Corporate Social Responsibility and New Job Seekers in the Greater China Region: Factors in Application Decisions

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February 2013
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Abstract

Our study applies literature from the corporate social responsibility (CSR), signaling and social identity fields to examine the influence of different aspects of CSR (taken as company work environment and philanthropic and ethical policies) compared to traditional job characteristics (taken as company salary, prospects, location, type) on job choices. We also look at variations across both geography and gender. As prospective new job seekers we use final year undergraduate students from the Greater China region and conjoint analysis. We find that different aspects of CSR do make a difference and there are variations across the region. In mainland China and Taiwan job seekers put greater emphasis on CSR that benefits internal stakeholders (e.g. employees) while in Hong Kong more importance is placed on external stakeholders (e.g. the community). Our findings offer important implications for theory and management practice.
Introduction

Despite the post-2008 financial crisis economic fallout, demand for skilled employees outstrips supply in various locations, such as the Greater China region. Even with a large supply of university graduates it is argued that only about 10 percent of them have the required skills to move the Chinese economy up the value chain (McKinsey Global Institute, 2008). Skills shortages are also being felt in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In a recent employer (40,000 across 39 countries) survey, 42 percent in Hong Kong and 54 percent in Taiwan had difficulty filling positions, higher than the global average of 34 percent (Manpower Inc., 2011).

What might assist organizations in such tight labor markets better understand job choice by prospective employees? Signaling theory (Srivasta and Lurie. 2001) explains how job seekers are attracted based on the information and signals they receive (directly and indirectly) about organizations. This information could come from job advertisements, interviews, campus recruitment or word of mouth. Research shows that job seekers interpret the signals they receive from these different sources and form an impression of the organization (Turban et. al. 1998).

The next question would be, what are the relevant signals in job choice and how important are they? Is one signal about corporate social responsibility (CSR)? There is evidence that CSR can motivate and retain workforces. For example, one survey (25,000 people across 25 countries) found that for 80 percent of those in large companies, motivation and loyalty increased in tandem with a greater commitment to CSR (Environics International, 2002). Another survey (US-based) found CSR activities had a positive effect on employee satisfaction and loyalty (Weiser and Zadek, 2000). Indeed, a significant fit between employer-employee values is seen as beneficial (Schneider, 1987). Thus, a job seeker may have an intrinsic belief that their future employer should be committed to CSR. The ‘weight’ given to such beliefs determines how important CSR practices are to job seekers.

Research also confirms CSR’s influence on job choice decisions. However, more in-depth research into this among Asians is scant. So, our study examines the extent to which job choices are influenced by CSR issues (a company’s legal, ethical, philanthropic responsibilities) as compared to traditional job characteristics (salary, prospects, location, company type) and variations between locations and gender in this. Our research setting is the Greater China region – mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Our study is important for several reasons and adds to previous research in key ways. First, we operationalize and integrate well established CSR models and theories. Second, we consider job choice beyond traditional job characteristics by incorporating CSR issues and testing in an area that is among the fastest growing in the world. Third, by using conjoint analysis we simulate an environment that is closer to reality. To our knowledge our study is the first attempt at using such analysis across the Greater China region. Fourth, we consider the attitudes of three groups of Chinese (from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) from an employee perspective, a comparison not undertaken before. Fifth, our comparative analysis highlights similarities and differences between locations - mainland China and its more advanced neighbors of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Sixth, by using a less used research setting, we help ground more common Anglo-American literature and results. Seventh, there are implications for management and practice in terms of employee resourcing stemming from our study.

Research context

The Greater China region offers an unusual context for CSR as both Confucianism and collectivism are evident. Also, CSR development in mainland China has not been voluntary. For example, in the 1990s CSR was imposed via supplier codes of conduct on Chinese textile and garment factories (Chan and Ross, 2003). More recently the government came to see CSR as a complement to its ‘Harmonious Society’ policy (2006) attempting to balance economic growth with improvements in the social and environmental arena. So, unlike CSR drivers elsewhere, the role of government has been dominant in mainland China, although less so in Hong Kong and Taiwan.
However, the government may not continue to be the dominant force in CSR. The voice of other stakeholders – consumers, employees and civil society – is growing. This is particularly so after several high profile events, including pollution-associated cancer deaths, coal mining accidents and tainted milk cases in mainland China and corporate scandals in Taiwan (Ip, 2008).

