009) considered that when most students and parents choose a country for a study tour, the first consideration is whether the education resources of the destination country are rich. It is not difficult to conclude that many students and parents use international study tours to explore the educational resources and available majors in the destination countries' schools (Cole, 2017), so as to make early preparations for future planning and development abroad (Chen, 2016). In the context of the globalisation of society, McLeod and Wainwright (2009) argued that consideration of the social security and international influence of the destination country has become one of the criteria for judging whether the country is a suitable study destination.

In terms of the types of study tours planned for future participation in, there is still plenty of room for market expansion for study tours aimed at language learning. Yu et al. (2005) found that increasing numbers of students and parents expect that the international study tour they participate in is not just a tour, but is for learning something during the tour. Weiler and Black (2015) stated that the language immersion environment of a foreign country must meet the needs of students. Through short-term study tours, students can get a lot of information that cannot be obtained through local learning in terms of learning methods and different language situations and contexts (Varela, 2017).

International study tours are currently in the early stages of industry development in China. Dima (2019) suggested that with recent policy and capital levels in China encouraging more attention on the study tour industry, external competitors will continue to flow in, and competition will continue to intensify. The future competition will mainly be the quality of study tour products (Opengart, 2017). While integrating users' thinking into products, it is not only necessary to integrate the habits and preferences of Chinese parents and their children (Cai et al., 2015), but also to subdivide them according to the psychological and growth characteristics of different age groups (Hutchings et al., 2002). Through combined school education, family education, and the operational concepts and models of mature overseas camps to effectively control the reception quality (Manspeaker & Wallace, 2019). In the future, the construction of the study tour product will need to be further improved. On the one hand, tourism products should have the characteristics of enrichment, personalisation, innovation, and quality. On the other hand, iconic products of study tours should also be concentrated in experiencing nature, history, geography, science and technology, humanities, and other forms, and not just be limited to learning a foreign language.

2.8 Conclusion

The positioning of international study tours is as an educational product with travel characteristics. Outbound study tours inevitably include the elements of food, accommodation, and transport during the travel period. However, international study tours are not just a simple international trip, but are potentially an enriching life experience for young students. During the formation stage of children's outlooks on life, they provide an opportunity to see, experience, and understand the world with their own eyes, and let it touch their hearts. This kind of touch can plant a seed in a child's young mind, triggering thoughts about what they want to do in the future, and establishing potential goals in the process.

In summary, this chapter reviewed the historical background, definition, types, characteristics, and models of study tours, their purpose, the impacts of globalisation, and

their future development. Most of the literature on study tours focuses on the benefits rather than on the challenges. Furthermore, most research on study tours emphasises the choice of destinations. This shows that the choice of destination and the experience of studying abroad are inextricably linked, which plays a vital guiding role in the next step of this research.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research aims, research questions, research strategy, ontology, and epistemology. This research uses a mixed method approach, and the paradigm of the research is explained in detail. Following this, the next section overviews the data collection and analysis. It explains where and how the data in this study were collected, thereby providing a basic data set and framework for data analysis. In addition, in the data analysis stage, quantitative data analysis along with qualitative data analysis based on thematic analysis methods were used. At the end of this chapter, the limitations of the research and a conclusion to the chapter are presented.

3.2 Research aims and research questions

The aim of this research is to explore the reasons for the popularity of international study tours for young students in China, with a focus on the students' and parents' attitudes to and perspectives on the tours. The research addresses two questions: what are the reasons for the popularity of study tours for young students in China, and what are the students' and parents' attitudes to and perspectives on these study tours?

In order to explore the development of study tours in China clearly and in-depth, this research has two research objectives: to identify the characteristics and needs of the students from China participating in study tours, and to identify the priority for students and parents when choosing a destination country.

3.3 Research strategy

3.3.1 Ontology

Moon and Blackman (2014) explained that *ontology* is the study of existing facts, while Hazar (2018) stated that it is related to actual existing knowledge or experience. Ontologies include the *relativist ontology* and the *realist ontology*. According to Povee

and Roberts (2014), a *realist ontology* assumes the existence of a reality, which can be regarded as truth. Similarly, Petty et al. (2012) indicated that it is related to the things that actually exist in the world that can generate knowledge. Additionally, a realist ontology can help researchers realise their certainty of the nature and existence of the research objects (Tornberg, 2018).

This research aims to analyse the reasons for the popularity of international study tours, based on the characteristics of students who have participated in international study tours. The study analyses demographic data, and conducts a thematic analysis of the data that are based on students' own experiences, and written comments posted by their parents. Therefore, this research combines a relativist ontology and realist ontology in mixed research methods.

3.3.2 Epistemology

According to Al-Saadi (2014), *epistemology* is related to various aspects of the effectiveness, scope, and methods of acquiring knowledge. Glegg (2016) explained that by studying the relationships between themes and objects, we can explore epistemological ideas and their influence on research design. Eybers (2020) discussed the epistemology of objectivism, which assumes that reality exists outside or independent of individual thought. Objectivist research offers reliability and applicability in the results obtained (Sankey, 2004). A quantitative analysis of demographic data is applied in this research, to support the results obtained from the qualitative analysis, which is of significance for answering the research questions. A subjective epistemology is reflected in the analysis of the themes of this research (see Morgan, 2007). The themes in the qualitative comments were screened to match the purpose of the research, in order to classify and analyse the themes more clearly. The value of subjectivism is that it can show how personal experiences shape people's perceptions of the world (Joffe, 2012), which is related to the research's objectives.

3.3.3 Paradigm

Greene (2015) explained that post-positivism has realistic assumptions and a desire for

the universality of reasoning. It usually requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Schoonenboom (2019) indicated that with a post-positivist paradigm, the purpose of mixed methods research is to obtain knowledge about a reality that exists in an independent and objective way. A post-positivism paradigm can be diverse in nature, and reality can be understood in different ways (Petty et al., 2012). Therefore, in terms of the philosophical stance of this research, although there are other paradigms, post-positivism is the dominant paradigm underpinning this mixed method study.

Traditionally, according to the Design-Based Research Collective (DBRC, 2003), quantitative and qualitative research methods are related to conflicting research paradigms based on different epistemological positions. Many researchers have recognised that quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined into a mixed method design (Fugard & Potts, 2015). The mixed methods approach, according to Grey (2018), can be based with different types of research questions, sampling procedures, data collection methods and approaches to data analysis. As noted by Petrovic et al. (2017), qualitative data can also be analysed and presented quantitatively. Kimmons and Johnstun (2019) further stated that the mixed methods approach is flexible and can include sequential designs with quantitative methods preceding qualitative, or vice versa, or even concurrent designs (Hui et al., 2019). The point made by Mitchell (2018), is that different research methods allow us to understand different aspects of the world; similarly, Fetters et al. (2013) noted that researchers normally adopt the methods most relevant to their worldview.

Different paradigms have completely different assumptions about the nature of the world (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Passmore and Rehman (2012) explained that the mixed methods approach should be based upon the kinds of questions being addressed and how the research design can help answer these questions. Using two different research methods as a mixed method to answer the same research questions at the same time, will make the conclusions more objective (Hesse-Biber, 2012). The use of multiple and mixed methods is logical according to Maxwell (2012), because quantitative and qualitative methods

represent different ways of understanding. Cassell and Bishop (2019) also demonstrated that mixed research provides a more complete methodological approach than purely quantitative or qualitative methods. Researchers can generate richer knowledge for their research through mixed research methods, provide references for theory and practice, and provide stronger evidence findings from which to generate conclusions (Johnson & Schoonenboom, 2016).

The researcher's perspective guides the type of research question and method chosen (Johnson, 2017). Quantitative analysis methods are used to analyse the characteristics of Chinese students participating in international study tours, and qualitative analysis methods are used to explore Chinese students and parents' choice of factors of study tour destinations, as well as their evaluations of study tours (Morgan, 2007).

3.4 Data collection

According to Tencent (2020), the New Oriental International School Tour & Camp Education won the "2019 Influential International Education Brand" award. As an industry pioneer, leader, and practitioner in the three core education fields of China's English learning, camp education, and international study tours, New Oriental is a preferred consultant for children's international education. Therefore, the New Oriental International Study Tour website was chosen as the main source for data collection. According to the New Oriental website (http://www.youxue.xdf.cn), there are several official WeChat accounts in China; official WeChat accounts from Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Shenyang, Xi'an, Chengdu, and Chongqing were selected for supplementary data. The chosen website and WeChat official accounts were therefore as follows:

Table 1

WeChat Official Account Names

Representative cities	Geographic regions	WeChat official account name
Beijing	North China	Beijing New Oriental International Study Tour
Shanghai Nanjing	East China	Shanghai New Oriental International Study Tour Nanjing New Oriental International Study Tour
Wuhan	Central China	Wuhan New Oriental International Study Tour
Guangzhou Shenzhen	South China	Guangzhou New Oriental International Study Tour Shenzhen New Oriental International Study Tour
Shenyang	Northeast China	Shenyang New Oriental International Study Tour
Xi'an	Northwest China	Xi'an New Oriental International Study Tour
Chengdu Chongqing	Southwest China	Chengdu New Oriental International Study Tour Chongqing New Oriental International Study Tour

Feedback from parents and students who had participated in the different study tours was available on both the website and on the WeChat public accounts in 2019, I reviewed more than 500 of these comments under different accounts. The students posted reviews based on their personal experiences of participating in the study tours, while the parents' comments mainly mentioned factors in relation to choosing different study tour programmes and what the study tour experiences brought to their children. It is worth noting that these comments provide related data that was used for thematic analysis, as explained later in the chapter. How the data were selected is explained in the next section on data analysis.

