

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Global mobility in nursing: Why Chinese students leave to study nursing in Australia

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The world-wide demand for skilled Registered Nurses is high, and understanding the reasons why Chinese students leave home to study nursing in Australia is important for institutions, policy makers, and nursing administrators in both China and Australia. This paper explores the factors shaping the decision of six Chinese students to study nursing in Australia and their preference to eventually live and work either in China or Australia.

**Methods:** A three-dimensional space narrative structure approach was used for this study. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with six Chinese nursing students whom were studying nursing at universities in Western Australia.

**Results:** Findings revealed that the most important factor that influenced Chinese students' decision to study nursing in Australia was the possibility for permanent residency.

**Conclusions:** Insights gained from the study are important for a myriad of factors including international nursing relocation, developments in networking and healthcare, and capitalising in education from a global perspective.

**Key Words:** International mobility, Study abroad, Chinese nursing student, 'Push and pull' model, Human capital, Nursing shortage

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a global shortage of nurses, which will continue to increase and is predicated to reach crisis levels in the next decade.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Simultaneously, the number of people requiring hospital level care has increased,<sup>[3]</sup> and the acuity of patients augmented.<sup>[4]</sup> Long term predictions state that at least, with 40% of nurses are planning on retiring in the next decade in most developed countries.<sup>[2]</sup>

This prediction has a high priority within the nursing profession because of the current low nurse staffing numbers, recruitment and retention issues and unequal skill mix that have been cited as the causes of significant deficits in patient care.<sup>[5]</sup> The world-wide demand has resulted in competi-

tion for skilled nurses,<sup>[6]</sup> therefore, understanding how and why students make the decision to move overseas to train as nurses is relevant to both recruitment and retention strategies.

China has identified particular challenges related to its nursing shortage<sup>[7]</sup> and has suffered a loss of economic investment due to the continuing loss of nurses,<sup>[8]</sup> which is compounding other challenges in the Chinese health care system.<sup>[9]</sup> Despite the need for nurses at home, Chinese citizens comprise the single largest group of international nursing students in Australia.<sup>[10,11]</sup>

However, there is little research that explores Chinese students' international education choice, their decision making process or, the reasons why Chinese students leave to study

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nursing in Australia.<sup>[12]</sup>

This paper reports a study that explored the factors shaping six Chinese students' decision to study nursing in Australia, and their preference to eventually live and work either in China or Australia.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1 The 'Push and pull' model

There is a shortage of scientific literature about Chinese students studying nursing in Australia. More specifically, very little is known about what motivates them to study nursing in Australia and what they are looking for in the nursing

programs at Australian universities. Studies have identified 'push and pull' factors (see Table 1) that influence international student global mobility and individuals' decision making.<sup>[13-15]</sup> Unfavourable conditions push people from their current place and favourable conditions simultaneously pull them to a more desirable place.<sup>[16]</sup> 'Push' factors work within the home country and prompt a student's decision to undertake international study. These include economic, social, and political forces.<sup>[17]</sup> 'Pull' factors work within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students, such as knowledge and awareness of the institution's reputation, support for international students, and recommendations from friends, relatives, or parents.<sup>[15]</sup>