Literature review and hypotheses development

The CSR Concept

Definitions of CSR have proliferated since the 1950s and it remains a contested concept. In contrast to traditional views that an organization’s primary (if not sole) responsibility is to shareholders and earning a return for investors and complying with laws, other views see organizations also have further ‘higher’, ‘broader’ or ‘secondary’ (albeit profitability remains primary) responsibilities - legal, ethical and philanthropic. This also includes other constituencies, such as employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, governments, environmental groups and other special interest groups or ‘stakeholders.’ This extension of economic responsibilities to non-economic or social domains with morals and values in organizations was popularized by Carroll (1979).

Carroll’s (1979) conceptualisation of CSR has been durable and widely cited. Its four ‘layers’ of organizational responsibilities suggests a sequential order, weighting and evolution of importance and development. Thus, there is an early emphasis on the economic, then legal, followed by ethical and finally discretionary (philanthropic) responsibilities. Carroll (1983) argues CSR involves business conduct that it is economically profitable, law abiding, ethical and socially supportive, but with profitability and legality the foremost conditions. Beyond these responsibilities are ethical ones, that organizations conduct their affairs in a fair and just way, to do more than just comply, but to also make proactive efforts to anticipate and meet the norms of society. Finally, there are discretionary responsibilities, expectations organizations be ‘good citizens’. This may involve such things as philanthropic support for communities, donating employee expertise and time to causes, etc.

More recently Carroll (2004) incorporated the notion of stakeholders into CSR. This moved it closer to Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory arguments that organizations be responsive to the competing demands of multiple stakeholders. Addressing the issues faced by stakeholders can have a direct social consequence (Greening and Turban, 2000). Since employees are considered an important organizational resource on the one hand and scarce on the other, meeting the social needs of potential employees will result in a more loyal workforce and an enhanced reputation for organizations (Mitchell et.al., 1997; Greening and Turban, 2000).

Given Carroll's prominence (and usefulness), we use his four-layered pyramid concept in our paper as a way to operationalise CSR. We assign a specific action of the company to represent each responsibility (see later details).

CSR and Job Seekers

It is argued that organizations are able to attract job seekers because of person-organization fit (Chatman, 1989; Ng and Burke, 2005). Studies relating CSR and organizational attractiveness to job seekers (Backhaus et. al. 2002) are anchored in two theories. First, signaling theory, whereby one party credibly conveys information about itself to another (Rynes, 1991). This suggests that job seekers use information put forward by organizations (explicitly and implicitly) to draw conclusions regarding organizational objectives and actions (Srivasta and Lurie, 2001), such as to infer working conditions (Turban and Greening, 1997). CSR, in particular, provides signals to job seekers about organizational values and norms (Greening and Turban, 2000). Organizations that project a ‘good’ image provide positive signals to job seekers (Rynes and Cable, 2003).

Second, CSR and implied organizational attractiveness to job seekers involves social identity theory, whereby individuals classify themselves into social categories (Greening and Turban, 2000). To explain inter-group behavior Tajfel and Turner (1979) introduced the social identity concept. This theory is concerned with ‘when’ and ‘why’ individuals identify with, and behave as part of, social
groups and adopt shared attitudes. This involves both the psychological and sociological aspects of group behavior. Thus, job seekers are attracted to organizations that fit their own values and norms (Albinger and Freeman, 2000). Thus, Carmeli et al. (2007) found employee perceptions of their organization’s CSR positively associated with organizational identification.

Signaling theory was enhanced by Turner’s (1987) self-categorization theory. As Celani and Singh (2011) usefully summarize, signaling theory has potential to explain the influence of predictors on job choice, while social identification theory and self-categorization theory can help understand the conditions under which job applicants receive certain signals from dual levels (individual and organizational) more favorably than others.