3.5 Data analysis

A mixed methods approach was used in this research. In this section, the two types of data analysis are explained in detail: quantitative data analysis and thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

Munk (2019) mentioned that in quantitative research, a large amount of data can more clearly reveal the insights of a specific range of data points through tables and figures, whereas in terms of qualitative research, Firmin et al. (2016) stated that text analysis in qualitative research is more inclined to reveal the social background associated with a research project. As Bryman (2007) explained, quantitative research can not only deliver numbers but can also deliver the results needed to fit the scope of the research. Abulela and Harwell (2020) further pointed out that using tables and figures to present research results is a means to an end. In these ways, it can be seen that quantitative data analysis can be used to support qualitative research (Rezaee et al., 2018).

This research is on international study tours, exploring the reasons for the popularity of study tours in China, and the views of parents and students on study tours, to answer the research questions. As mentioned, the study is based on two research objectives that guided the exploration of these issues in more detail. Consequently, data were screened to include only those that provided basic personal information; the 180 comments that were chosen, all mentioned gender, students' ages, and parents' occupations (see Table 2).

Table 2

Dataset

Source	Identity	Quantity	Percentage	Overall Percentage
Parents	Fathers	46	25.6%	60%
	Mothers	62	34.4%	
Students	Boys	32	17.8%	40%
	Girls	40	22.2%	

As seen in the data set, 40% of comments were from students and 60% were from parents. Girls wrote more comments than did the boys, and mothers wrote more comments than did the fathers. Excel spreadsheets were used to generate tables to clarify the students' genders and ages, and infer their education level based on their ages. Selected study tour destinations and willingness to participate in study tours in different regions were also recorded. This kind of quantitative data analysis based on demographic data, was able to

help address the research questions, while the qualitative analysis was used to more clearly understand the characteristics of Chinese students participating in international study tours. The results of the quantitative data analysis are presented in the next chapter.

3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

3.5.2.1Thematic analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis should be regarded as the most basic method of qualitative analysis. Walters (2016) explained that thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting on specific topics in the data. One of the main advantages of thematic analysis is that it helps to reduce and simplify the data, while producing results, as pointed out by Grey (2018). In addition, Clarke and Braun (2017) indicated that thematic analysis provides a more detailed description of a specific topic or group of topics in the data. Cheung et al. (2018) stated that this may be related to specific questions or areas of interest in the data. Thus, Butler-Kisber (2018) noted that thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research method that can potentially help researchers select the specific topics needed in a data set.

Braun and Clarke (2006) introduced a detailed six-step guide for thematic analysis. Due to the large number of comments, categorising them by themes helped reduce the complexity of the work (see Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In this research, I classified the themes of different reviews using thematic analysis as outlined in the following six steps.

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data
Clarke and Braun (2006) indicated that repeated reading of data is needed to gain familiarity with the data. Thus, before starting to code, I re-read the entire data set. Xu and Zammit (2020) argued that the initial code can be obtained from the perspectives of different participants during the data collection process. Joffe (2012) also mentioned that a good theme code can describe most of the data. In addition, according to Javadi and Zarea (2016), assigning a word or phrase to the subject of a qualitative data paragraph is one of the models of thematic analysis, and can be interpreted as a descriptive code (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Accordingly, in the process of familiarity with the data, I extracted the

relevant information in each review and preliminarily classified it according to the characteristics of the study tour, cognisant of the points that may need to be explained later (see Javadi & Zarea, 2016). Although the data were stored electronically in a Word document, I used traditional tools, such as pens, highlighters, and notebooks, to record keywords that were mentioned frequently in the comments, and which were later adopted as codes. As Clarke and Braun (2006) emphasised, at this stage, it is a good idea to take notes or mark-up ideas for coding, which can then be used in subsequent stages.

Step 2. Generating initial codes

In the second stage of the analysis, I studied the comments (in Chinese) of students or parents who participated in international study tours and tried to find special meanings in their words to generate the initial codes. I analysed them in Chinese and then translated the comments into English. I adopted the suggestion of Braun and Clarke (2006) to use the inductive method and carried out a preliminary coding of all data that had similar literal or potential meanings. I divided all aspects of the 180 reviews into the smallest possible parts according to their meanings, and marked words with similar meanings or identical words in different colours, and recorded them in a notebook. In addition, at this stage, I eliminated some comments as they were not relevant to the research questions. For these comments, I recorded only the basic personal information of the person who posted the comment, and omitted the detailed qualitative content. This was because at this stage I needed to find as many codes as possible, and make sure these codes were related to the research questions.

To facilitate the search for subsequent topics in the next step, I wrote down some frequently occurring words, such as "personality," "cross-culture communication," "English learning," "visionary," "outlook," "environment attitude," "challenge," "globalisation," "diversity," and "security." Then, I classified the words according to the relationships between them, and determined the initial names of these code groups, which were ear-marked as possible themes for later (see *Figure 1).*

Figure 1

Initial Words Analysed of the Theme Groups

```
                                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Personality / Younger age       │
                                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐                │ Confidence / English learning   │
│                  │                └─────────────────────────────────┘
│  From students'  │                ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│   perspective    │ ─────────────▶ │ Visionary / Outlook             │
│                  │                └─────────────────────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘                ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Environmental attitude          │
                                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Challenge                       │
                                    └─────────────────────────────────┘

                                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐                │ Globalisation / Different destinations │
│                  │                └─────────────────────────────────┘
│  From parents'   │                ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│   perspective    │ ─────────────▶ │ Diversity                       │
│                  │                └─────────────────────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘                ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Security                        │
                                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
```
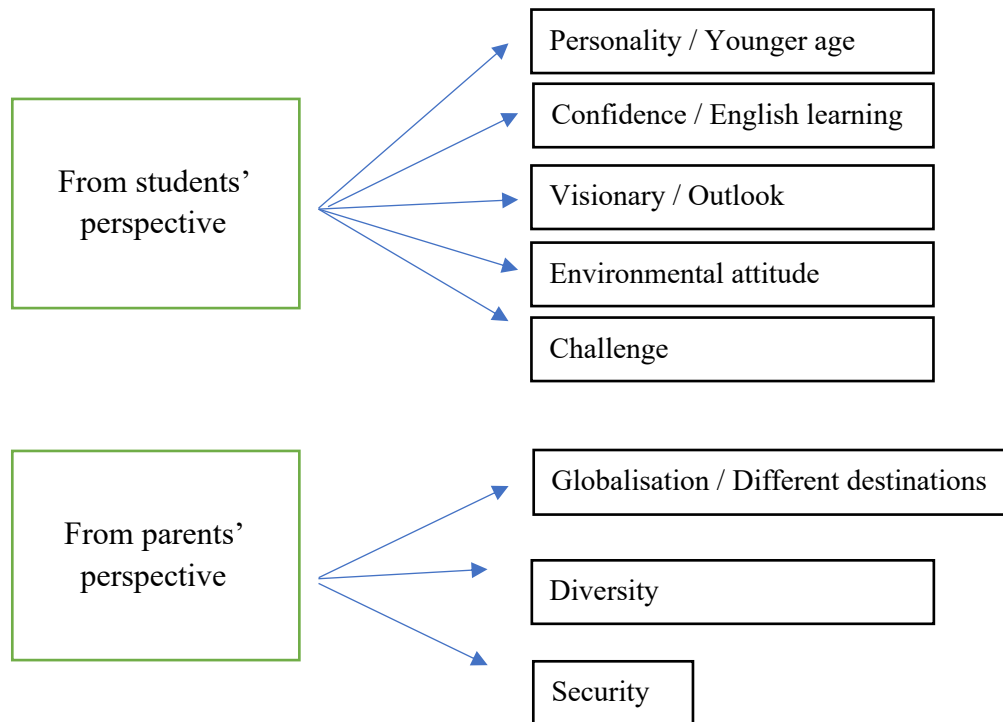
Some comments mentioned various aspects of international study tours, which may have had relationships with other topics, but for the sake of reducing the data, I decided to use them only once and put them under the most relevant topic. At this stage, I could associate my research goals with the topics mentioned in the literature review, according to the characteristics of international study tours, and develop the initial codes.