**Table 1.** Summary of push and pull factors that affect Chinese students' global mobility and their decision making

Author (year)	Push factors	Pull factors
Zwart (2013)		Pull factors most influencing Chinese students country choice were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Ranking of the university</li> <li>The cost of living and tuition</li> </ul> The <u>least important</u> pull factor was the possibility of immigration to the host country
Lawson (2011)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The quality of education</li> <li>➢ Tuition cost</li> <li>➢ Living cost</li> <li>➢ Safety</li> <li>➢ Prospects for permanent residency (PR)</li> <li>➢ Opportunities to work</li> </ul>
Bodycott (2009)		A major pull factor in Chinese parents' decision making: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The promise or desire to emigrate</li> </ul>
Yang (2007)	Push factors motivating Chinese students to look abroad for education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The education system in China has been unable to accommodate all the Chinese students who desire higher education</li> <li>➢ Economic growth and prosperity in recent years have made self-funding an overseas education a possibility for many Chinese families</li> <li>➢ The government's 'open' policy on students going abroad which has a strong influence on student mobility.</li> </ul>	The most important factors motivating Chinese students to study in Australia are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Future migration opportunities after graduation</li> <li>➢ Australia's high quality of education</li> <li>➢ Competitive tuition fees</li> <li>➢ A lower cost of living</li> </ul>
Chen (2007)	Push factors that explain why international graduate students from East Asia choose to come to Canada to pursue advanced education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Political environment</li> <li>➢ Educational system</li> <li>➢ Social capital</li> <li>➢ Future career</li> <li>➢ Program offering</li> </ul>	The pull factors that attract Chinese students studying abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Immigration possibility for third world countries</li> <li>➢ Academic quality</li> <li>➢ Safety</li> <li>➢ Climate environment</li> <li>➢ Language</li> <li>➢ Geographic proximity</li> <li>➢ Location</li> <li>➢ Financial aid</li> <li>➢ Alumni</li> </ul>
Sanchez et al. (2006)		Pull factors to students' decision-making processes when choosing a destination for study abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Academic reputation</li> <li>➢ Safety</li> <li>➢ Cost</li> <li>➢ Location</li> <li>➢ Possibility of immigration</li> <li>➢ Possibility for economic advancement</li> </ul>
Muche and Wachter (2005)	The most important push factors influencing Chinese students' decision to study abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Personal and professional growth</li> <li>➢ Improvement of foreign language skills</li> <li>➢ Experience of new ways of thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The institution's reputation for quality</li> <li>➢ Range of courses</li> <li>➢ Market profile</li> <li>➢ Alliances</li> <li>➢ Use of information technology</li> <li>➢ Marketing efforts</li> </ul>
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	Push factors that influence Chinese students' decisions to study abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Lack of access to higher education in their home country</li> <li>➢ Perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system</li> <li>➢ The availability of technology-based programs in the host country</li> </ul>	Pull factors influencing Chinese students studying abroad encompassed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The commonality of the language</li> <li>➢ The geographic proximity of the host country</li> <li>➢ The institution's reputation for quality</li> <li>➢ The range of courses</li> <li>➢ Promotion and marketing efforts</li> <li>➢ The staffs' knowledge of international opportunities</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Competition for skilled nurses

China desperately needs its overseas trained nurses to return in order to cope with current challenges in healthcare and nursing education.<sup>[6,9,18,19]</sup> Australia on the other hand, has implemented robust marketing strategies to recruit international nursing students from China to its' undergraduate and postgraduate nursing programs, in order to maximise educational income and to prepare for predicted nursing shortages.<sup>[1,10,12,20]</sup> What does not feature in the existing work on this topic, however, are the reasons why Chinese students leave to study nursing in Australia.<sup>[12]</sup>

This paper offers insights and highlights regarding the economic impact of Chinese nursing students' decision to study overseas.

## 2.3 Educational systems in both countries

Nursing education in China comprises of five levels including Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Baccalaureate, Masters, and Doctoral.<sup>[21]</sup> The Diploma consists of a three-year nursing program designed to teach clinical skills, and the Advanced Diploma consists of a three-year associate nursing degree program offering general clinical training alongside nursing theory and skills. The Baccalaureate consists of a five-year Bachelor of Nursing program providing a broad nursing foundation with associated sciences, and the Master of Nursing programs aim to prepare experts in either clinical practice

that emphasises advanced clinical practice or in research that focuses on research training. The Doctoral nursing programs aim to instruct nurses in education, research, and leadership and management skills.<sup>[9]</sup>

As shown in Table 2, there is only a single level of registration, which is that of an RN despite the fact that nursing education comprises of five levels.<sup>[21]</sup>

In Australia, to gain initial registration and become an RN, a person has to complete an accredited nursing program, demonstrate competency of NMBA Standards for Practice as a nurse, and meet the minimum English language requirements.