By combining signaling and social identity theories with Carroll’s pyramid of responsibilities, we can extend the former by identifying specific responsibilities that influence job seeker choice. In other words, not all types of responsibilities are equally important to job seekers. To some, economic responsibilities could be seen as important, while for others charitable acts may dominate their selection of jobs. This may depend on the responsibility that an individual job seeker most identifies with.

Previous work suggests that job choice can be influenced by CSR. Evidence includes Albinger and Freeman (2000); Backhaus et. al. (2002); Turban and Greening (1997); Bhattacharya et. al. (2008); and Greening and Turban (2000). However, a gap stems from the predominant US-focus and bias of such work.

Studies using the research context of the Greater China region on job choice and also linked to CSR are scarce. Fisher and Yuan (1998) compare the importance of job attributes in China and find differences: wages, working conditions and job security were important among mainland Chinese and Taiwanese versus appreciation of one’s efforts and interesting work in the US. Lui (2006) found Chinese employees valued a sense of belonging and commitment more than financial concerns and that those who felt undervalued tended to leave despite high compensation. Zhao’s (2006) study (of 141 college students and 44 recruiters in several Chinese cities) found job seekers ranked job security, company image and organizational culture above salary level.

Some literature suggests that the understanding of CSR may be undergoing change in China. Despite allegations that business practices in China are unethical to some extent (Egels-Zanden, 2007), business ethics and corporate conduct are receiving attention from job seekers. In a six country survey (of business students) of perceptions of business ethics and moral judgments, Ahmed et al. (2003) found the Chinese to be uneasy with personal unethical behavior. Furthermore, Snell and Tseng (2003) found a revival of traditional Confucian values in mainland China (particularly in private firms and joint ventures).

Thus, the literature suggests that job seekers in China are motivated not only by financial aspects, but also by company image, some of which can stem from CSR. In such an environment, signals sent by organizations about their CSR are indeed useful. Thus, we propose:

**H 1: CSR issues are significant considerations among Chinese job seekers.**

The literature also points to the moderating effects of ‘individual-difference’ characteristics, including gender, in job choice (Chapman et. al., 2005). Chow and Ngo (2002) attribute gender difference preferences among job seekers to two factors: 1) socialisation that distinguishes gender roles; and 2) the degree of discrimination and prejudices that influence the role of females in the economy. An early study by Jurgensen (1978) found male job seekers emphasized job security while for females it was type of work. Other studies (e.g. Tolbert and Moen, 1998; Brammer, et. al., 2007) provide support for gender differences in job attribute preferences. For example, Backhaus et al. (2002) found diversity issues to be of more importance to female job seekers.
However, Turban et al. (1993) demonstrate an insignificant gender effect as both male and female job seekers consider type of work and advancement as the two most important job characteristics. In addition, Barber and Daly (1996) suggest that gender differences in job choices are disappearing because of changes in societal norms.

Studies of the Greater China region show no obvious differences among male and female job choices. For example, Fisher and Yuan (1998) found (using workers in a hotel chain in Shanghai) little difference in job attributes (wages, promotion, job security and growth opportunities) preferences, although females had a greater preference for job security. Likewise, Chow and Ngo (2002) found (using university students in Beijing and Shanghai) similarities in job attribute rankings among both genders. These studies, however, did not consider CSR as a job attribute. Given the non-significant role played by gender in other job attributes we propose:

**H2: CSR issues are equally important to male and female job seekers.**

The Chinese in the Greater China region are not a single entity. Although they share a common ethnic heritage and use a similar script, differences in socio-economic standards and political ideologies run deep (Loh, 2004). For example, Tse et al. (1989) found the consumption values and behavior of Chinese to be quite distinct, with Hong Kongers more hedonistic, mainlanders more utilitarian and Taiwanese in-between. Similarly, Cheung et al. (1992) found that despite the same dimensions of personality, there were degrees of differentiation, with Hong Kongers the most selfish, materialistic and irresponsible, mainlanders the least so and Taiwanese in-between. Similarly, Huff and Kelley (2003) found common in-group bias amongst Chinese, but the Taiwanese significantly differed when it came to external trust.