Step 3. Searching for themes

In this step, I put the initial codes together to form a new category. In the process of sorting, I considered the potential themes of the data sets and developed word codes with similar meanings into a theme that could be used later. Clarke and Braun (2017) stated that in thematic analysis, the choice of themes needs to be according to a coherent logic. Certain related codes can be brought together into potential themes and further analysed to establish sub-themes on this basis, according to Yin (2016). Veal (2018) suggested that in some cases, the use of visual maps can help classify different codes. Therefore, I categorised the different codes according to the characteristics of study tours and the objectives of this research, and wrote down the name and short description of each code,

then made appropriate theme and sub-theme assignments (see Table 3).

Table 3

Preliminary Analysis Content

From students' perspectives	Personality / Younger age	The age trend of students participating in study tours is getting younger.
	Confidence / English learning	Students who have participated in study tours are generally more confident in speaking English.
	Visionary/ Outlook	After experiencing different cultural education, students have a clearer vision for the future.
	Environmental Attitude	The attitudes of different countries towards the natural environment also attract students.
	Challenge	It is a challenge for students to leave the protection of their parents to visit other countries.

From parents' perspectives	Globalisation / Different destinations	Different countries have different emphases on education.
	Diversity	Diversified study tour arrangements provide more choices.
	Security	It is most important to ensure the safety of children in all aspects.

I analysed the demographic data of the students who participated in study tours by gender, age, education level, parents' occupation, and region. This group of data combined the characteristics of study tours, and could be used as a major theme. In their comments, most students or parents mentioned the countries they visited on the study tours. Therefore, the names of the countries mentioned were used as sub-themes under the potential theme "study tour destination," and included the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Canada, Germany, and New Zealand.

Step 4. Reviewing themes

In this step, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasised that firstly, it is necessary to determine whether the data extracted form a consistent theme; secondly, it is necessary to consider whether the current theme can accurately represent the meaning of the entire data set. Passmore and Rehman (2012) pointed out that this level of subject review needs to ascertain whether it can closely achieve the research objectives. Therefore, I needed to

verify these topics to see if they were consistent. After I ascertained that the topics were coherent, I checked the data set to see if there were any missing or inappropriate data for the topic, so as to provide a clearer idea for the next step of defining the themes.

Step 5. Defining and naming the themes

For each theme, a detailed analysis needs to be written (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Joffe (2012) explained that it is important to consider how each topic corresponds to a broader meaning of the relevant data, to ensure that it is related to the research questions or objectives. I assigned an appropriate name to each topic, in association with my research goals. The final themes were:

Theme 1: Characteristics

Through the occupations of the parents of students participating in international study tours and the regional distribution of Chinese study tours mentioned in the comments, the characteristics and needs of the students participating in study tours could be analysed in detail.

Theme 2: Destinations

The names of the countries of study tours were common in the data set. Taking the destinations of study tours as a theme was a good choice, as through detailed analysis, the findings could explain the attraction of different study tour destinations to students and parents.

Theme 3: Factors

This theme was mainly to explore the factors that parents gave priority to when choosing a study tour destination. Through the analysis of the factors considered by the parents, it was possible to discuss the attitudes and opinions of the parents towards international study tours.

Theme 4: Evaluations

This topic provided information on the benefits of study tours. Through the analysis of parents' and students' evaluations of study tours, it was possible to determine which aspects of study tours offered potential benefits to the students.

Step 6. Producing the dissertation

By this stage, I had a set of feasible themes and had completed the final analysis of the data. The final analysis is presented in the next chapter, of the findings.

The purpose of this research was to generate new knowledge from the comments made by students and parents, which could lead to new understandings of study tours. After categorising the data, I conducted a comprehensive analysis of all the collected data, consistent with my chosen research methods.

3.6 Limitations

In the process of conducting the literature review, I found that research about study tours was more focused on studying than on travelling. However, during the data collection process, comments about the study tours were not as common as those about attractions or restaurants marked on Google maps. Thus, the relevant content of the study tours needed to be viewed on the websites of the study tour organisations or the WeChat public accounts. To collect usable data, I chose the organisation that had the most customers in the study tour industry of China. However, the comments recorded on the website and WeChat official accounts had all been screened by their own staff, so the comments available to the public were all positive. Therefore, in the next chapter, the main points mentioned are the advantages of participating in study tours, and there is no content about negative effects. This is a clear limitation of the study, highlighting the reality of social media research in which comments can be screened.

3.7 Ethical issues

This research study did not require ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). It used secondary resources from public information on the Internet and did not involve animals or humans in the data collection process. Additionally, this research did not require any copyright permissions. All the content came from public information on the Chinese Internet, and I translated the comments into English. There were no direct personal or company copyright issues.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the research philosophy underpinning this research, in terms of the realist ontology, objectivist epistemology, and post-positivist paradigm for the quantitative data analysis, and the relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and interpretivist paradigm for the qualitative data analysis in this mixed research approach. In order to meet the objectives of the research, I collected comments from students and parents on study tour experiences, from the study tour website and WeChat public accounts, to form my data set. In the design of this mixed method, the quantitative data analysis provided demographic statistics based on the characteristics of the study tours, while the qualitative research analysis was undertaken on the comments and provided in-depth understandings to help answer the research questions of the study. This study used quantitative data analysis to support the findings of qualitative analysis. The next chapter details the findings obtained through both the analysis processes.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my research findings in relation to the aims of this research. I searched the relevant study tour websites on the Internet and WeChat official accounts, and collected the data from the feedback on the study tours, as posted by students who had participated in the study tours, and their parents. The feedback content was selected from 2019 comment and was my research data. Due to COVID-19, outbound travel in 2020 was temporarily halted, making the data for 2019 the most recent feedback content.

This research project collected the characteristics and needs of different study tour groups, the selection of study tour destinations, the factors of study tour programme selection, and the students' and parents' online evaluations of the tours. The findings presented in this chapter can help provide better understandings of the needs of Chinese students who participate in international study tours and their parents' views of these study tours.

4.2 The characteristics of study tour groups and their participants

4.2.1 From the students' perspectives

Figure 2

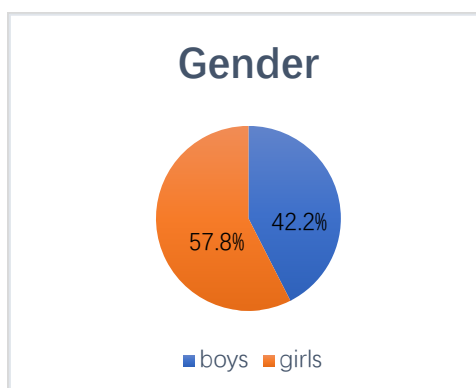*Gender of Study Tour Group Participants*

Figure 3

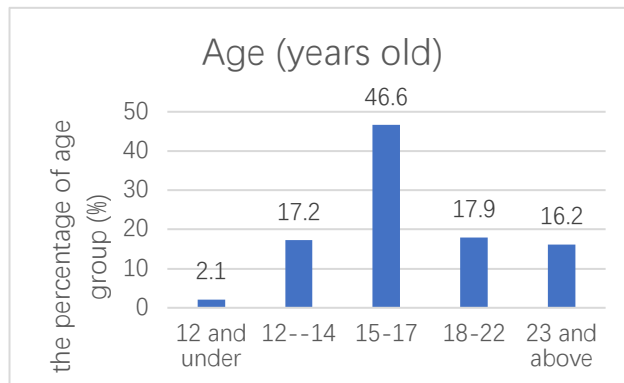*Age of Study Tour Group Participants*

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of girls who participated in study tours was 57.8%, and the proportion of boys was 42.2%. I analysed the ages of the students who participated in the study tours and found that students of different age groups had participated in the international study tours experience. The population participating in the international study tour programme included children, teenagers, and adults.

As presented in Figure 3, those aged 12-14 years old were 17.2% of total participants, and those 15-17 years old were 46.6%, which accounted for the majority. It was evident that young people (12-17 years old) participating in international study tours were becoming a trend, as this was the largest age group. However, among the groups of primary and middle school students and college students, the proportion of girls was 15% higher than that of boys. This suggests that girls may have more enthusiasm and awareness of participating in international study tours.