An EN requires 1 to 1.5 years full-time or part-time equivalent study for a Diploma of Enrolled Nursing; an RN requires 3 to 3.5 years full-time or part-time equivalent study for a Bachelor of Nursing, and an NP requires an expert RN to complete a relevant master's degree. An NP has been endorsed to work autonomously and collaboratively as an advanced clinical role in a specified nursing practice area.<sup>[22-26]</sup>

As shown in Table 2, there are three levels of nursing registration in Australia: 1) Enrolled Nurse (EN), 2) Registered Nurse (RN), and 3) Nurse Practitioner (NP). Training courses for EN, RN, and NP are accredited via an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF).

**Table 2.** Similarities and differences of Australian and China's nursing registration systems

	Australia	China
Nursing registration level	EN; RN; NP	RN
Qualification requirement	Diploma of nursing (EN) Bachelor of Nursing (RN) Master of Nursing (NP)	Diploma of Nursing Advanced Diploma of Nursing Bachelor of Nursing
Clinical placement required for initial registration	Yes	Yes
Exam	No	NNLE exam
CPD	At least 20 hours CPD per year	No
National registration	Yes	No
Renew registration	Yearly	5 yearly
Registration body	AHPRA	Local Nursing Registration Board

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Design

A narrative inquiry approach, more specifically the three-dimensional space narrative structure model, underpins the theoretical perspective of this study.<sup>[27]</sup> This approach gives particular emphases on interaction, continuity and situation. The details of this approach have been reported previously.<sup>[28]</sup>

This study aims to contribute to a more accurate understanding of Chinese nursing students' international education choice and decision making process, by exploring their collective experiences.

### 3.2 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee. All potential participants were made aware could withdraw from the study at any time, with no

penalty. Participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study and any future publications and presentation of the data.

In case of emotional distress during the interview process, an appropriate plan was prepared which included a list of appropriate resources which were available for any participant who felt they required debriefing or further support. Participants were also advised that there were options for breaks during the interview, and the interview could at any time be terminated.

### 3.3 Researcher's position

Culture influences communication behaviours.<sup>[29,30]</sup> Confucianism is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and this was reflected in participants' responses to the interview questions; these included: respectfulness toward teachers, saving face, and quietness and silence. At a cultural level, the first author's ethnic background (Chinese) and her personal experiences as an international student, helped participants to share their views and experiences. It is impossible for the researcher to stay silent, through support and encouragement to share experiences, the first author's voice became part of the story also.<sup>[27]</sup>

### 3.4 Data collection

Data collection occurred through individual in-depth interviews, group discussions, and conversations. In this process, individual interviews were conducted in the first phase with the central concern that interpretative research is to understand human experiences at a holistic level. People differ in their ability to articulate their views and ideas. Individual interviews give researcher an opportunity to establish rapport with participants, to make sense of research questions that are sensitive to the participant's context and world view, and to give cues that could increase the richness of the data.

Themes arrived in this phase were then elaborated and moderated in the next phase—focus group discussions. A focus group discussion explores the meaning of findings by providing an insights into different opinions among participants.

Ongoing conversation was established to continue dialogue for further updates and member checking.

Because the way researchers enter the field of inquiry influences what they attend to, the data collection process will be selective, despite using an interview guide and the information collected shaped by the selective interest of the researcher and/or participants.<sup>[27]</sup>

#### 3.4.1 Language choice

All the participants in this study were bilingual, as was the principal researcher, with Chinese being their first language

and English their second language. Therefore, interviews occurred in Mandarin or English, whichever preference the participants favoured. Interviews conducted in Mandarin, were transcribed by the principal researcher verbatim into English, and participants were offered the choice of reviewing the transcribed interviews.

Within Narrative Inquiry, member checking is an essential process in preserving the integrity and authenticity of the personal accounts of participants. The principal researcher also reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy and authenticity with the original audio recordings as a form of methodological rigor regarding the content from the interviews.<sup>[31]</sup>

#### 3.4.2 Interviews

Participants hold the power of knowledge since they are the only experts on their lived experience. During the interview process, the principal researcher was careful not to show any bias towards participants views, but remain respectful of and interested in participants worldviews.<sup>[29]</sup> Each interview ranged between two-three hours in length, and occurred in public areas, offices and cafes that allowed privacy and was convenient for the participants. Guiding questions and interview probes were used only as conversation starters, or if the participant needed help to express an opinion. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the principal researcher, who used codes and pseudonyms to de-identify participants.