The Chinese in the region, to a large extent, are said to internalize the Confucian teaching on moderation and self-discipline (Cheung et al., 1992). Confucian values, particularly those concerned with long term considerations, are found to be positively correlated to CSR (Ramasamy, et. al., 2009b). However, there were significant differences between the attitudes and behavior towards CSR between the Hong Kong Chinese (with a strong Confucian tradition) and mainlanders.

CSR could be viewed differently across the region. In China CSR is seen as part of government strategy to promote ‘harmonious development’ (Darigan and Post, 2009). In Hong Kong, CSR is seen more as a charitable activity by businesses (Mahtani and Leo, 2007; Mahtani and Welford, 2004). In Taiwan CSR is seen as rather limited compared to the general view that businesses are embroiled in crony capitalism and nepotism (Ip, 2008).

Thus, influential job attributes across the three locations would differ not only according to economic conditions and job market environments, but also by expectations of the responsibilities of organizations. Given the differences that exist among the Chinese in terms of their values and behavior we propose:

**H3: The importance of CSR in job choice differs among the three locations in the Greater China region.**

**Methodology**

Our data derives from a survey of final year undergraduate students.¹ These respondents are at four universities from mainland China (Xi’an and Shanghai), Taiwan (Taipei) and Hong Kong, one from each city. These cities were chosen so that our sample covers coastal (Shanghai) and inland (Xi’an) China, as well as other important cities within the Greater China region (Taipei and Hong Kong). Several professors helped in survey administration. Some 500, 300, 400 and 200 copies of the

¹ Bello et al (2009) indicates these contexts when students are suitable for business and management research, which our study falls within. In addition, since these students would be university graduates, they are likely not to be in the unskilled category.

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questionnaire (based on graduating class size) were distributed among students in their classes in Xi'an, Shanghai, Taiwan and Hong Kong, respectively. Confidentiality was assured, participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered, but the involvement of professors resulted in high return rates: 87.4%, 82%, 73.5% and 65.5% in Xi'an, Shanghai, Taipei and Hong Kong, respectively. Since respect for teachers is still a dominant virtue in Chinese societies, such rates were not that surprising.

As we use final year undergraduate students as prospective new job seekers, important questions include what do they know about CSR? How do they get such information? Does being a student (the student identity) include a CSR component? We argue that students, as young adults at the verge of entering the labour market, are often rather idealistic about the world. Kolodinsky et al. (2009) finds that students are more likely to have favorable attitudes towards CSR if they hold ethically idealistic views. Business Schools are emphasising business ethics in courses (Sleeper et al., 2006) because it stimulates concern for the obligations of organizations to act for the social good (Angelidis and Ibrahim, 2004). Students are more exposed to views that organizations need to be more balanced in addressing moral, societal, environmental and other issues (Giacalone and Thompson, 2006). Thus, when choosing jobs, students may take into account CSR so that they can self-categorize (Turner, 1987) themselves with organizations that would fit their own aspirations. Given the increasing exposure of students to CSR in the media and education, we expect an increased importance for CSR when choosing jobs.

Respondents are shown in Table 1. Demographic backgrounds among the samples are fairly similar: they were all between 20 to 24 years old. In each city there were more females than males. All claim to be above average in academic performance, but close to average in terms of family income. There are no significant differences in the samples. For gender, the chi-square test for testing the null that the proportions of males/females across the selected cities are equal (H0: pXian=pSH=pTW=pHK) is 1.616 (p-value=0.656, df=3). Thus, there is no statistical evidence to suggest the proportions of males/females across the cities are not equal. As for age, the ANOVA test for testing the null that the average ages across the selected cities are equal is 904 (p-value=0.000), suggesting at least one city differs from the others. The difference in age can be attributed to the specific education system in the location, i.e. the number of school years before university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Profile of Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (% male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean academic performance (1-10)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean family income (1-10)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents were asked to rate their own academic performance with respect to their peers. 1 refers to the lowest 10% academic performance category and 10 the highest 10% academic performance category.  
** Respondents were asked to rate their family income with respect to the inhabitants in the city they live in. 1 refers to lowest 10% income bracket and 10 the highest 10% income bracket.
Survey Instrument and Variables
The survey was initially designed in English and then translated into the local language by the researchers with the assistance of a professional translator. Translated versions were then back-translated into English. Discrepancies were studied and amendments made for greater contextual clarity. Next, the terminologies and cultural contexts were modified to maximize questionnaire readability. As a result two sets of questionnaires emerged – a simplified Chinese version for Shanghai and Xi'an and a traditional Chinese version for Hong Kong and Taiwan. These were pilot tested in March-April 2007, involving 30 students each from Hong Kong and Shanghai. Consequently, more minor adjustments were made before the full fieldwork in June-December 2007.