Figure 4

Education Levels of Students
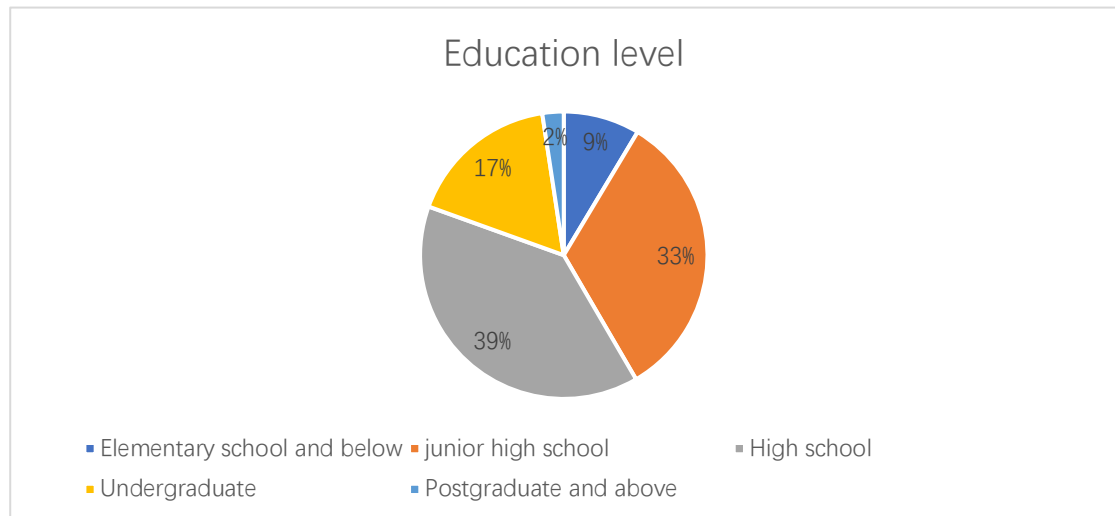
As presented in Figure 4, of students who participated in the study tours, their education level was mainly concentrated in the junior high school and high school stages. Among these, junior high school students accounted for 33%, while high school students accounted for 38.9%, indicating that this cohort was the largest group on international study tours. The data analysis found that the proportion of undergraduate students who had participated in international study tours was 17.2%, while the proportion of elementary school students and below was 8.6%, exceeding the proportion of those with postgraduate or higher education levels, highlighting that international study tours were attracting more teenage students than those of other age groups.

4.2.2 From the parents' perspectives

Figure 5

Parents' Occupations
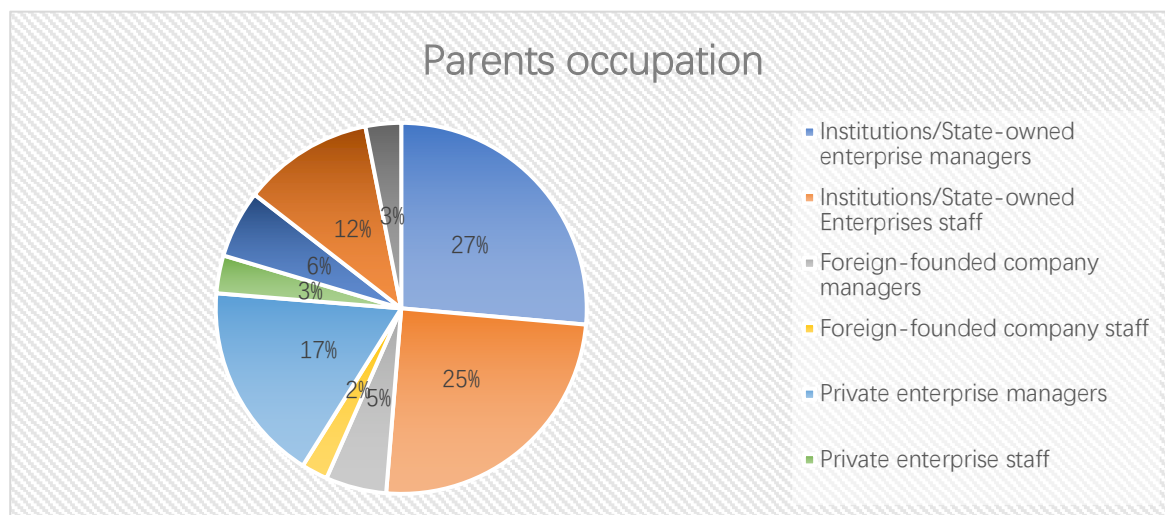
According to the research data (see Figure 5), middle-level and above managers in government institutions, state-owned enterprises, foreign-funded enterprises, and private enterprises accounted for nearly half of the parents' group. It was evident that most parents who chose to let their children participate in international study tours had achieved some success in their professional fields. The higher-level professions of the parents resulted in higher earnings, which they were able to use to fund their children's overseas study tours. As some these parents described:

> *I am the manager of a foreign-funded enterprise. I used to study an MBA in the UK. I didn't have time to take my child to travel this summer, so I signed him up for a study tour in the UK, which opened his outlook and he was able to visit my university. (Father of a 15 years old boy from Shanghai)*

> *I am a business owner. I am very satisfied with the study tour arrangements in the UK. The cost is not that high for our family. When my daughter came back, she was very happy and excited to tell me a lot about her yearning for university life in the UK. I hope her college entrance examination goes well and she can go to the UK to study as she wishes. (Father of a 17 years old girl from Shanghai)*

> *Due to my work restrictions, I have never travelled abroad. When I first heard from my son that there was a study tour to Canada, I was very supportive. I think this is a good educational activity that not only allows children to learn English skills, but also lets them experience different cultural backgrounds. (15-year-old boy's father, working for the*

With the acceleration of China's socialist modernisation process, many families in China are capable of and willing to invest in their children's international study tours. At the same time, the higher the family's annual income, the more the parents are willing to fund their children on international study tours. Through the experiences of participating in international study tours, students can experience personal growth, training, and an international education.

4.2.3 Regional distribution of study tour participation

Figure 6:

Willingness to Participate in Study Tours by Region of Residence
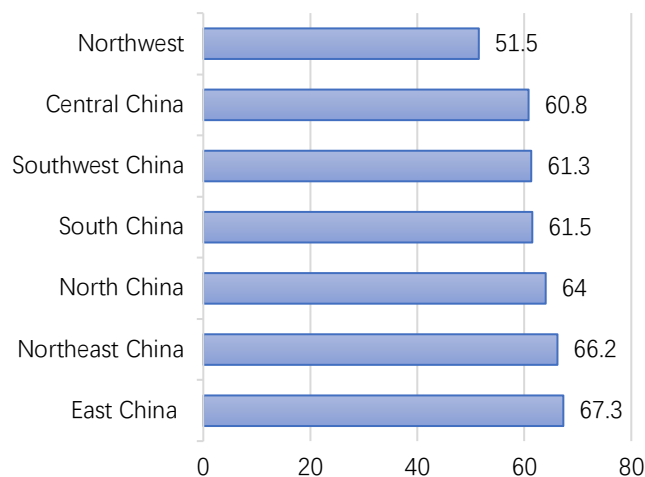
During the data collection process, the proportion of students from different regions to study abroad was analysed (see Figure 6). East China and northeast China had the largest proportions of students with a high willingness to participate in study tours in the future, accounting for 67.3% and 66.2% respectively, followed by 64% from north China, and 61.5% from south China. There were 61.3% of those in southwest China and 60.8% in central China with a high willingness to participate in study tours. The willingness of those in the northwest region had the lowest proportion, with 51.5%. It emerged that in most regions of China, more than 60% of students had a high willingness to take part in study tours. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Hangzhou and other

urbanised areas had strong potential client groups willing to study abroad, as highlighted in the following comments.

> *I just consulted the study tour programme in the United States last week. I would like to register my child for the summer plan. (Mother of a 14-year-old girl from Beijing)*

> *My kid is in the sixth grade this year, and I plan for him to join a Canada study tour during the summer when he graduates from elementary school. (Mother of an 11-year-old boy from Shanghai)*

> *I booked a summer vacation for my daughter to go to New Zealand to participate in a study tour, because Guangzhou has a direct flight to Auckland, which can be easily reached, and she can also experience a winter in the Southern Hemisphere. (Father of a 12-year-old girl from Guangzhou)*

These parents were considering their children's summer vacation plans. It can be seen from their comments that the overall market demand and development environment for international study tours were optimistic.

4.3 The selection of study tour destinations

Table 4

Destinations Selected for Study Tours

Study tour destinations			
United States	51.5%	**Switzerland**	8.4%
United Kingdom	25.8%	**Japan**	8.0%
Australia	16.6%	**Italy**	7.2%
France	11.6%	**New Zealand**	7.1%
Canada	10.2%	**South Korea**	6.4%
Hong Kong	10.1%	**Northern Europe**	3.2%
Germany	9.3%	**Spain**	1.5%

Table 4 shows that among the students who had participated in international study tours, most (51.5%) went to the United States, 25.8% went to the UK, followed by Australia and France, etc.

4.3.1 The United States

Chinese students not only preferred to visit tourist attractions, and cultural and artistic attractions in various regions in the United States, but also have close contact with and inspect world famous universities, making the United States the most popular destination for Chinese students. This is supported by comments from study participants:

> *This summer, I chose to study abroad in the United States, because American universities accounted for 70 of the world's top 200 universities. The 8 Ivy League universities have first-class academic standards and international reputations. In the future, I hope to study in the United States and enter an Ivy League school. This study tour gave me a chance to get close to my dream schools. (Hua, a 16-year-old boy from Shanghai)*

> *I took a short-term study tour to the United States this summer. I personally experienced the learning environment and atmosphere of American universities, and participated in the authentic American English classroom experience, which helped me improve my oral English and self-confidence in communicating with American students. (Yang, a 16-year-old girl from Shanghai)*

> *I chose to go to the United States because the openness，innovativeness, and flexibility of American education attracted me deeply. I also visited Disneyland and other tourist attractions this time. I hope I can go there again next year. (Chen, a 14-year-old girl from Beijing)*

At the time of writing, most study tours to the United States are of middle and high school students. There were differences in the study tour selections according to the different educational grades. Lower educational grades focused on the overseas experience, such as special camps, Western classrooms, host families, and other experiences that students had not experienced in China. These students also particularly favoured an immersive language environment and study tours that allowed for cross-cultural communication. These findings are supported in comments from some parents.