#### 3.4.3 Focus group discussions

Part of the data collection method included the use of a focus group, which encouraged participants to reflect on their learning and working experience in Australia with their peers. The topics they shared included, but were not limited to, learning subjects, graduate attributes, food and eating habits, transportation, language, social life, happiness, friendship, dreams and ambitions. The interview took two hours and was audio recorded and then transcribed by the first author.

#### 3.4.4 Ongoing conversation

The participants were also encouraged to communicate with the first author regularly via emails or any other media to update their experiences. The principal researcher conducted regular group conference calls via the telephone to encourage dialogue and debate with herself and the group as a whole.

### 3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis was a process of making sense of the transcribed focus group, interview and conversational texts. The essences encoded inside the narratives were identified and expanded outward to the fullest extent of resonance possible; this process took into account multiple aspects of participants' narratives as well as the entire substance of the texts:

the nuances of tone, pauses, and breaks in the conversation, the observation of participants' interactions with other people and their social and cultural discourse, their past and present experiences, their physical location; and their dreams and ambitions were all considered and included in the analysis.<sup>[27]</sup>

This study employed a thematic analysis approach. Field texts were deconstructed and reconstructed to 'arrive at

themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories'.<sup>[32]</sup> The process of thematic analysis is transparent, adaptable and detailed to facilitate translation of different aspects of the research focus. The approach requires the analyst to be cognisant guidelines for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data and describing data in rich details'.<sup>[31]</sup> Thematic analysis was utilised in this study, following the six phases (see Table 3) as outlined by Braun and Clarke.<sup>[31]</sup>

**Table 3.** Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising with data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Gathering data and collating codes into potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine each theme and generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling text extracts relating to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report.

*Note.* Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 35)

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Profile of the participants

The study participants included five females and one male, who were all in their twenties, from Mainland China, and studying an undergraduate nursing program at one of three Western Australian universities: Edith Cowan University, Curtin University or Murdoch University. These students were Chinese nationals holding full-time student visas. They had been in Australia for two years at the time of the interviews. None of the participants were in receipt of a scholarship—they were all wholly sponsored by their parents. All participants were the only child in their family as a result of the one-child policy in China. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities.

Leo (male, 20 years old) was in his last year of nursing study at the time of the interviews. His hometown was in Eastern China, in a city well known for its beautiful natural scenery. Like the other participants, he was the only child in his family. His parents operated a business and were always busy, so he was raised by his grandparents, to whom he was very close. He successfully completed his nursing degree in a reputable nursing university in his hometown, where he was an outstanding student. He was also an outstanding student in his nursing course in Australia. From my observation, he was a very intelligent and capable person.

Zhe (female, 21 years old) was in her last year of nursing

study at the time of her interviews. She came from Eastern China, from a city that is a prominent place in Chinese history and culture, and a huge commercial centre in East China. Her parents were both professionals working in one of the large hospitals in her hometown. She was the only child in her family, and had a strict upbringing—her father was particularly strict with her and sometimes beat her to discipline her. Despite her parents' strict discipline, she was very close to her them and frequently contacted them via telephone or online.

Emily (female, 22 years old) was in her last year of nursing study at the time of her interviews. She came from Southeast China in a city ranked one of the China's most liveable cities. The city is well known for its import and export industry. She had already successfully completed her nursing degree in China, so this was her second time completing a degree in nursing, except this time in English and in Australia.

Li (female, 19 years old) was in her second semester of her second year of nursing study at the time of her interviews. She came from Northeast China. Her hometown was a financial and shipping centre for Northeast China that was ranked one of the China's most liveable cities. Her father operated a small transport business, renting and hiring cars, while her mother was an accountant. Like the previous participant, Li had successfully completed her nursing degree in China, and this was her second time studying a degree in nursing, except

this time it was in English and in Australia.