Apart from the usual demographic components (age, gender, education, income levels), the critical part of the questionnaire comprised 16 hypothetically created job profiles. Each job profile (see Table 2 for an example) displayed various combinations of job attributes. Respondents were asked to tick three jobs that they would apply for and to cross three jobs that they would not apply for.

Table 2. An example of a job profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Starting Salary</th>
<th>Prospect In 3 years</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Company Type</th>
<th>Work Environment</th>
<th>Company’s Philanthropic Policy</th>
<th>Company’s Ethical Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Below market average</td>
<td>Tenured position likely</td>
<td>First-tier city</td>
<td>Local company</td>
<td>Sometimes unsafe or unhealthy</td>
<td>Donates 5% income to charities yearly</td>
<td>Ethical standards are sometimes violated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our seven job attributes are based on the job selection literature. For example, Chapman et al. (2005) categorize job attributes into those that are specific to the job (i.e., pay, benefits, types of work) and those that are broadly reflective of the organization (i.e., size, work environment, location, familiarity). Among these job attributes, salaries, advancement, type of work and location are popular (Chapman et al., 2003; Chapman et al., 2005; Turban et al., 1993).

Carroll’s (1979) pyramid of responsibilities, as described earlier, is popular in empirical research and can be operationalised (Smith and Langford, 2011). Specific activities can be assigned to each of the four responsibilities. Salary and jobs prospects were taken as the economic responsibility as this would derive from profits and competitive position of the employer. To address the non-economic responsibilities we used safe working environment to represent legal responsibility, adherence to ethical standards to represent ethical responsibility and donations to charities to denote philanthropic responsibility. These job attributes were chosen because they were common initiatives among firms in the Greater China region and also easily understood by our respondents.

Each job attribute was given several options (see Table 3). Starting salary (1) has three options, with the market average as a benchmark. Job prospect (2) has tenure, bonus and promotion. Location (3) has differences between the questionnaires due to geographic size. The mainland China and Taiwan

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2 The use of hypothetical job profiles is not new to this sort of research. Greening and Turban (2000) used verbal descriptions of hypothetical jobs to evaluate the attraction among job seekers to socially responsible jobs. Backhaus, Stone and Heiner (2002) also use hypothetical numerical values to evaluate the social responsibility of businesses, although real companies were used in their exercise. Since our sample was from multiple regions, using real companies could pose a problem of compatibility.

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questionnaires had three location options of: first tier cities, hometown and countryside, while the Hong Kong questionnaire had three location options of: Hong Kong, Guangdong Province and Chinese first tier cities. Company type (4) has options of multinational companies (MNCs), local companies and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), or in the case of Hong Kong, the government. Work environment (5), philanthropic policy (6) and ethical policy (7) have two options each.

Table 3. Options within each attribute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Below market average</td>
<td>1. Tenured position likely</td>
<td>1. First-tier city</td>
<td>1. Local Company</td>
<td>1. Sometimes unsafe or unhealthy</td>
<td>1. Donates 5% income to charities yearly</td>
<td>1. Ethical standards are sometimes violated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method of Analysis: Conjoint Analysis
Job choice decisions are typical settings for conjoint analysis. In determining preferential options within each job attribute and the relative importance among job attributes, conjoint analysis has several advantages over more conventional survey methods in which respondents are asked to indicate preferences and rate the importance of job attributes. This is because the latter method produces unconstrained ratings which may result in indistinguishable levels of importance of single job attributes if all job attributes are rated equally importantly or when rated without considering the existence of other job attributes (Auger et al. 2003).