> *My daughter participated in a 14-day study tour in Los Angeles, USA, and lived in a local home. She told me that at first, she was very nervous and did not dare to communicate with others. Fortunately, there was a girl of the same age as my daughter in this family, who shared her favourite dolls and books with my daughter. This made my daughter feel very warm and she got along well with this family in the next few days. They are still keeping in touch. I am grateful for everything this family has done. (Mother of a 10 years old girl from Nanjing)*

> *My daughter said that this study tour made her feel that spoken English is no longer as*

difficult to speak as she thought. Her host family taught her many English native speakers'
ways of oral English. She said that it felt very different from what she learned in books. I
think this kind of cross-cultural international study tour is very worthwhile. (Mother of an
11-year-old girl from Shenzhen)

Due to cultural differences and the younger age range of the children, it was normal for these students to have difficulty integrating into the study tour environment in terms of communication skills and habits at the start. However, with active encouragement from and communication with the host families, the children slowly opened up and accepted this cross-cultural communication method, which was a positive outcome.

Students in the middle and upper educational grades were more focused on gaining practical benefits. For example, a study abroad experience can increase the success rate of being accepted into prestigious schools. The following comments from high school students provided support for this.

I will apply for New York University next year. I visited New York University this time. I like
the atmosphere of the school very much. (A 17-year-old boy from Hangzhou)

I have always wanted to go to UCLA. This study tour made me feel the shock of the school.
I hope this experience will bring me some advantages in applying for UCLA next year. (A
17-year-old boy from Wuhan)

This group of students often had a clear purpose for participating in study tours. They knew what they hoped to gain through participating in the study tours.

4.3.2 The United Kingdom and Australia

For students with different personalities and needs, the UK education system encouraged them to use their curiosity and interest to explore freely, and find their passion, as demonstrated in these comments.

This summer, by participating in a short-term study tour in the UK, I learned about the
rigorous education system and aristocratic culture of Britain, and felt that my personal
cultivation, English ability, and cultural comprehension had reached a new height. (Xuan,
a 15-year-old girl from Guangzhou)

I can feel that my child has gained new knowledge during this study tour. He was happy to
share with us what he saw and heard. We felt that he was more confident than before. (A

The UK's study tour market is based on English language learning combined with city visits, with some camp activities being added to the itinerary. This type of study tour not only met the needs of students for leisure and relaxation during the holidays, but also the expectations of parents who hoped the children could acquire knowledge during their holidays. As these parents mentioned:

> *My child experienced camping when he was studying in the UK. He said that he learned how to set up a tent, how to use barbecue tools, and he saw the sky full of stars at night. This is a precious experience for children who have been living in urbanisation for a long time. (Mother of an 11-year-old boy from Shanghai)*

> *My child is very excited about the camping activities in the UK. In the process of learning to set up a tent, he learned a lot of proper nouns. This is an amazing experience. (Mother of a 12-year-old boy from Chengdu)*

The majority of students participating in the study tours in the UK were junior and high school students, then elementary school students and university students. Due to the upsurge of studying in the UK, university students were also taking study tours to the UK, as the next comments explain.

> *I am an undergraduate student at Beijing Normal University. I am going to apply for a British university next year to study for a master's degree. I visited many well-known universities in the UK during this study tour which provided me with more options to apply for. (A 20-year-old girl from Beijing)*

> *I am going to apply for postgraduate courses. I was deciding between the United States and the United Kingdom. This time I participated in a cultural study tour in the United Kingdom with my classmates. We visited several universities, but I liked the University of Sheffield the most. I hope I can successfully enrol next year. (A 21-year-old girl from Nanjing)*

The purpose of these university students' participation in study tours was similar to that of the middle school students, which was mainly to visit British universities in preparation for further studies.

Similarly, Australia also has highly recognised educational resources, and is the first choice for study tours to the Southern Hemisphere. As demonstrated in the next comments, Australia's natural ecological environment was a factor that attracted students from China.

Australia's unique natural ecological environment and the environmental protection concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature attracted me deeply. During this study tour, I not only experienced the customs of Australia, but also saw kangaroos and koalas. Koalas are so cute. (Nini, a 13-year-old girl from Beijing)

I went to the UK this year, but I heard from my classmates that they hugged a koala in Australia. I am so envious. I hope I can go to Australia to hug a koala next year. (Long, a 15-year-old boy from Chengdu)

The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, were the most popular destinations for Chinese study tours in 2019. Even in the other students' future study planning and country selection, these countries were identified as the main study destinations for Chinese students.

4.3.3 France, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and others

The proportion of students who chose France, Canada, Germany and New Zealand as their preferred countries for study tours was relatively moderate. Compared with the most popular three countries, the tendency for Chinese students to study elsewhere is increasing, as illustrated in these students' comments:

My parents are in the wine business, and I am very interested in the process of making wine. I visited a winery, which I wanted to do during the study tour. I saw the process of making red wine, which was incredible. (A 17-year-old boy from Hangzhou)

I like football very much and I have learned a little German. I heard that universities in Germany are free. I hope I can study in Germany in the future. (A 16-year-old boy from Guangzhou)

I like Taormina in Italy. After this visit, the slow pace of life makes me want to stay there. (A 21-year-old girl from Shanghai)

European education generally focuses on the cultivation of interest, allowing students to try different activities to find their preferred area of learning. On European study tours, Chinese students can participate in experiential teaching and discover their points of interest in practice while experiencing the multinational culture of Europe. These points were the outstanding features of European study tours, and important in terms of Chinese study tour trends. The beautiful scenery and profound cultural heritage in Europe mean sightseeing study tours are a major product on the travel market. European study tours to

countries such as France, Germany, and Switzerland had the advantages of offering different languages' learning and culture. Additionally, the traditional European tourist destination of Italy was also included in many study tours as a special product that spans education and tourism.

Canada was another major country for studying abroad, and has a government that promotes multiculturalism and encourages outstanding talents from all over the world to live and study in Canada. Canada has attracted businesses from around the world with its advanced education system, high-quality educational resources and favourable immigration policies. Many Chinese families regard Canada as their first choice for studying, as the following feedback mentions:

> *From the east coast to the west coast of Canada, each province has different characteristics and is rich in diversity. The outdoor and indoor entertainment activities are rich and diverse for us. (A 16-year-old boy from Shenzhen)*

> *Canada is my first-choice country, and I finally went there this winter vacation. As a child from south China, I saw heavy snow for the first time and made a snowman with my classmates. (A 15-year-old girl from Guangzhou)*

> *The universities in Canada have always maintained a very high academic level, various international rankings are very high, and the degrees are recognised worldwide. What's more, among all major English-speaking countries, Canada has low tuition fees and is also a country suitable for immigrants. (Mother of a 16-year-old boy from Shenyang)*

Canada's high-quality education system was the primary factor attracting Chinese students. Firstly, in terms of education level, Canada has many world-renowned schools, and students liked to visit their ideal destination schools in advance by taking part in the international study tours. Secondly, a good living environment is another important consideration. As a country of immigrants, Canada has a tradition and policy of valuing multiculturalism, reflecting Canada's high ethnic tolerance.

New Zealand is another popular country, and in the Southern Hemisphere. Compared with Australia, study tours to New Zealand had different characteristics. New Zealand has high social security ratings, abundant natural resources, snow-covered mountains, steaming volcanoes, stretches of beaches, and even a Hobbit village created for the *Lord*

of the Rings films, which attract the attention of Chinese students. In addition to English language learning and knowledge, students were able to experience New Zealand's characteristic Māori culture and local features. Using nature as the tool for learning, this kind of study tour left the traditional teaching modes and inspired students' spirits of active exploration. This is demonstrated in the following comments.

> *There are many farms in New Zealand, and you can often see cattle and sheep everywhere. Being in New Zealand makes me feel very close to nature. (A 14-year-old girl from Shanghai)*

> *This study tour not only went to Auckland to experience a sailing trip, but also went skiing in the South Island. Queenstown is simply beautiful. (A 15-year-old girl from Guangzhou)*

> *As a big fan of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, I finally went to New Zealand. The Hobbit Village is amazing. This study tour in New Zealand not only improved my spoken English, but I also learned a few words of Māori, kiaora. (A 17-year-old boy from Nanjing)*

When students and parents choose a study tour destination, their first consideration is usually whether the educational resources of the study destination are sufficient. In the context of globalisation of the international education market, the consideration of social security and international influences on study destinations has become a criterion by which to judge a country as a potential study destination. Overall, the traditional countries where people study abroad, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, are still worth relying on in terms of international influence and social stability, and have become the preferred destinations for most Chinese students and parents. In addition, the cost of study tours, local scenery and climate, cultural identity, and the difficulty of visa acquisition were other important considerations for the choice of country of the intended international study tours.

