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## Factors affecting hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience and career intention in China

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### ABSTRACT

Hotel interns' satisfaction with the internship may play a significant role in determining their intention to develop a career in the hospitality industry. Factors that affect hotel interns' satisfaction and career intention are thus important to be identified in linking hospitality education to industry human resource needs. This study aims to identify the key factors that affect job satisfaction and career intention of hotel interns in China. Data were collected through a survey on hospitality management students in three Chinese universities. Factor analysis identified seven factors that influence students' satisfaction with internship experience and their career intention; these include *internship achievements*, *mentorship and assessment*, *interpersonal relationships*, *compensation*, *hotel features*, *hotel internship programming*, and *curriculum requirements*. Regression results indicated that *internship achievements*, *curriculum requirements*, *hotel internship programming*, and *mentorship and assessment* significantly influenced interns' satisfaction with internship experience, while *curriculum requirements*, *interpersonal relationships*, and *internship achievements* significantly affected career intention. The study provides empirical insights to guide hotel internship program design and practices.

### 1. Introduction

Hospitality management emerges as a tertiary degree study program attracting a significant number of students in colleges and universities across the globe. Due to the practice-oriented nature of careers in the hospitality industry, hotel internship has become an important part of curriculum design in higher degree hospitality programs (Chen, Shen, & Gosling, 2018). Internships allow students to undergo comprehensive training, master applied knowledge, acquire analytical and problem-solving skills, and develop a practical process to apply knowledge into the workplace (Collins, 2002; Jiang & Tribe, 2009). In addition, internships also prepare students to enter the job market by cultivating students' work attitude and professional cognition (Dickerson, 2009; Zopiatis, 2007), thus improving their employability.

Hospitality management is a degree program offered in many Chinese universities. With the boom of the hospitality industry in China, hospitality management has become a popular subject area of higher learning in colleges and universities. By the end of 2017, around one thousand Chinese higher learning institutes had established hospitality management as a degree program, and the number

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of enrollment majoring in hospitality had reached nearly 60,000 (CNTA, 2018). Over the years, hospitality management programs in China's universities have trained many hotel professionals for the industry, making a major contribution to the industry's development through providing the talent needed. Despite the booming growth of hospitality management programs and number of students enrolled in these programs in China, there has been a notable "disequilibrium of supply and demand" between the hospitality education sector and the industry (Wu, 2004, p. 22). While there are increasing numbers of students majoring in hospitality and tourism degrees in China, few of these graduates eventually commit their careers in the hospitality and tourism industry (Song & Wang, 2008). Hotel internship provides trial experiences of working in the hospitality industry and has become an integrative component of a higher degree hospitality management program in China. Therefore, it is important to seek solutions to manage these internship programs to better meet the industry talent needs.

The hotel industry's demand for interns is growing rapidly (Stansbie & Nash, 2016). For hotel operators, interns are an important labor source, effectively ameliorating the seasonality of the hospitality industry demanding a flexible labor pool (Stansbie & Nash, 2016). Hotels can decide how many interns to engage with according to the demand for staffing in low or high seasons, and dynamically replenish human resources required during busy periods. In addition, interns are paid less than the formal employees, thereby helping to reduce operating costs of hotels (Mulcahy, 1999; Zopiatis, 2007).

Hotel interns are a special group of workforce with dual identities. On one hand, they are hotel staff learning practical service knowledge and skills (Ineson, 2010). On the other hand, they are still university students and their satisfaction with the internship experience would reflect teaching quality in their study programs. Although university hospitality management programs are fully aware of the importance of hotel internships (Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008), the interests of the internship hotel and those students taking internship in the hotel are not always aligned (Chen et al., 2018). Such a misalignment of interests may cause an internship program to fail to achieve the desired results.

On the other hand, from a career perspective, hotel interns occupy a unique position for career research. Arthur (2008) reviewed the traditions of career scholarship and noted that two prominent camps of career researchers are either from schools of education taking a vocational perspective or from schools of management or business taking an organizational perspective. Calling for interdisciplinary inquiries in contemporary careers, Arthur (2008) noted the conversation between the two traditions would offer some worthwhile interdisciplinary common ground for career research. Hotel interns take the dual role as students in universities and temporary workers in a hotel organization. Their unique position between higher education and the industry (organization) makes it both practically relevant and theoretically applicable to study their career intention and the determining factors.