Conjoint analysis, on the other hand, is better able to portray the job choice decisions more realistically as a ‘trade-off’ among job attributes (Malhotra, 1996). Jobs are rated together with all the included features in a more integrated manner, simulating a more realistic job choice process. Indeed, conjoint analysis has been used to evaluate consumers’ perceptions when social causes are used in marketing (Bloom et al., 2006; Valor, 2005). Importantly, this method is consistent with the compensatory decision rule (see Grewal and Levy, 2008). We employ this rule in our study, forcing respondents to evaluate given alternatives by trading off one job characteristic against another. For

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3 The ‘first-tier cities’ concept is well-known in China, referring to 4 cities – Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

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instance, a convenient work location might have to be traded for an above market average starting salary, and so on.

However, given that there are seven job attributes and several options within each, 648 (3x3x3x2x2x2x2) job profiles could be created to represent all combinations. As respondents may not be able to efficiently evaluate all these job profiles, a fractional factorial design was used to reduce the number. The process selects a subset of all the possible job profiles in a manner to preserve the independence among the options of a job profile and to ensure each option of a job attribute appears the same number of times (see Hair et al, 2006). Applying the additive model that excludes interaction effects among job attributes in the estimations reduced our job profiles to 16.

Respondents can be asked to rank job profiles according to their preferences or rate each job profile on a given scale or simply to choose job profiles according to their decisions. Conjoint ranking does not describe the distances among job choices and it is not an easy task to compare when the number of job profiles is large. Conjoint rating provides distances, but dealing with a large number of potential ties is not desirable. Choice-based conjoint analysis means respondents only have to decide whether or not they will select the given job based on the combination of attributes (an example was shown in Table 2).

However, the level of analysis must be shifted from the individual to the aggregate level. Although conjoint designs have a history of successful application, no consistency emerges as to which one to use (Karniouchina et al., 2008; Krieger et al., 2004). As mentioned previously, in our study a choice-based approach is employed in which respondents are asked to select three jobs they would apply for and three they would not apply for. Usefully capturing both sides of responses can only be done by using the choice-based approach.

By aggregating individual choices grouped data are created. The sum of the number of ticks and crosses for each job profile provides the sample’s positive and negative judgments on each job profile. Using these judgments the average counts of the same option across job profiles are computed. Next, the standard deviations resulting from the average counts of the various options within a job attribute are computed. Finally, the part-worth values, representing the preference of each option for each job attribute, are computed by taking the square root of the standardized squared deviation (see Hair et al. 2006 for detailed illustration). The ratio of the range of part-worth values of an attribute to the summed range of part-worth of all attributes is the relative importance of the job attribute. It should be noted that all part-worth values are scaled for higher interpretability according to procedures described in Hair et al (2006).

**Results**

Our results concern, first, the relative importance of job attributes assigned by job seekers when choosing or rejecting jobs; and second, within job attributes, the relative importance of the various options (see Table 4). For many of the job attributes the choice of options is somewhat straightforward. For instance, in the salary attribute, an above average salary is preferred to the market average salary. Below market average salary is of least importance. This is true in all locations. Similarly, for other CSR issues, a greater importance is placed on safe working environment, ethical conduct of organizations and regular charitable donations.
Table 4. Preference Scores of Options within JobAttributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Attributes</th>
<th>(b) Options</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Xi’an</th>
<th>Shanghai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>6.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market Average</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Prospects</td>
<td>Bonuses</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>7.39</td>
<td>5.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Company</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multinational</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOE/GOV</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Country-Side/Guangdong</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China First-Tier City</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home Town/HK</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>Safe and Healthy</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>8.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes Unsafe or Not Healthy</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic Policy</td>
<td>Donates 5% to Charities on Regular Basis</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not make donations</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Policy</td>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>7.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows unethical practices</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the selection of options in the other three job attributes varies. For instance, for job prospects, bonuses and promotion are more preferred in mainland China, whereas tenure is more preferred in Taiwan and Hong Kong. This difference may reflect a sometimes noted relative short-term mindedness in mainland China for people to maximize their utility compared to a longer-term orientation in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Tak and King, 2004). Our results are also consistent with Fisher and Yuan (1998) where mainland Chinese ranked job security at 6 out of 10 job attributes compared to the Taiwanese who ranked it 1 (Silverthorne, 1992).

