Serial number	0007
Title	Antecedents and Consequences of Perceived Employability: A Study of Chinese Undergraduate Business Students

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Introduction

Dominant discourses have centred on the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) to equip students for the wider labour market. The issue of graduate employability has gained significance in recent years (Holmes 2013; Sin and Neave 2016; Tomlinson 2012). Following Rothwell, Herbert, and Rothwell's (2008) definition, we conceptualize employability as a subjective construct applied to the university students.

Previous research has indicated that perceptions of employment opportunities are influenced by the interpretations of the context and individual circumstances (Kraimer et al. 2011; Ngo, Liu, and Cheung 2017; Van Dam 2004). However, the majority of these studies have ignored how individual dispositional and social relational factors may affect perceived employability of students. Specifically, core self-evaluations (CSE) is an important individual dispositional factor important for employability research (Judge et al. 2003). Stress coping perspective (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) argues that individuals with higher CSE should adopt better coping mechanisms when faced with challenges (Judge and Hurst 2007). They would be more optimistic with respect to their careers. Moreover, social relationships as a contextual factor has been gaining importance in career related research (Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum 2004; Flum 2001; Schultheiss et al. 2001). Social support theory suggests that relational support of students is connected to their career exploration through teachers, peer and family support (Cheung and Arnold 2010; Flum 2001).

Few studies on perceived employability have been carried out in Asia, especially in the Greater China region. To fill the research gap, a study on this topic is important. First, China is the biggest developing country supplying the largest number of graduates (Ren, Zhu, and Warner 2011). Second, China has also undergone extensive higher education reforms that its graduates have employment difficulties (Lian 2009, 2011). Third, unique socio-cultural factors are salient in shaping students' perceptions and behaviors. For example, in collectivist and hierarchical Chinese societies, teachers are always the authority figures (Li and Du 2013). Peer groups also play a key role in regulating students' academic and social life (Chen et al. 2008). These social relational factors are highly relevant in employability research.

Furthermore, we tested the relationships between perceived employability on two attitudinal outcomes, namely, university satisfaction and organizational identification (OI) (Ashforth and Mael 1989, 1992). Perceived employability, viewed as a type of motivational personal resource that links to resilience and ability to control and impact on the environment, has allowed

individuals to develop a sense of control and experience attachment and satisfaction with an organization. For that reason, we expect positive relationships between perceived employability and students' OI, and their satisfaction respectively.

Model and Significance of Study

In this study, we aim to achieve several objectives. First, a conceptual model is developed that incorporate three antecedents and two outcomes of perceived employability. Second, we evaluate the unique roles of teacher-student and student-student relationships in the Chinese higher education context. Finally, our study may provide some practical implications to their stakeholders. Our model is displayed in Figure 1, and the following hypotheses are developed.

Hypothesis 1: CSE will be positively related to perceived employability.

Hypothesis 2: Teacher-student relationship will be positively related to perceived employability.

Hypothesis 3: Student-student relationship will be positively related to perceived employability.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived employability will be positively related to organizational identification of the students with their university.

Hypothesis 5: Perceived employability will be positively related to students' satisfaction with the university.

FIGURE 1. Proposed Model of the Study

Methods and Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for this cross-sectional study was the undergraduate students from two business schools in mainland China and Hong Kong. Business school students were suitable subjects as their faculties are key growth areas for universities. All the variables used established scales. Unless otherwise indicated, all items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey was conducted between September and December 2016. A total of 749 questionnaires were received. Data were reported after descriptive statistical and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

Results and Discussion

Positive correlations were found between the three antecedents and perceived employability as well as between perceived employability and the two outcomes. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis provided support for all the hypotheses. Specifically, when students have a positive fundamental appraisal about themselves, other people and the world (i.e., a high level of CSE), they tend to see themselves as highly employable. The culture-specific influences on perceived employability have also been noted. Both teacher-student and student-student relationships were found to be predictive of perceived employability. With Confucian cultural values, students respect their teachers by internalizing their values and career advice. A supportive teacher might boost the confidence of a student and hence increase their perceived employability. Peer norms may also prevail that social learning and mutual support act to enhance a student's perceived employability. Besides, we found a positive effect of perceived employability on students' identification and satisfaction with the university. In other words, students' attitudes toward their universities seem to be associated with their perceptions of employability.

There are some important implications for teachers, peers, and career counsellors on developing employability enhancement initiatives so as to strengthen students' core self-beliefs and perceptions of employability. Chinese teachers should pay more attention to the issue of employability in their teaching. They might provide the students with practical information about the labour market, and encourage them to engage in various employability-related activities. A "relationship" type of teaching is encouraged, with more student-teacher interaction inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, students may share career information, job search skills and experiences among themselves. It is also imminent to reform the present educational system from one of examination-oriented and teacher-centred into a student-centred and employability-driven one. Students would then perceive more social and emotional support, and caring from their teachers and peers that they may have a stronger sense of relatedness to others. Accordingly, their employability perception would be enhanced, and this helps increase their identification and satisfaction with the university.

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