The hospitality industry is arguably one of the world's largest service sectors that employs a majority of the workforce, especially young workers. It seems a lot of career models and concepts, such as the protean career orientation, the boundaryless career model, and the hybrid and Kaleidoscope career models (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), can find their applications with the next generation hospitality workers. Nevertheless, from a vocational and industry perspective, it is necessary to examine hotel interns' career intention and the influencing factors as a start in this context.

Hotel interns' satisfaction with their internship experience shapes students' perceptions of the industry in general and affects their intention to work in the hotel industry after graduation (Fang, Cheung, & Chingtsu, 2013; Seyiñoğlu & Yirik, 2015). Although previous research has indicated that hotel interns' satisfaction was affected by many factors, including both internship programs and industry participation (Chen & Shen, 2012), a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction with their internship experience is generally lacking in the literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the key factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience and examine the relationships between these factors and hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience and their career intention.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Hotel interns' satisfaction

Student satisfaction with the internship experience has emerged as a key indicator in evaluating the effectiveness of an internship (Farmaki, 2018); internship satisfaction in turn influences students' career choices after graduation (Chen et al., 2018; Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2016) and the development of hospitality career identity (Mooney & Jameson, 2018). To enable quality education in hospitality management, it is important to maintain students' satisfaction with their internship experience (Lam & Ching, 2007; Singh & Dutta, 2010). Different from hospitality employees' job satisfaction, the literature identified some special factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction with their internship experiences, which varied across countries (Kong, Wang, & Fu, 2015; Yiu & Law, 2012).

Generally speaking, the three stakeholders involved in shaping internship satisfaction are academic institutions, hospitality organizations and students themselves (Chen et al., 2018; Chen & Shen, 2012; Cho, 2006). In previous literature, researchers have identified various influential factors with each stakeholder. From the academic institution's point of view, internship planning, academic preparedness, academic supervisor, administrative assistance, performance evaluation, and relevance of the internships to the curriculum design were examined as factors influencing students' overall satisfaction with internship experience (Chen et al., 2018; Chen & Shen, 2012; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Ko, 2008; Tse, 2010). From the hospitality organization's point of view, researchers explored factors such as working conditions and environment, working relationships and social interaction, help from colleagues and supervisors, skill training and learning experiences (Chen et al., 2018; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Ko, 2008; Lam & Ching, 2007; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013; Singh & Dutta, 2010; Tse, 2010). Lastly, from the student perspective, self-initiative, self-commitment and dedication, autonomy, personal growth, and appreciation and feedback were investigated as determinants of

students' internship satisfaction (Chen & Shen, 2012; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Lam & Ching, 2007; Singh & Dutta, 2010; Tse, 2010).

So far, the literature has identified a diversified range of factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experiences. However, the factors identified are different across studies and cannot be regarded as conclusive. In terms of study area, studies were conducted in the western countries like U.S. (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018), U.K. (Singh & Dutta, 2010), and Greek (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013), and in the eastern countries/regions such as India (Singh & Dutta, 2010), South Korea (Cho, 2006), Hong Kong (Tse, 2010), and Taiwan (Chen & Shen, 2012). In the context of China, despite the scale of hospitality higher education, little research has been done to examine the factors that influence the Chinese hospitality students' internship satisfaction. The current study, therefore, addresses this research gap.

## 2.2. Hotel interns' career intention

The literature has identified a variety of factors that motivate hospitality students to choose the hospitality industry after graduation. For example, Lee, Lee, and Dopson (2019) identified five sources of influence on hospitality students' career choices, namely faculty, industry mentors, advisors, parents, and social media. From a student's standpoint, major factors influencing their career choices are exciting people industry, travel opportunities, care for others, a stable career, cross training, transferable skills, cultural diversity, and even gender (Amissah, Mensah, Mensah, & Gamor, 2020; Goh & Lee, 2018; Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2014). Previous research has also highlighted the critical role of internship in hospitality students' future career intention (Robinson et al., 2016; Seyitoğlu & Yirik, 2015; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Students who have unpleasant experiences in their internship are likely to form negative attitudes toward working in the industry and therefore are de-motivated to join the hospitality workforce after graduation (Fong, Lee, Luk, & Law, 2014). Robinson et al. (2016) identified that after internship experience, students' career aspirations tend to change from a hospitality oriented career pathway to a tourism career pathway.