Chun (female, 20 years old) was in her last year of nursing study at the time of her interview. She came from the largest city in Northwest China after she completed her nursing degree there. Her hometown city was a key regional transportation hub that allowed areas further west to maintain railroad connections to the eastern half of the country. Her mother was an accountant in a large company and her father was an engineer in reputable private company. Like many other participants, she was the only child in her family and her parents wished to provide the best they could for her, and wished her to have a better life. Despite being so close to her parents, Chun only contacted them via telephone once per fortnight—she stated that she did not want to them to worry and ‘only want to bring them good news when I talk to them’.

Ping (female, 27 years old) was born in a large city in North-

east China. Her hometown was ranked one of the China’s most liveable cities. Her parents operated a clothing wholesale shop. They were very busy with their business and Ping, as a single child, spent lots of time with friends and was quite independent in looking after herself and studying. At the time of the interview, Ping had just graduated from her Australian nursing course and was working at one of the largest private hospitals in Perth. She was planning to marry her boyfriend, who was also from China and was in his last year studying at university in Australia.

All six participants completed their nursing degree in China prior to attending an Australian university. The factors related to the move to Australia were encompassed in four themes (see Figure 1): cultural and social ‘push’ factors in China, Australian ‘pull’ factors, encouragement and support from peers and family, and participants’ strong desire for opportunity and cultural experiences.



Figure 1. Four themes relating to the decision to study in Australia

## 4.2 Cultural and social 'push' factors

Participants described three cultural and social factors that influenced their decision to study nursing in Australia. The first was a lack of Guan xi in Chinese society. Guan xi refers to one's connections with those of power and influence, and if the participant did not have Guan xi, finding a job and advancing was described as difficult:

In China, after graduating, if you want to find a good job, you need to have money and guan xi. Even if you have money, but no guan xi, you still can't find a job. (Emily)

The competitive job market was described as a driver to move where employment prospective were limited:

(In China), it was very hard to find a job, my application had been refused too many time. (Ping)

In China it is very competitive, many graduates can't find a job. (In China), there are many students working in areas that are different from their major, whatever you studied at university doesn't guarantee you will find a job in that area. (Emily)

The low professional status of nursing in China was a further driver influencing the decision to study nursing in Australia:

The way people here look at nursing as a profession is different from China. (In China), nursing doesn't pay well and the workload is really high and heavy. Many nurses leave nursing because of the heavy workload. Unlike medicine, nursing is not very respected in China. In Western countries nursing is a good profession. (Leo)

Major cultural and social factors that influence the decision of Chinese students to study in Australia include: lack of Guan xi in Chinese society, competitive job market, and low professional status of nursing in China.

Job market is extremely competitive in China especially for graduates. The rapid internationalisation of China's economy render English a valuable skill when seeking employment. Most of them perceived overseas trained students as having better job opportunities in China than local graduates, since the economic expansion of China requires more employees with a global outlook and experience. Decisions to study overseas become particularly vital solution if one doesn't have a strong Guan xi in Chinese society.

The Chinese education system has not kept pace with the nation's economic growth. Although the Chinese government has increased the number of universities and colleges, access is still very competitive. Due to the shortage of places, most students want to escape the hard exams war they face to gain entry to better ranking universities; the entry requirements for studying abroad are generally lower than for Chinese universities.

In addition, all participants perceived the nursing profession as a 'great' and 'good pay' profession in Australia. Participants contrasted this with the inferior profile nursing has in China.

## 4.3 Australian 'pull' factors

Australia was described by participants as a place full of opportunity, with blue sky, sweet air, and people are friendly and respectful:

Before I knew it, the plane had reached Perth! The view from above revealed many small cottages, each so different with little triangular shaped rooftops and accompanied by unbroken green. It was so unique. Such beauty that I have never seen before, like an open garden with countless trees.