From the explanations in this section, it is apparent that many Chinese students and parents used study tours to focus on the actual situation of schools in the destination countries, such as their learning environments, the majors available, and other educational resources of the schools that affected the students' future education plans and developments.

4.4 The factors influencing study tour selection

4.4.1 Security

With the vigorous development of China's study tour market, various kinds of international study tours have become available, and their qualities differ. Choosing the most suitable international study tour for children during the winter and summer vacations has become one of the focuses of the parents.

> *There are too many study tours programmes now, and for me, security for the children is the most important. (Mother of a 13-year-old girl)*

> *This is the first time my son has left us for such a long time. We always worried about what to do if he got sick. Fortunately, the teachers were very professional and could solve emergencies. (Mother of a 10-year-old boy)*

> *I will choose a peaceful, politically stable, and socially safe country as my child's study destination. (Father of a 12-year-old boy from Chengdu).*

Through the comments, it emerged that parents were most concerned about the overall safety of participating in a study tour. In particular, the parents of primary and middle school students valued safety protection the most, and most parents of students who intended to study abroad put the issue of overseas safety as their primary consideration.

4.4.2 Brand reputation

Some students and parents paid attention to diverse and personalised tours when choosing a study tour. Some of the students and their parents were interested in the brand and reputation of the travel institution when they chose a study abroad tour. This is evident in the following comments.

> *I have participated in study tours in the United States before, mainly for English language study and university visits. I now prefer to participate in study tours with rich tourism activities. (A 15-year-old boy from Chongqing)*

> *My colleague recommended me the New Oriental International Study Tour Organisation. Their children participated last year, and they said they not only did they have English classes, but also participated in many extracurricular activities. (Mother of a 13-year-old boy from Beijing)*

In addition, experienced leading teachers, high-quality overseas study tour camps, study tour product prices, visa pass rates, and recommendations by friends were criteria affecting the selection of or participation in international study tours.

4.5 Students and parents' evaluations of study tours

4.5.1 Study tours for increasing knowledge

Allowing children to take a rare vacation to study abroad and see the wider world was considered an excellent way to tap into potential advantages and improve language communication skills and adaptability at a stage when children's outlooks on life and the world were being formed.

> *Because of this study tour, I found that the world has become bigger. Staying in the same place for a long time, getting along with the same group of friends for a long time, doing the same thing for a long time, will inevitably make my world smaller. So, go out, no matter what happens, meet different people, things, and scenes that will bring us new horizons and insights. (Siya, a 16-year-old girl from Chengdu)*

> *These experiences and insights will give the children a lot of capital and confidence, and they will develop their unique temperament and mind over time. The study tour is to pull yourself out of your daily life. I am very happy that my daughter has grown up through this study tour and become sensible. (Siya's mother)*

Most of children's knowledge comes from books or from the Internet, especially for children growing up in a city. Study tours provide children with opportunities to experience various things in nature and society personally, and improve their perceptions of the world. Other countries in the world are different to China, so children can come into contact with a lot of new experiences during a trip, can acquire a lot of new knowledge that is not in books, and at the same time, increase their general knowledge.

> *Because of the study tour, I have a vision for university for the first time. The principles taught by my parents and the teachers are extremely important to each of our students, but in some cases, it may not be more effective than our own experience. (Zihao, a 17-year-old boy from Chongqing)*

> *I think if children intend to study abroad, they can experience the customs of the selected country in advance through study tours, and go to the selected colleges and universities in advance to listen to classes, to feel and to understand the atmosphere of the colleges they*

will apply for, to pave the way for the future study abroad career. My son has experienced a lot of universities that he never felt before. I think this study tour was arranged very well. (Zihao's father)

4.5.2 Study tours for improving adaptability

There will always be unpredictable situations that are not in anyone's control during travel. When an accident occurs, it can prompt the children's ability to adapt to changes. No doubt children's willpower will be exercised in solving difficult problems encountered during travel. Travelling allows children to see a wider world, which can stimulate their curiosity about new things, their desire to explore, and result in a more open mind in terms of accepting new things and having creative ideas.

Many people may have learned English for many years. When they go abroad, they find that they cannot open their mouths. After learning English for many years in school and going through countless exams, how to fluently order in a restaurant, looking for scenic spots on the road, even asking for directions, checking in at a hotel, etc., this study tour made me feel that hands-on practice is the best way to learn a language. (Dan, a 15-year-old boy from Wuhan)

For every person whose native language is not English, communicating in English is not only a change of language, but also a change of thinking logic. Of course, if they decide not to go abroad, students can still go to a foreign teacher's language class. However, no matter how much foreign teachers teach, they cannot replicate a real-life scene or experience:

After this study tour, I had a more profound experience of modesty and courtesy. At first, I asked the teacher why oncoming strangers on the street smile to us or say hi. Why do they like to say sorry whether it is their fault or not? This time going abroad to study was an opportunity for me to experience a new environment and human relationships. Going out to study, we not only increase our knowledge and listen to the story, but also let our heart open more and embrace everything that is worth embracing. I am grateful for such a journey to be part of my life. (Han, a 16-year-old boy from Hangzhou)

Because of studying abroad, I love my parents even more. Maybe when you are at home, you will not listen to your parents, be grateful for your parents' giving, and don't understand your parents' love. Until you set out alone, you do not realise your comfort zone which was built by parents with hard work. (Ruoxuan, a 15-year-old girl from Nanjing)

Travelling provides a good opportunity to enhance children's ability to live more

independently. Various difficulties during travel provided the children with personal challenges as well as an opportunity. Without the help of parents while travelling, children had to learn how to deal with the surrounding environment when they encountered difficulties, improve their ability to solve problems, and improve their self-confidence. In the process of communicating with different people, children also learned how to behave in the world, and their ability to communicate with others improved.

> *Due to this short-term study tour in the summer holidays, I have seen the diversity of society. After walking around, you will immediately realise how narrow the material-led world view is, and you don't need so many items to get happiness. (Hong, an 18-year-old girl from Tianjin)*

> *I was very happy to participate in this study tour. Experiencing different lives in different countries provided me with a lot of material for writing articles. It made my vision not only limited to my school and the city where I live. (A 16-year-old girl from Hangzhou)*

A short-term international study tour can provide opportunities to get students out of their comfort zones. For students, the purpose of visiting a university was not just to walk around, but to get an impression of being admitted to a prestigious school, and produce a vision in their minds, encouraging them to work hard to achieve their future goals.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings on international study tours from China, as well as meeting the research objectives. Through the analysis of gender, age, and educational backgrounds of the students who had participated in study tours, the characteristics of and preferences for different Chinese study tour groups were explained. The findings also presented the analyses of the choice of study destinations, such as those in Europe, North America, or the Southern Hemisphere, as well as the factors affecting study tour selections in terms of comprehensive security assurance and brand reputation. This chapter also analysed feedback from students and parents' evaluation of their experiences. The discussion in the next chapter links back to the literature to provide more depth to the findings and compare any differences between students' and parents' perspectives.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research study explored the reasons for the popularity of international study tours in China and the attitudes and opinions of students on these study tours and those of their parents. This chapter answers the research questions around the characteristics and needs of Chinese students participating in international study tours, as well as the factors considered when choosing a destination country, as outlined in the previous chapter. By combining the arguments presented in the literature review in chapter two and the findings in chapter four, the following sections discuss the research results in detail.

5.2 Reasons for the popularity of international study tours in China

5.2.1 Value of international study tours

With the increasing awareness of international study tours in the Chinese market, students and parents are becoming increasingly aware of the importance and necessity of participating in international study tours at an early age. The data analysis presented in the findings shows that most students participate in international study tours at junior and high school stages, but that there is also demand for study tours for students at elementary school. This finding confirms the statement by Liu (2016), that the trend of younger students to go on international study tours is recognised in the Chinese market. In terms of the ages for participating in international study tours, Evans et al. (2008) stated that the elementary school stage is an important period in the formation of children's outlooks on life, values, and the world. If students participate in international study tours during this stage of their education, as noted in the comments posted by parents, the children can integrate into a global education classroom in advance, and better understand the foreign education system and educational philosophies. These findings echo those in the literature, with Brigham (2011) making the argument that in international learning and short-term exchanges, establishing the long-term goal of attending a world-renowned school is of great significance to each child's future plans and personal development.

Many high school and college school students' comments mentioned that through the short-term international study tours and communications, they could consider in advance the countries and colleges they wanted to study at in the future. This finding is consistent with that of Cai et al. (2015), who found that a short-term international study tour before studying abroad plays a key role in the early planning of studying abroad in the future, which is also a new trend for college students. From Dejordy et al.'s (2019) perspective, students can experience the local learning environment and atmosphere by visiting different study destinations and making adjustments to their future plans. This is a new way for students to evaluate their current plans, which is reflected in the recognition of the value of international study tours by students and their parents.