However, the literature has also demonstrated that not all factors related to internship satisfaction influence students' career intention. For instance, among internship satisfaction-related factors, administration factors (Ko, 2008), further training and learning (Amissah et al., 2020), social experiences and good relationships (Heo, Kim, & Kim, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013), a clear career pathway (Goh & Okumus, 2020), individual motives and commitment (Jiang & Tribe, 2009), and organizational culture (Farmaki, 2018) are all factors that influence hospitality students' future career intentions. In addition to internship satisfaction, Wang, Chiang, and Lee (2014) also found that interns' anxiety, which significantly decreased after internship, also impact hospitality students' career commitments. Besides internship experiences, the curriculum design and degree requirements can also impact graduates' career choices (Baldauf & Luchinskaya, 2019).

Although the existing literature has examined factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction and career intention, research focusing on Chinese hospitality students is comparatively limited and outdated (Lee et al., 2019; Wen, Li, & Kwon, 2019). General research on boundaryless career has noted that national culture possibly exerts its influence on career choices (Bagdadli, Solari, Usai, & Gandori, 2003; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This warrants a specific investigation in the context of China's hospitality industry even though some similar studies have been conducted in other countries (e.g., Farmaki, 2018). As China has a unique work culture to define a specific context for a hospitality workforce, it is worthwhile to explore the specific factors that influence hotel interns' satisfaction and career intention (Chen & Shen, 2012; Wen et al., 2019). An understanding of these specific factors will not only benefit higher learning institutes in designing more suitable internship programs, but also help hotels and their management to better utilize internship programs to serve their human resource management and operational needs.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research instrument

In this study, we followed a post-positivistic research paradigm (Tribe, 2001) and collected the research data through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected demographic information about the students and their internship arrangements, including gender, internship length, internship hotel star rating level, job rotation modes, and internship department. The second section included a comprehensive list of indicators that may impact internship experiences. The list contained 31 intern experience items that were developed from previous studies (Cho, 2006; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Ko, 2008; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013; Tse, 2010). The list considered all three key stakeholders involved in hotel internships (Chen et al., 2018; Chen & Shen, 2012; Cho, 2006), namely universities, hotels, and students. Nine items were related to the university, such as internship length, mentorship, internship assessment, and achievements (Cho, 2006; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Ko, 2008). 18 items were related to the internship hotel, including hotel features, working conditions, compensation and rewards, interpersonal relations, and work-related training (Cho, 2006; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013; Tse, 2010). Finally, four items ask the respondents to reflect on their personal development during the internships from the student perspective (Tse, 2010). The last section investigated interns' satisfaction with their internship experience and their career intention each with a single item. For the 31 intern experience items and the single item overall internship satisfaction measurement, a five-point scale from 1 as "very dissatisfied" to 5 as "very satisfied" was applied. Career intention was measured using a single statement "Are you willing to take a hotel industry career in future?" with a 5-point scale from 1 as "very unwilling" to 5 as "very willing". The questionnaire was developed in Chinese and pretested with 10 undergraduate students. Based on comments and feedback from the pilot test, the final survey instrument was reworded and modified to ensure that all questions were easily understood by the respondents.

### 3.2. Data collection

Data for this study were collected through the questionnaire survey on undergraduate students majoring in hospitality management from three large public universities located in Guangzhou, China. The survey was conducted in the fall semester of 2018. Only those students who had participated in hotel internship were qualified to participate in the study. Faculty members of hospitality programs at the three universities were contacted to help with data collection. The research team followed the standard requirements of research ethics in social sciences (Israel & Hay, 2006) and made sure that participation in the survey is voluntary and respondents' personal information is kept unidentifiable in the research process. With the permission of the class teachers, the questionnaires were distributed and collected at a time that did not interfere with the normal class activities to minimize any negative impact on the research participants. Two large classes of mostly third-year and fourth-year students were selected in each university, as internships in China's universities offering hospitality programs are mostly arranged in the third or fourth year of the study. The questionnaires were distributed to students in classroom and collected immediately upon completion. Each student who participated in the survey received a small gift (e.g., a gel pen) as compensation. A total of 237 questionnaires were distributed and 207 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 87.3%.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The collected survey data were first cleaned and checked for missing data. No missing data was identified. The data normality assumption was met, as skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within the acceptable limits of  $\pm 2$  (Field, 2009). Data analysis in this study was done in two steps. First, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 31 items to identify key factors that affect internship satisfaction. The key factors were then labeled based on the semantic meanings of the composing items. Second, three regression analyses were employed to examine the relationships between the identified key factors and internship satisfaction, that between the identified key factors and career intention, and that between internship satisfaction and career intention.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Sample profile