It was my first time walking on this land with its exotic scenery and the air so fresh. The breeze was moist and soft, permeated with the smell of flowers. This is the first impression Perth gave me. (Ping)

Blinking as I exited the airport, I realised that the sky was so blue, like I had never seen it before. Looking around I noticed flowers were everywhere, like a big park. The air here is clear and fresh, with a hint of flowers' fragrance on the whispering breeze. (Chun)

I like Australia, people are friendly, for example, in China, bus drivers are often impatient, easy to get angry, sometimes they scold customers, they often shout loud but here, bus drivers are so friendly and helpful. People here are very friendly, they say hi when they greet you and say goodbye or thank you when they are leaving. (Emily)

Australia is perceived by international students as a place of magnificent land, unusual bounding animals and people who are frank and easy-going.<sup>[33]</sup> Participants in this study described 'the sky is so blue and you can see stars at night', 'the air is so clean' and 'the beach is very beautiful'. They

further identified employment prospects and the possibility of future immigration as the key factors that inspired them to study nursing in Australia.

#### 4.4 Encouragement and support from peers and family

The participants were very clear that encouragement and support from peers and family were paramount influences on participants' motivation to undertake nursing studies, which resulted in working and living in Australia. Participants stressed that parental approval played a vital role in this decision making process:

I am the only child in our family. My mum and dad are so good to me they work very hard want to provide me a good life. I am very close to my parents especially my mum. My parents are so good to me and they have sacrificed so much for me. There is nothing I ever want to do to disappoint them. I know they focus on my study and they want me to have a good life you know, like all parents, they want me to have a better life. (Chun)

I wasn't sure what I should do with my career. I have a sister (cousin), she said one of her relatives is in Australia, the relative's husband is a nurse in Australia, and she said the nurse's salary is very good in Australia. My dad thought it's not a bad idea to study nursing, nursing seems popular in other countries so might have opportunity to go overseas. My dad said, going to Australia is not only about getting good pay but also, the living conditions such as environment, quality of life is better than China. I listened to my dad, believed in him and studied very hard. If I have the opportunity to study abroad, my mum and dad would be very happy. (Emily)

The most important factor influencing decisions to study nursing in Australia was the possibility for immigration. Encouragement and support from peers and family were noted as strong contributors to their motivation to eventually work and live in Australia. Participants reported that their parents played a vital role in the decision making process.

#### 4.5 Desire for opportunity and cultural experiences

Participants described a strong desire to experience different cultures, learning new knowledge and skills. Attracted by the favourable conditions as they described 'the sky is so blue and you can see stars at night', 'the air is so clean' and 'the beach is very beautiful', whilst aware that more and more of their friends studying outside China, the participants

also wanted to go abroad to avoid being disadvantaged in a competitive job market:

I didn't want to stay in my hometown, I wanted to go out, go further, go to a bigger city, work in a good hospital, and I want to go to big city. (Ping)

I was excited when thinking of study in Australia because I wanted to experience different cultural and see different things. (Leo)

The rapid development of the Chinese national economy and the growth of Chinese family incomes has meant increased opportunities for Chinese students to pursue their higher education overseas, and a consistent expansion of the overseas study market.

Participants expressed their desire to experience different cultures, and learn new knowledge and skills. Attracted by the favourable conditions that Australia can offer, whilst aware that more and more of their friends are studying outside China, the participants also wanted to go abroad, and avoid being disadvantaged in a competitive job market.

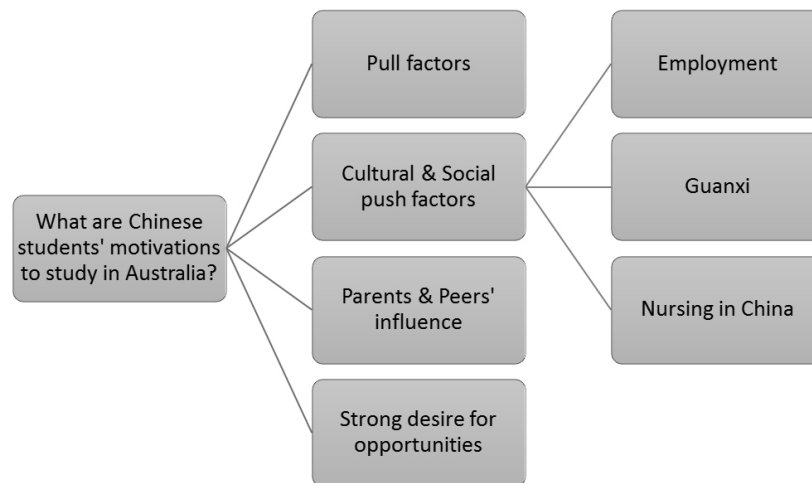
## 5. DISCUSSION

Four broad themes emerged from the analysis (see Figure 2): home country cultural and social push factors, host country pull factors, parents and peers' influence, and participants' self-desire for opportunities.