However, the findings also show that the occupations and incomes of parents of students participating in study tours are generally at the upper-middle level. With the acceleration of China's socialist modernisation process, many families in China are capable of and willing to invest in their children's international study tours. However, this was not reflected in the research of Ryan and Zhang (2006), who found that the occupational background of parents did not affect their support of their children's participation in study tours. It is evident that parents have increased their awareness of the value of international study tours. The parents of this generation of students can achieve work and social status, bringing personal experience and foresight, so have long-term plans for shaping their children's international vision and educational quality.

5.2.2 Attractiveness of different study tour destinations

Mirani and Farahani (2015) pointed out that people need a broad perspective to understand different social classes and think about the world from a diverse perspective. The findings of this study show that the attractiveness of destination countries has a strong influence on the choice of study tour destinations for parents and students.

Data in *Table 4* (p.39) show that more than half the students choose the United States as their study tour destination. Some students wrote in their comments that they had a deeper understanding of some local English expressions and the local cultural background after

their study tour to the United States. Others wrote that they started to actively engage in group discussions with local students in class, and their oral expression skills significantly improved. These findings are consistent with Liu (2016)'s view that study tours can help Chinese children learn and think about how to cooperate with others. While receiving the influence of the Western education system and educational philosophy, they can also evaluate the different teaching styles and learning atmospheres and compare them with those in China (Chen, 2016), as well as improve their foreign language expression skills (Ballestas & Roller, 2013). In recent years, it has become a trend for Chinese students to use their holidays to travel to the United States for short-term study trips to experience the learning atmospheres of American classrooms.

The core of the British education system is to respect students' individual differences. Manspeaker and Wallace (2019) stated that under a strict quality assurance system, there are more than 90 universities and 50 higher education institutions in the UK. The most frequent comments from students who participated in a study tour to the UK were on the British education system and aristocratic culture. These points coincide with those of Chen and Lu (2019), who found that the UK culture encouraged students to use their curiosity and interest to explore freely and find their true passion. Schools and teachers provide students with learning resources and guidance in this process. Lee (2019) also mentioned a related point of view, in relation to participating in short-term study tours in the United Kingdom. They observed that Chinese students appreciated the rigorous education system and aristocratic culture of the United Kingdom, and achieved multiple study tour goals, such as those of self-cultivation, English learning, and cultural understanding.

As one of the world's three major overseas study destinations for Chinese students, Australia has 42 higher education institutions and universities, eight of which are among the top 50 in the world; 53% of Australian universities are among the top 500 in the world (Liu & Wang, 2018). This highlights that Australia's overall education level is world-class. Australia has always been able to attract students from all over the world with its high-quality educational resources and rich multiculturalism (Liu & Wang, 2018). In

addition, many students who participated in Australian study tours were attracted by Australia's ecological environment and wildlife. This was also evident in comments by Lu (2012), who stated that Australia's unique natural ecological environment and the environmental protection concept of human beings living in harmony with nature were important reasons for Chinese students to choose Australia as a study destination.

Furthermore, according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2019), in 2018, as many as 360,000 international students studied in Canada, an increase of 83% on 2008. The 110,000 Chinese students accounted for the largest proportion, accounting for 33% of all international students. In addition, the relaxation of visa policies and the increases in immigration policy benefits were also good news for students and parents who chose Canada for their study tours (New Oriental International Study Tour Organisation, 2019). These policies were also considerations when parents chose Canada as a destination country for their children.

For Chinese students and parents, the Schengen visa and convenient transportation were motivations for participating in European study tours. The experience of visiting multiple countries in one trip is very attractive to students. Burion (2015) stated that many European universities are keen to admit students with international perspectives and multinational learning experiences. Studying abroad in Europe can better meet the needs of students to broaden their international horizons and experience international education. Some students in this research mentioned that they chose to go to Europe because they could experience the culture of different countries on one trip. Rudolf (2016) also mentioned similar views, that Europe is the birthplace of Western culture, and multinational culture can give students the most authentic Western cultural experience.

New Zealand has high social security ratings, and an education system with a history of more than 100 years (Ryan & Zhang, 2006). However, most of the students participating in New Zealand study tours had environmental study tours as their main purpose of travel. Parents hoped that their children could feel the pleasure of sunshine, ocean, and pure nature in New Zealand. Students thought that the good ecological environment and farm animals visible everywhere had a significant impact on them. As people pay more

attention to environmental protection, students are better able to respect life, respect nature, admire nature, and be appreciative of life.

As the study tour market matures, there will be more choices of destination countries for study tours. In the future, study tours with unique resources will be favoured by parents and students. When high-quality education and professional tourism are perfectly combined, travel organisers can promote study tour products that are highly recognised by the market.

5.3 Parents' perspectives on and attitudes towards international study tours

5.3.1 Quality of study tours

When choosing a study tour destination, parents are most concerned about the quality of the study tour projects. For example, it was evident in the findings that parents considered whether the educational resources of the destination countries were rich, whether the children's safety would be guaranteed, whether the organisers of the study tours were professional, and whether the schedule of the study tour was diverse. These points of view were mentioned by the parents unanimously.

The issue of rich educational resources in destination countries was mentioned in the attractiveness of destination countries, as just noted. The following section discusses issues of safety, the professionalism of organisation, and the diversity of the itinerary. First, as far as parents are concerned, when their children are handed over to study tour organisations, their main concern is safety. This point of view was reflected in Akande's (2010) research, which stated that comprehensive security is a prerequisite for parents choosing a study tour agency. Parents of elementary and middle school students particularly commented on the importance of security overseas. Apart from the safety of the destination country and the safety of transportation, the safety of accommodation and food is also the focus of parents' attention. If destination countries have a high safety factor, stable social status, high-quality host families, and safe quality food, parents are

more able to feel surer of their decisions in relation to safety.

Furthermore, from the comments of the parents in the findings, it is evident that participating in study tours organised by educational institutions is a major way for Chinese students to travel. Parents assess whether the study tour organisations are professional in terms of the students' potential gains during the study tour, study planning, and itinerary arrangements. Parents believe that professional study tour organisations have core values and concepts of related products in overseas study, itinerary arrangements, and curriculum settings. Such institutions not only treat students' study tours as group tours, but also allow students to achieve their expected gains in the process of international cultural learning (Liu, 2016). In addition, professional study tour institutions have multiple study tour routes. This observation is consistent with the view of Bodycott (2009), who commented that the setting of each study tour project takes into account the learning, educational, and growth attributes of a student group, which can influence the students' determination on the study tour (as cited in Chen & Isa, 2013).

For students who participate in a study tour, the main products are English learning and cultural exploration (Duan & Zhang, 2020), such as visiting museums and art galleries. For example, on the study tour programmes, parents pay most attention to cultural integration and English communication (Li, 2019), followed by attention to the natural environment and local camp education. Local camp education is a relatively new concept to most Chinese parents and students according to Chen and Lu (2019), but many parents and students are willing to try and accept it. As some students and parents mentioned in their comments, a camp experience allows children to try a new way of life, which can become a precious memory for those who have been living in a large city. In addition, innovation on a study tour is also very important for parents. In the information on the New Oriental International Study Tour website (http://www.youxue.xdf.cn), the types of study tours planned in the future were also mentioned, with various types of creative courses, such as art courses, robotics competitions and other items on the list. This kind of uniquely themed study tour arrangement covers the multi-dimensional interests of students in art, music, programming, and photography. Participating in a study tour of

this kind has the potential to exercise students' practical abilities and stimulate their interest, which meets the expectations of the parents.

5.3.2 Benefits of study tours to children's development

As mentioned in the literature, in the current context of global political and economic integration, parents are more aware of the importance of cultivating children to become global citizens (Hains-Wesson & Appleby, 2017), so enhancing a more international perspective is sought by students and parents (Cole, 2017). While these points are matched with the findings in this study, the parents thought that the main purposes of the international study tour were to broaden students' world vision, enrich students' life, enhance students' initiative, cultivate students' characteristics and develop their skills in relation to globalisation, diversified concepts and thinking habits, all of which are considered benefits of international study tours. Students obtained information from all over the world through the Internet and other channels. They were curious about the world and hoped to gain international learning experience through short-term international study tours. This finding is consistent with viewpoints in the literature. Stone et al. (2014) mentioned that students participating in study tours are not just visiting, but seeking a personal experience that will help them understand different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, cultivating an international perspective is not only important to the demand for study tour consumption (parents), but also the demand for study tour experience (students), which makes it the most important purpose of study tours.

In the process of taking part in the study tours, students can also practise relatively independent living and learn to self-manage and cooperate with others. These points of view were common in the findings and confirm the work of Ryan and Zhang (2006), who found that study tours can mobilise students' learning initiative, so they can participate in the classroom more actively. Many students learned how to cooperate better with others during the study tour, whether in class discussions or after-class communication. When students express their own ideas to group members, they also subconsciously develop good oral expression skills and logical connection skills, and improve their overall communication skills (Varela, 2017).