The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1. 74.4% of respondents were female and 25.6% were male, consistent with the findings that there are more female students than male students in hospitality management programs (Wen, Leung, Li, & Kwon, 2018). The majority of students (97.6%) had spent less than 6 months for their internships, and about half (49.8%) had internships between three and six months. Students with long-term internships (more than 6 months) showed the highest levels of internship satisfaction (3.80), followed by students with short-term internships (1 month or less) (3.67). Most students (85.0%) had internships in five-star hotels.

About three quarters of students did not rotate through different departments in their internships. Among students who worked without job rotation, nearly half (48.4%) had internship in the food and beverage department. Surprisingly, internship satisfaction among interns who worked in the housekeeping department was the highest (3.38).

### 4.2. Factors affecting internship satisfaction

To identify the key factors that affect hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience, factor analysis with maximum

**Table 1**  
Demographic profile of respondents (N = 207).

|                                     | Category         | N   | %    | Mean of satisfaction |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----|------|----------------------|
| Gender                              | Male             | 53  | 25.6 | 3.38                 |
|                                     | Female           | 154 | 74.4 | 3.24                 |
| Internship length                   | 1 month or less  | 70  | 33.8 | 3.67                 |
|                                     | 1–3 months       | 29  | 14.0 | 3.17                 |
|                                     | 3–6 months       | 103 | 49.8 | 3.01                 |
|                                     | Over 6 months    | 5   | 2.4  | 3.80                 |
| Hotel Star Level                    | 5 stars          | 176 | 85.0 | 3.27                 |
|                                     | 4 stars          | 6   | 2.9  | 3.17                 |
|                                     | 3 stars or lower | 25  | 12.1 | 3.32                 |
| Job rotation                        | Yes              | 50  | 24.2 | 3.44                 |
|                                     | No               | 157 | 75.8 | 3.22                 |
| Rotation mode                       | Inter-department | 17  | 8.2  | 3.59                 |
|                                     | Intra-department | 33  | 15.9 | 3.36                 |
| Internship department (no rotation) | Front desk       | 49  | 23.7 | 3.24                 |
|                                     | Housekeeping     | 21  | 10.1 | 3.38                 |
|                                     | F&B              | 76  | 36.7 | 3.20                 |
|                                     | Others           | 11  | 5.3  | 3.00                 |

likelihood extraction and oblique rotation was conducted on all of the 31 items in the questionnaire. The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Bartlett spherical test (Chi-square = 2468.42,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicated the data were suitable for factor analysis. Seven items were deleted during the factor analysis process either due to low loading (below 0.40) or due to cross-loading on more than one factors. They were: X<sub>5</sub> (special situation coordination), X<sub>10</sub> (Internship position), X<sub>11</sub> (work shift), X<sub>12</sub> (workload), X<sub>14</sub> (work environment), X<sub>21</sub> (hotel leadership), and X<sub>22</sub> (hotel management structure). After repeated extraction, seven factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1. The results of factor analysis are shown in Table 2. The identified seven factors accounted for 66.0% of the total variance in the data, exceeding the threshold of 60% of the total variance in social sciences research suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010).

Factor 1 contains four items, X<sub>29</sub> (improve social adaptability), X<sub>30</sub> (develop mental skills), X<sub>31</sub> (deepen understanding of the hotel industry), and X<sub>28</sub> (gain hotel internship experience). This factor reflects the knowledge and achievements students obtain from hotel internships. Thus, factor 1 is named *internship achievements*. This factor found its equivalent in previous studies such as Tse (2010). Factor 2 is comprised of three items, X<sub>6</sub> (guidance and instructions from mentors), X<sub>7</sub> (care from mentors), and X<sub>8</sub> (university evaluation system of internship). This factor includes the support and care given by internship mentors in the universities and how universities assess and evaluate internships. Thus, factor 2 is named *mentorship and assessment*, which is frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g., Cho, 2006; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018). Factor 3 consists of three items, X<sub>19</sub> (relationships with hotel employees), X<sub>20</sub> (relationships with other interns), and X<sub>18</sub> (relationships with supervisors). This factor discusses the interpersonal relationships between interns and hotel employees, other interns, and supervisors (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Ko, 2008; Tse, 2010). Thus, factor 3 is named *interpersonal relationships*.