This study has revealed findings that is in keeping with previous findings of other studies conducted, however, this study suggests that a unique characteristic has been demonstrated concerning a group of Chinese nursing students working within an international placement, and their decision making process. These findings revealed that the most important factor influencing the decisions to study nursing in Australia was the possibility for future immigration (permanent move). This result is in contrast to the findings of Zwart,<sup>[16]</sup> but consistent with Lawson,<sup>[34]</sup> Bodycott,<sup>[35]</sup> and Yang.<sup>[36]</sup>

It has been predicted that by the year 2015, there will be an estimated shortfall of 109,000 Registered Nurses in Australia 2025.<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, many countries are implementing strategies to improve working conditions, and driving new recruitment strategies to increase in nursing student numbers. Global governments are actively encouraging the employment of health professionals from multicultural diverse backgrounds, in order to alleviate the imminent nursing shortage, and to also provide culturally competent care Australia requires.<sup>[37]</sup> This has consequently impacted upon Australian universities, who need to expand nursing courses and provide more clinical placements, in line with ensuring the educational success of future nursing students.<sup>[12]</sup>





**Figure 2.** Factors influencing Chinese students studying nursing in Australia

In China, the nursing education and health system requires a major overhaul to address the challenges the country is currently facing, and proposed reform has been endorsed by China's policy and regulations.<sup>[38,39]</sup> The planned reform has raised demands for identified criteria to be achieved in order to enable nursing education to assert its' prerogative regarding the unique body of knowledge attached to nursing, which prepares nurses to practice at advanced levels in order to improve health outcomes. Identified demands include the requirement of all universities to produce quality and meaningful nursing research and educational aids, as well as utilising evidence-based practice.<sup>[38]</sup> It is therefore vital that opportunities are created and implemented for Chinese nurses to accept academic positions in the future workforce, especially Chinese nationals with overseas experience who return to China.

A recruitment of nurses, with overseas training and experience, to return to China to work will interject in China's burgeoning healthcare development and strengthen the current nursing education system. However, the all-consuming question that has not been answered is whether newly qualified nurses will relocate back to China after completion of training courses conducted overseas.

The return of qualified Chinese Registered Nurses would bolster skills, training and knowledge within the Chinese nursing profession, and China would benefit from a reciprocal open policy in education. If Chinese nursing students decide to extend their stay in Australia after graduation, then the loss to China is huge. Australia may benefit from a short-term economic advantage, potentially saving millions of dollars related to the cost of training. In the case of the current study, if the students choose to stay, their families

may migrate to Australia given the dynamics of the one-child policy. The further ramifications are debatable.

Perhaps Australian universities should recognise the value of Chinese nursing students, and not regard them as visitors or short-term 'cash cows', as these students are part of Australia's future health professionals who will provide services within Australian communities. The learning experiences gained within nursing programs at Australia universities become vitally important and consequential in the provision of Australia's expanding healthcare system. Australian universities should explore how Chinese nursing students' academic and career needs can be met, in order to provide optimal, positive learning experiences.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study contribute to international students' mobility regarding Chinese students studying abroad. These results present unique characteristic of Chinese students' decision making process to study nursing in Australia. The most important factor was the possibility for immigration. Their decision to study in Australia was found to be influenced by their home country's cultural and social push factors (guan xi, employment, and inferior nursing status) and host country—Australia's pull factors ('blue sky', 'sweet air', 'friendly people', and perceived opportunities to work and live). The study found that encouragement and support from peers and family were strong contributors to their motivation to study nursing, and eventually to work and live in Australia. In particular, parents played a vital role in this decision making process. Participants demonstrated a strong desire for opportunities and cultural experiences.

Australian universities need to re-think how Chinese nursing

students' academic needs are met within their institutions, in order to provide optimal, positive learning experiences for overseas students.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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