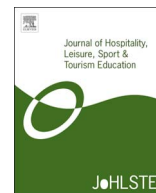


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## Critical Perspectives

# Hospitality and tourism management students' study and career preferences: Comparison of three Asian regional groups

Seongseop (Sam) Kim <sup>a,\*</sup>, Jishim Jung <sup>b</sup>, Kuo-Ching Wang <sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> School of Hotel & Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 17 Science Museum Road, TST East, Kowloon, Hong Kong<sup>b</sup> College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Sejong University, Gunja-dong, Gwangjin-gu, Seoul 143-747, Republic of Korea<sup>c</sup> Graduate Institute of Sport, Leisure, and Hospitality Management, National Taiwan Normal University, 162, Sec. 1, Hoping E. Rd., Taipei, Taiwan

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## ABSTRACT

This study is involved with five objectives: understanding hospitality and tourism management (HTM) students' preferences, their characteristics for future HTM career, their motivations for choosing HTM as a major, their reasons for choosing or not choosing whether to work in the hospitality and tourism industry, and the important factors that they consider when making career decisions. The responses of HTM students living in three Asian countries where HTM programs are popular were compared. Taiwanese students exhibited the highest level of motivation to study HTM and the lowest level of willingness to work in a low position at the starting of their career among the three regional groups. In contrast, Hong Kong students indicated the lowest motivation to study HTM and the most negative responses regarding welfare or working conditions in the hospitality and tourism fields as reasons for not choosing to work in the industry. Korean students showed the highest expectation of international working opportunities and a flexible organization culture, and the highest level of willingness to work in a high position at their starting career point. All of the student groups indicated the importance of practical learning or interest in employment over scholastic pursuits or intellectual interest. The results of this study are useful for HTM education stakeholders, including potential students, HTM school staff and the HT industry.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013a), the growth rate in international tourism demand is in line with its long-term outlook for tourism in 2030, with an average growth of 3.8% per year. In particular, countries in the Asia-Pacific region are expected to record the highest growth rates (UNWTO, 2013b). According to the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE), 127 institutions in the United States offer a hospitality baccalaureate and graduate degrees (not including certificates and diplomas). Among them, many major state universities have grown to offer large hospitality programs, some admitting more than 1000 students. Such growth indicates intense competition among hospitality programs for better quality and increased student enrollment (Lee, Olds, &

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [sam.kim@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:sam.kim@polyu.edu.hk), [sskim@sejong.ac.kr](mailto:sskim@sejong.ac.kr) (S. (Sam). Kim), [jsjung0930@hotmail.co.kr](mailto:jsjung0930@hotmail.co.kr) (J. Jung), [gordonwang@ntnu.edu.tw](mailto:gordonwang@ntnu.edu.tw) (K.-C. Wang).

Lee, 2010). This rapid growth should result in prosperous HTM programs capable of keeping pace with increased demand. Although the significant role of HTM education has been highlighted, research into the motivation behind actual HTM students' decisions to pursue HTM studies – at home and abroad – or to plan for a career in an HTM field is limited (Jung, Kim, & Schuckert, 2014; Kim, Guo, Wang, & Agrusa, 2007; Lu & Adler, 2009; Richardson, 2008).

The development of the HT industry has also stimulated demand for hospitality and tourism management (HTM) education and the establishment of related educational institutions. For example, in 1972, there were only 20 institutions in the UK offering HTM courses, by 2009 the number had risen to 117 (Walmsley, 2012). This growth has been particularly evident in the East Asia region. In China, the first college issuing an HTM diploma was established shortly after the “open-door policy” came into effect in 1978 and a degree program followed in 1982. Statistics show that there has been rapid growth over the past thirty years: by 2011, 1115 colleges and universities were offering HTM programs to 599,800 students (CNTA, 2012 as cited in Li & Li, 2013). In 1995, there were five 4-year colleges providing 2921 students with HTM programs in Taiwan. By 2013, 237 departments at 95 Taiwanese schools (4-year colleges and the Institute of Technology) were offering 91,889 students HTM programs (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 1997, 2013). Taiwan had only one graduate school that provided an HTM graduate program to 34 students in 1995; by 2013 a total of 68 departments were offering 3659 students an MA program and 3 departments were offering 27 students sports-, leisure-, travel-, or hospitality-related p.h. D. programs (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 1997, 2013).