Factor 4 consists of three items, X<sub>16</sub> (overtime pay), X<sub>17</sub> (fringe and benefits), and X<sub>15</sub> (internship salary). This factor is related to compensation received through the hotel internship program (Cho, 2006; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013) and is thus named *compensation*. Factor 5 is comprised of three items, X<sub>2</sub> (distance to school), X<sub>1</sub> (hotel star level), and X<sub>13</sub> (employee meals). This factor highlights some basic features of the internship hotel. Thus, factor 5 is named *hotel features*. Hussien and La Lopa (2018) found that intern hotel's location and the convenience of commuting to the intern hotel significantly affect the interns' satisfaction with their internship programs, providing literature support to the validity of this factor. Factor 6 consists of five items, X<sub>26</sub> (hotel intern reward programs), X<sub>24</sub> (opportunities in internship), X<sub>27</sub> (hotel intern recognition), X<sub>23</sub> (internship training), and X<sub>25</sub> (sense of achievement at work). This factor explains the rewards and recognition given to interns by hotels and the opportunities for interns to develop their skills and create a sense of achievement. Thus, factor 6 is named *hotel internship programming*. This factor has not been explicitly identified in the literature but somehow shares some similar meaning to "learning opportunities", "professional development", and "autonomy" in Hussien and La Lopa's (2018, p. 518) study. Factor 7 includes three items, X<sub>3</sub> (internship arrangement in degree plan), X<sub>4</sub> (required internship length), and X<sub>9</sub> (curriculum emphasis). This factor focuses on the curriculum design and the role the internship plays in the

**Table 2**

Factors influencing hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience.

| Item/Factor  | Factor loading | Eigen-value | % of variance | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|--|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <b>Factor 1: Internship achievements</b>                     |                | 10.866      | 35.05         | 0.897               |
| X <sub>29</sub> : Improve social adaptability                | 0.816          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>30</sub> : Develop mental skills                      | 0.799          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>31</sub> : Deepen understanding of the hotel industry | 0.721          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>28</sub> : Gain hotel internship experience           | 0.654          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 2: Mentorship and assessment</b>                   |                | 2.299       | 7.42          | 0.843               |
| X <sub>6</sub> : Guidance and instructions from mentors      | 0.972          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>7</sub> : Care from mentors                           | 0.947          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>8</sub> : University evaluation system of internship  | 0.435          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 3: Interpersonal relationships</b>                 |                | 1.872       | 6.04          | 0.807               |
| X <sub>19</sub> : Relationships with hotel employees         | 0.894          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>20</sub> : Relationships with other interns           | 0.758          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>18</sub> : Relationships with supervisors             | 0.635          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 4: Compensation</b>                                |                | 1.586       | 5.12          | 0.746               |
| X <sub>16</sub> : Overtime pay                               | 0.805          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>17</sub> : Fringe and benefits                        | 0.633          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>15</sub> : Internship salary                          | 0.579          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 5: Hotel features</b>                              |                | 1.013       | 3.27          | 0.702               |
| X <sub>13</sub> : Employee meals                             | 0.623          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>2</sub> : Distance to school                          | 0.545          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>1</sub> : Hotel star level                            | 0.497          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 6: Hotel internship programming</b>                |                | 1.366       | 4.41          | 0.813               |
| X <sub>24</sub> : Opportunities in internship                | 0.527          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>26</sub> : Hotel intern reward programs               | 0.458          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>23</sub> : Internship training                        | 0.443          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>25</sub> : Sense of achievement at work               | 0.432          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>27</sub> : Hotel intern recognition                   | 0.431          |             |               |                     |
| <b>Factor 7: Curriculum requirements</b>                     |                | 1.470       | 4.74          | 0.824               |
| X <sub>3</sub> : Internship arrangement in degree plan       | 0.957          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>4</sub> : Required internship length                  | 0.733          |             |               |                     |
| X <sub>9</sub> : Curriculum emphasis                         | 0.459          |             |               |                     |

curriculum. Thus, factor 7 is named *curriculum requirements*. This factor corresponds to “credit requirements” in Hussien and La Lopa’s (2018, p. 518) study.