Parents expect children to experience the general teaching style, education system, and teaching philosophy of Western education during a study tour. This exploration of different educational backgrounds also confirms the argument of Riggan et al. (2011) that the cultural shock of students exposed to different educational backgrounds can produce totally different feelings in students compared to those they feel in China; furthermore, they can learn to integrate into the local culture more when they are in a different cultural environment. From the perspectives of students, a foreign language learning environment can improve their understanding of foreign education environments, teaching concepts, and methods. Students can more easily and quickly improve listening and speaking fluency on study tours. Tucker and Weaver (2013) had a similar view, noting that through personal experience, young students can more effectively understand and enhance their foreign language skills.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter responded to the research questions in this study by combining the findings from the previous chapter with the arguments found in the literature. First, several reasons were offered for the popularity of international study tours in China. One, was that parents and students were becoming increasingly aware of the value of international study tours. Parents value education and support their children to experience the world, even if the children are young. Furthermore, there are now more choices of study destinations than before. Each country has different attractions for students and parents, so students who participate in study tours have increasing opportunities to experience different world views.

The subsequent section (section 5.3) explored parents' attitudes to and viewpoints on international study tours. Parents paid the most attention to the quality of study tours when choosing study tour projects, and took into account the educational resources of the destination country, the security during the study tour, the brand reputation of the study tour organisers, and the diversity of the study tour arrangements. In addition, parents also believed that participating in study tours could bring many benefits to their children, such

as increasing children's knowledge, fostering an international perspective, and improving learning enthusiasm and foreign language skills. The final conclusion chapter synthesises the findings, reviews the research objectives and research questions, explains the significance and implications of this research, and considers possibilities for future research on study tours.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview based on the research aims and objectives of this study. Through a review of the entire study, it points out the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, and explains some limitations of the research, proposes future research, and offers a personal reflection.

6.2 Aims and objectives revisited

The aim of this research was to explore the reasons for the popularity of international study tours among Chinese students, as well as students' and parents' views on and attitudes towards study tours. Through a thematic analysis of the online comments of students who had participated in a study tour, and those of their parents, the following key concepts were identified.

1. With the increase of income levels, parents' investment in children's education continues to grow, which means that parents are paying increasing attention to international education opportunities, in the hope that their children can be exposed to a quality educational environment.

2. The study tour age group spans a wide range, and there is a trend for relatively young students to participate in international study tours.

3. Different study destination countries bring different educational experiences as well as attractions to students.

4. The abundance of educational resources and local social safety/security are the most important criteria to use when choosing study tour destinations.

5. Students and parents are very clear about the purposes of participating in international study tours, with broadening their horizons and increasing their knowledge being the primary reasons to participate in study tours.

These insights contributed to the answers to the following research questions:

Question 1: At this stage, what are the characteristics and needs of the students in China participating in the study tours?

At this stage, students participating in international study tours are increasingly of a younger age in China. The family backgrounds of these students are generally in the middle or above living standard, and their parents are willing to invest in their children's education based on their world views. Middle and high school students are the main group of study tours. In this group, many students have a plan of studying abroad in the future. These students hope that through the experience of and interactions on short-term international study tours, they can make choices in advance about the countries and colleges they wish to study at abroad in the future.

Increasing numbers of students visit different countries through short-term study tours to experience diverse educational backgrounds. For students on a study tour, language learning and cultural experience are no longer the only requirements. Parents and students have gradually begun to pay attention to the self-cultivation of quality and interest. Diversified study tours have also become popular international study tours.

Question 2: What is the priority for parents and students when choosing a destination country?

For parents, the greatest concern is the safety of their children, when they hand them over to study tour institutions. All-round safety protection is a prerequisite for parents choosing study tour projects. The diversity of study tour routes and the richness of educational resources in the destination countries are the core elements that attract students and parents, as well as their brand reputations. In addition, having experienced teachers and overseas camps are also important deciding factors for parents and students.

6.3 Implications

6.3.1 Theoretical implications

The focus of this research was to explore the reasons international study tours are popular in China and to analyse parents' and students' views on these study tours. The development and research of theories on international study tours in China needs to be improved. The public has recognised that short-term international study tours can bring benefits to students. However, there is little in-depth research on the reasons for the popularity of tours, the way study tours are conducted, and their longer-term benefits. Therefore, this research combined the personal and family backgrounds of the students participating in study tours, as well as the analysis and discussion of the different views of students and their parents, to provide new research perspectives and directions in the field of international study tours in China.

6.3.2 Practical implications

This study provided an understanding of the overall views of students participating in study tours and their parents' perspectives, as well as in-depth insights into the study tour market in China. Through research into the current situation of study tours in China, it offers evidence of study tour destinations and routes for students and parents who have the motivation and intention to invest in study tours in the future. This research found that different countries have different concerns about education, and different countries for study tours can bring different benefits to students. With the increasing popularity of international study tours in China and the gradual younger age of students participating in study tours, the safety of study tours has also become the focus of attention of parents. This research provides new ideas for study tour organisations and creates innovative ideas for future study tour arrangements. Therefore, the outcomes of this research have some important practical implications.

6.4 Personal reflection

In the process of completing this dissertation, I developed a deep understanding of the status and operation of international study tours in the Chinese market. In my opinion, the deep-seated reason for the upsurge of overseas study tours is the insufficient supply of high-quality educational resources in China. For a long time, the educational resources and educational methods of Western countries have been highly respected in China, whereas China's educational resources and educational methods have been criticised. The uneven distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas, between the eastern, central, and western regions have exacerbated the shortage of supply, causing many students who cannot obtain high-quality domestic educational resources to look abroad.

However, China also needs to focus on ways to regulate the overseas study tour market. This requires the joint efforts of government departments, the study tour industry, and study tour participants. Firstly, the Chinese Government should strengthen the qualification review of overseas study tour agencies, travel agencies, and schools. It is also necessary to increase the promotion and popularisation of knowledge and laws related to overseas study tours. Secondly, practitioners in the study tour industry must continuously improve their abilities, their quality, and strengthen their sense of responsibility. The third point is that parents should more rationally weigh up the cost-effectiveness of a tour, obtaining information from multiple sources when choosing a study tour project, and planning the itinerary carefully. Fourthly, it is important to develop domestic education more vigorously. The improvement of domestic education at home can keep some of the overseas study tour demand back in China.

In the current COVID-19 situation, we have to admit that future international study tours may be very different from those of the past, especially to the United States and the United Kingdom, which are among the countries most affected by the pandemic. At present, due to the ongoing epidemic, most countries only allow native citizens to enter. Considering that safety and security are the most important issues for parents, parents will need to

more carefully consider destination countries for study tours in the future. For the moment, no one knows when the epidemic will end. Both international study tours and outbound tourism are experiencing a downturn. However, the demand for international study tours and outbound travel still exists. When the epidemic can be controlled, I believe that the market for international study tours and outbound travel will restart, albeit it might look differently.

6.5 Limitations and future research

This research has limitations which may have impacted on the results of the study. An obvious limitation is that to collect effective review information, I chose a well-known institution that has run international short-term study tours in China for many years, and searched only for the public comments on the institution's website and WeChat public accounts. However, website and official accounts administrators can optimise the comments and selectively disclose them. Therefore, in the public comments, there are only positive comments, leading to the final discussion focus on the positive impacts of study tours, with no mention of any negative impacts; this no doubt affected the objectivity of the research results. Another limitation is related to the selected research topic. There is not enough literature on international study tours, and most studies are from the perspective of education rather than travel experiences, which has led to the findings of this research to focus more on educational viewpoints than on tourism. Nevertheless, the study tour market does exist in the education and tourism markets.

As mentioned, as the international study tour market grows in China and continues to grow in the future, more studies should be carried out on study tours focusing on tourism aspects. In my view, the focus of a study tour should be on taking students to learn while travelling, not to travel while studying. The significance of study tours lies more in experience and exploration, which can help students develop their thinking and gain a more diverse international perspective. In the circumstance of experience, instead of studying, children can integrate better with international society through their life experiences abroad, which can have a positive significance for the cultivation of their

outlook on the world. In addition, more research is needed on the potential longer-term benefits of international study tours in future research. Many benefits were identified in this research, but they need to be followed up with more thorough research.

6.6 Overall conclusion

In the current environment of globalisation, it has become a trend for students to participate in short-term international study tours during their holidays. Due to the wide variety of types of study tours and destination countries, the study tour market is becoming increasingly prosperous. This study used a mixed research approach. Quantitative research was used to analyse the demographic characteristics of students participating in study tours and their family backgrounds, while qualitative research analysed the comments of students who participated in study tours and those of their parents, using thematic analysis methods. Extracting information about the study tour experience obtained from different reviews produced effective results, such as those on the benefits of study tours.

Once parents realised the value of short-term international study tours for their children, the age of students participating in study tours tended to become younger, which means that parents hope that their children are exposed to a broader worldview earlier. Therefore, this study shows that with the improvement of parents' financial level and increased focus on educational attainment, the market share of international study tours also increases. Different destination countries bring different attractions and benefits to children. When choosing a study tour, parents pay the most attention to the safety and quality of the study tour projects. Parents also believe that participating in an international study tour can bring many benefits to their children. However, considering the future of study tours, more comprehensive and diversified study tour products focusing on tourism experiences need to be proposed, as well as the longer-term benefits of participating in international study tours need further research.

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