There are two four-year colleges in Hong Kong with HTM programs. As of 2013, the number of undergraduate students was approximately 2000, the number of master's students about 200 and the number of doctoral students about 50. In Korea, 35 departments of 4-year colleges offered 7971 students HTM programs in 1995, whereas 80 departments offered 13,573 students HTM programs in 2013. Following the widespread popularity of HTM at the undergraduate level, graduate programs have exhibited a similar increase. In 1995, there were only 3 graduate schools providing 54 p.h. D. students with HTM doctoral programs, while in 2013, 32 departments offered 616 students HTM master's programs and 13 departments offered about 350 students doctoral programs (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2013).

Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea are very well known for the passion for higher education among students, parents, and governments (Shanny, 2013; Sharma, 2013). Higher education institutions and graduate colleges in universities continue to face increasing competition from around the world (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Crosling & Heagney, 2009). Universities and graduate colleges that have an HTM graduate school also are facing an increasingly challenging and competitive environment (Lee, Yuan, Hwang, & Kim, 2012). In addition, they have experienced explosive HT industry growth and a resultant increase in HTM program enrollment. Despite the popularity of HTM studies in Asian countries, research comparing Asian student groups is very limited. International students' choice to study in another country is affected by individual demand, current national educational situations, and other student-attracting circumstances (Han & Yoon, 2015; Horng & Teng, 2006; Jung et al., 2014). Hong Kong in particular has observed a rapid increase in the number of exchange students, college students, and postgraduate students from nearby Asian countries. There is thus a need to compare their preferences and wants.

Relatively few HTM education studies have explored students' preferences for majoring programs (Cothran & Combrink, 1999; Kim et al., 2007; Ma, Kim, & Lee, 2007; O'Mahony, McWilliams, & Whitelaw, 2001) and factors influencing preference for a career in the HT industry (Airey & Forntisitit, 1997; Barron, Maxwell, Broadbridge, & Ogden, 2007; Cothran & Combrink, 1999; Jenkins, 2001; King, Mc Kercher, & Waryszak, 2003; Lu & Adler, 2009; Nores, 2010; O'Mahony et al., 2001; Richardson, 2008; Ros et al., 1999; Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005).

Most studies have analyzed the HTM educational issues of only one national educational system (e.g., Horng, Lee et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2010; Lo, 2006; Myung & Li, 2015). They have not incorporated diverse HTM education agendas because they only reported one nation's educational circumstances. In addition, previous studies used small samples. They avoided more practical problems faced by Asian students, such as studying abroad. Since most studies were undertaken in non-Asian countries, it is interesting to focus on Asian circumstances. Recent efforts to explore cross-national differences have been very limited. Since education is an institutional system in every country, the HTM educational system and educational culture can be different (Annaraud, 2006; Hobson, 1999; Hu, Chen, & Lin, 2006; Ineson, Rhodeb, Nita, & Alexieva, 2011). Currently, in a time when Asian HTM students study abroad in foreign countries such as the U. K., the U. S., Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand (Jung et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2007), countries that want to recruit more Asian HTM students need to understand the characteristics and preferences of Asian students.

In response to the weaknesses of previous studies that made efforts to identify the characteristics of one national student group, this study attempted to assess cross-regional or cross-national differences by comparing the student cohorts of three regions in East Asia. This study's method involved surveys, rather than small-scale interviews, so as to include different responses from a large student population that is diverse in terms of educational level, geographical region, and major subject. To avoid sampling bias, this study collected completed surveys from 404 respondents attending six Korean colleges, 553 from respondents attending five Taiwanese colleges, and 338 from respondents attending two Hong Kong colleges.

This study has five objectives. The first is to identify students' preferences for HTM studies and characteristics through a series of chi-square analyses. The second is to understand the characteristics of students' plans for future HTM careers through a series of chi-square analyses. The third is to explore students' motivations for choosing HTM as a major and to assess students' reasons for choosing to work in the HT industry. The fourth is to evaluate students' reasons for not choosing to work in the HT industry and to analyze the important factors in making a career decision. The fifth is to compare the results of the three regional groups. Even though these three groups live in the same East Asian region, a comparison of the

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