The measurement reliability of each factor was assessed using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ . The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value for the seven factors ranged between 0.702 and 0.897, all above the accepted threshold of 0.6 for exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2010), indicating good internal consistency for all the factors. Thus, the average scores were calculated as the factor scores for further regression analysis.

#### 4.3. Relationship between internship satisfaction and career intention

In order to test the relationship between internship satisfaction and career intention, a linear regression analysis with the interns’ career intention as the dependent variable, and internship satisfaction as the independent variable, was conducted. The result shows that internship satisfaction had a significant positive effect ( $\beta = .472, p < .001$ ) on the interns’ career intention (Table 3). In other words, the higher the internship satisfaction is, the higher the interns’ career intention is.

#### 4.4. Relationships between internship factors and internship satisfaction/career intention

Stepwise linear regression analysis was conducted to explore how the 7 internship factors influence internship satisfaction. The results indicated that when factor 1, factor 2, factor 6, and factor 7 were incorporated into the regression equation, the model fitting effect was the best. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values of the four factors were all much smaller than the cutoff value of 10 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that there were no multicollinearity issues among the factors. The determination coefficient  $R^2$  is 65.8%, showing that the overall explanation power of the regression model is satisfactory.

Specifically, as shown in Table 4, factor 1, *internship achievements* ( $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$ ) and factor 7, *curriculum requirements* ( $\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$ ), were the most influential factors in determining internship satisfaction, followed by factor 6, *hotel internship programming* ( $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$ ) and factor 2, *mentorship and assessment* ( $\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ). Factor 3 (*interpersonal relationships*), factor 4 (*compensation*), and factor 5 (*hotel features*) did not have any significant effect on internship satisfaction.

Another stepwise linear regression analysis was conducted to identify how the internship factors could influence the interns’ future career intention. The regression analysis indicated that when factor 1, factor 3, and factor 7 were incorporated into the regression equation, the model fitting effect was the best. As shown in Table 4, factor 7, *curriculum requirements*, was the most influential factor in determining career intention ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ), followed by factor 3, *interpersonal relationships* ( $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.01$ ) and Factor 1, *internship achievements* ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ). Factor 2 (*mentorship and assessment*), factor 4 (*compensation*), factor 5 (*hotel features*), and factor 6 (*hotel internship programming*) did not have any significant effect on career intention.

Two factors, *internship achievements* and *curriculum requirements*, had significant impacts on both internship satisfaction and career intention, demonstrating that they are relatively more important in designing internship programs. In contrast, *compensation* and *hotel features*, did not affect either internship satisfaction or career intention. Although these two factors are concerned by students in the internship experience, they are not determining interns’ satisfaction with the internship experience and their career intention to work in the hotel industry.

## 5. Conclusions and implications

### 5.1. Conclusions and discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the key influential factors of hotel interns’ satisfaction and career intention. The study utilized a comprehensive list of 31 items related to hotel internships based on previous literature and conducted a survey with undergraduate hospitality management students in Guangzhou, China. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the key factors, and regression analysis was then run to examine the impacts of the key factors on internship satisfaction and career intention. The study yields the following three main findings.

Firstly, factor analysis identified seven key factors of hotel internship experience, including internship achievements, mentorship and assessment, interpersonal relationships, compensation, hotel features, hotel internship programming, and curriculum requirements. Like previous studies (Ko, 2008; Lam & Ching, 2007; Singh & Dutta, 2010), this study highlighted the importance of help and support from mentors, interpersonal relationships, rewards and appreciation, feedback and assessment, and skill-developing opportunities. Hotel internships involves multiple parties including educational institutions, students, and intern hotels (Cho, 2006; Yiu & Law, 2012); therefore, the key factors of internship experience are well informed by the interactions of the three actors. This study found the factor of internship achievements, which reflects student interns’ personal/professional development and academic achievement needs, is the most important internship experience factor. This finding highlights the need to attend to student development in designing internship experience. On the other hand, other factors found in this study, such as mentorship and assessment,

**Table 3**

The effect of intern satisfaction on career intention.

| Dependent variable | Independent variable    | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | t     | p     |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------|------|---------|-------|-------|
| Career intention   | Internship satisfaction | .485 | .063 | .472    | 7.670 | <.001 |

**Table 4**  
The effects of internship factors on internship satisfaction and career intention.

| Dependent variable      | Independent variable                    | B    | SE B | $\beta$ | t    | p      |
|-------------------------|---|------|------|---------|------|--------|
| Internship satisfaction | F1: <i>Internship achievements</i>      | 0.40 | 0.07 | 0.34    | 6.07 | <0.001 |
|                         | F7: <i>Curriculum requirements</i>      | 0.31 | 0.05 | 0.33    | 5.89 | <0.001 |
|                         | F6: <i>Hotel internship programming</i> | 0.25 | 0.07 | 0.20    | 3.65 | <0.001 |
|                         | F2: <i>Mentorship and assessment</i>    | 0.12 | 0.05 | 0.13    | 2.60 | 0.010  |
| Career intention        | F7: <i>Curriculum requirements</i>      | 0.26 | 0.07 | 0.26    | 3.51 | 0.001  |
|                         | F3: <i>Interpersonal relationships</i>  | 0.24 | 0.08 | 0.20    | 3.10 | 0.002  |
|                         | F1: <i>Internship achievements</i>      | 0.23 | 0.09 | 0.19    | 2.53 | 0.012  |

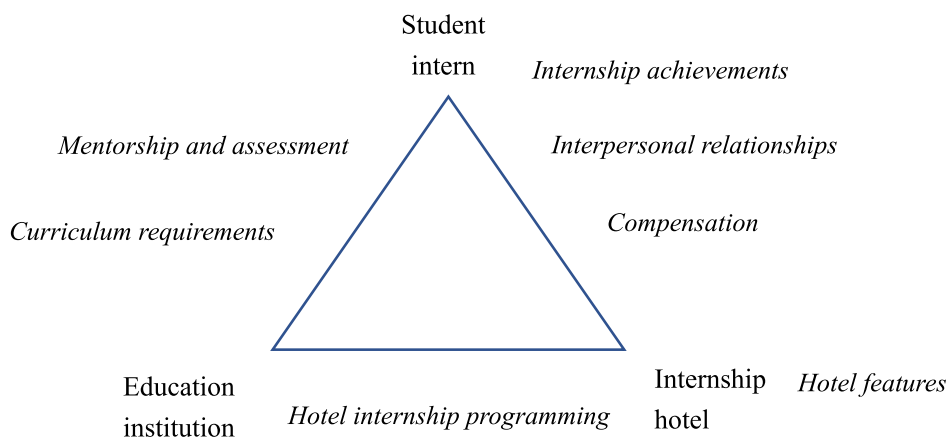
interpersonal relationships, hotel internship programming, and curriculum requirements, reflect the relationships of student interns with the education institution and the intern hotels.

Fig. 1 shows the factors in a triangular diagram composed of the three parties of students, education institution and internship hotel. All the factors can be allocated in a certain place in this conceptual diagram.

This study also identified some different focal points among Chinese students. For example, Chinese students were focused very much on internship achievements, which were different from the findings of Lam and Ching's (2007) and Singh and Dutta's (2010) studies. In addition, our study identified curriculum requirements as one of the key factors in hotel internship experiences, reflective of the role and responsibilities of the education institution in the internship experience.

Secondly, the regression analysis results showed that internship achievements, curriculum requirements, hotel internship programming, and mentorship and assessment significantly influenced internship satisfaction. In addition, curriculum requirements, interpersonal relationships, and internship achievements had significant impacts on interns' intention to pursue permanent positions in the hotel industry. Similarly, Lam and Ching (2007) identified help from superiors as a predictor of overall internship satisfaction. Ko (2008) also found that learning and administration were two factors influencing students' future career choice. This study highlighted the importance of two factors, internship achievements and curriculum requirements, both of which are strongly related to important elements of Chinese culture like goal setting and being responsible. Both factors are found to significantly predict internship satisfaction and career intention. Internship achievements seem to address the self-efficacy issue in the hotel workplace and increase the interns' self confidence in working in the hospitality industry. Studies have shown that problem-solving is an effective coping strategy that reduces occupation stress and in turn turnover intentions among Chinese hotel employees (Huang, van der Veen, & Song, 2018). Internship achievements seem to be able to improve interns' social adaptability and their problem-solving skills in the workplace, thus increasing their intention to find a career in the hotel industry. In addition, hotel internship programming and mentorship and assessment were the factors that affected internship satisfaction, while interpersonal relationships significantly influenced future career intention. In previous studies, interpersonal relationship has been frequently identified as an internship experience factor (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Ko, 2008; Tse, 2010). These findings indicate that relationship building in the workplace has a long-term impact on hotel graduates' future career choice.

Lastly, the study revealed that two factors, compensation and hotel features, were not significantly related to either internship satisfaction or career intention. In previous studies, Lam and Ching (2007) found that the job itself did not affect overall satisfaction, while Ko (2008) found that the environment did not influence future career choice. However, no prior research had considered the effect of monetary compensation in hotel internship. This study found that although compensation had some impact on hotel internship experiences, it was not an important factor to which hotels should pay much attention.



**Fig. 1.** Factors of internship experience.

## 5.2. Implications

This study makes valuable contributions to both academia and the hospitality industry. From a theoretical perspective, this study compiled an inclusive list of indicators of hotel internship experiences and empirically tested them among Chinese undergraduate students. Although previous studies have investigated hospitality internship satisfaction, none has been done with undergraduate students in mainland Chinese higher learning institutions. This study represents a first attempt to explore the hotel internship indicators in the unique context of Chinese culture.

The study also provides practical implications for both hospitality educators and industry practitioners. Hotel internship programs connect hospitality education to the industry practice and are thus a critical point to address one of the challenges elaborated by [Lugosi and Jameson \(2017, p. 170\)](#) in hospitality management education: “The future of hospitality will most likely require the establishments of new partnerships and new models of delivery to a) underpin employability, b) help maintain the relevance of education to practice and c) ensure the financial viability of courses.”. At the same time, hotel internship addresses [Baum’s \(2019\)](#) concern of hospitality industry’s capacity in recruitment and retention of talents. If managed well as concerted effort between both universities and intern hotels, internships may nurture favorable career pathways in the hospitality industry, albeit in a limited sense according to [Baum \(2019, p. 3832\)](#), who sees a need of “ground-changing” change involving both the education sector and the industry for preparing the future hospitality workforce. To improve satisfaction among hotel interns and facilitate future employment in the industry, this study put forward the following proposals from the perspectives of the three stakeholders: universities, hotels and students.

Universities should design internship programs well and improve both the allocation of mentors and assessment methods. The internship plan acts as a “trial period” before students step into the real workplace. Universities should clarify the importance of internships to students and actively formulate internship plans. Additionally, internship mentors assigned by universities play an important role in the internship. Students’ lack of work experience leaves them easily confused about their futures. They need mentors to provide timely guidance and care, to help them address the confusion encountered at work, and to elevate their levels of job confidence. Mentors should take the initiative to understand students’ needs before the internships are implemented. They must help the students mentally prepare for their first work experience and prevent them from having unrealistic expectations of the internships that might affect their career intention in the hotel industry after graduation. Finally, universities should establish an effective evaluation system for internship assessment according to the characteristics of the industry. A good internship assessment system should be able to help students understand their own strengths and weaknesses, rather than simply assigning a grade to the internship course.

Hotels should establish and improve workplace relationship building and management and training systems to increase interns’ opportunities. Generally speaking, interns tend to work more for the opportunity to improve their job skills than for monetary compensation. Therefore, when seeking internship partnerships with universities, hotels should, in addition to considering their own needs, develop a proper management system for interns to balance their study and work. For example, hotels may arrange accommodation for students and arrange job rotations to enhance their comprehensive abilities. Finally, since internships are a part of the learning process and will have a direct impact on students’ career choice, hotels should also develop corresponding vocational skills training programs for interns and provide job opportunities in which students may practice these skills. Hotels must also ensure that students understand corporate culture, industry development prospects, and the process of adapting to work life.

Students should have realistic expectations of their internships and set practical goals for achievement. They should adjust their mentality and be conscious of their identity change from college students to employees. They should have a good reserve of professional knowledge before starting their internships, and form reasonable expectations toward the internship process. Additionally, individual differences among students should be acknowledged. Every student comes to the internship with different expectations and will face a unique set of challenges. Therefore, students themselves should take the initiative to communicate with university mentors and hotel leaders, express their needs and demands, and actively seek help in their internships.

### Author statement

Hua Qu: conceptualization, supervision, funding acquisition, data collection, data analysis, writing and revision.

Xi Y. Leung: conceptualization, supervision, writing and revision.

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Jiamin He: data collection, data analysis, writing and revision.

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