The location attribute is more complicated, partly because of the nature of the sample. Shanghai respondents preferred to work in first-tier cities while Xi’an respondents, like their Taiwanese counterparts, preferred to remain in their hometowns. Hong Kong respondents preferred to remain in Hong Kong. There is a clear aversion to the countryside by the mainland Chinese, while Hong Kongers are relatively not keen on working in mainland China.

As for the company type attribute, there is a clear preference for MNCs. In mainland China and Taiwan private local companies are preferred to SOEs. In Hong Kong, however, working for the government is preferred relative to local companies.

Our results provide some initial support for H1. The fact that all four CSR issues (salary and job prospects, work environment, philanthropic and ethical policy), but in particular the latter three non-economic responsibilities, are considered important, i.e. better is preferred than worse, in all locations, is consistent with studies that find a high degree of CSR support in the Greater China region.
(Ramasamy and Yeung, 2009a). However, the preferences reported refer to preferences within one job attribute. In other words, preferences are made in isolation without considering other job attributes. Thus, an individual may prefer applying to a company with an ethical policy to one without. However, jobs are not chosen based on such isolated job attributes and involve trade-offs (Albinger and Freeman, 2000). Would a job seeker sacrifice a higher paying job for one with an ethical policy? Would a job seeker leave their hometown just because the company has an ethical policy? Answers to this line of questioning can be addressed more through conjoint analysis, as described earlier.

Conjoint analysis forces respondents to make trade-offs between options in attributes in order to balance their gains and sacrifices. The manner in which the respondents make these trade-offs are assigned quantifiable weights. This finds not only the preferential order of options within job attributes, but also the weights that represent the importance of job attributes. For instance, a respondent may prefer a high-paying job to a low-paying one, but the degree of importance (computed by using the procedures documented in Hair et al., 2006) of salary may not be as significant as other job attributes. Table 5 reports the relative weights of importance assigned to various job attributes.

### Table 5. Degree of Importance of Job Attributes (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Attributes</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Xi’an</th>
<th>Shanghai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$A$</td>
<td>$R$</td>
<td>$A$</td>
<td>$R$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>18.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>11.86</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>18.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>15.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>23.56</td>
<td>21.68</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Policy</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q$_{test}$</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>23.51</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>10.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $A$: Will apply; $R$: Will not apply

The critical value of the $Q_{test}$ is 12.59.

The results in Table 5 allow us to accept our H1 with more certainty, albeit with varying degrees across the locations. In Shanghai, work environment and starting salary are the most important job attributes. The company’s ethical policy and location are also relatively important. An unsuitable location (e.g. the countryside), non-existence of an ethical policy and an unfavourable starting salary, are important factors for not applying for jobs. The results are quite similar in Xi’an. However, an unsafe work environment is the most important job attribute for non-application for a job there.

In Taiwan, work environment, salary and company ethical policy are the three most important job attributes for job application, while an unsafe work environment and lower than market average salary are reasons for not applying for jobs. Company ethical policy, philanthropic policy and type are also relatively important for non-application for jobs.

Hong Kong stands out as different. Here, starting salary, company philanthropic policy and location are the three most important reasons for applying for jobs. However, jobs that do not pay well are clearly rejected, although other job attributes may be favorable. Relatively, an unsafe work environment and an unclear company ethical policy do not seem to matter much.
The differences in the degree of importance of the various components of CSR allow us to accept H3. More specifically, the chi-square test for testing the null hypothesis that the allocated importance to company philanthropic policy⁴ and ethical⁵ policy across the cities is equal is rejected. In the case of working environment, the chi-square test shows differences between cities at the 10% significance level.⁶

In terms of H2, Table 6 shows the relative importance among job attributes between male and female job seekers. The Q test shows that there is a significant difference between males and females only in Shanghai and Hong Kong in terms of the job attributes considered important. In Shanghai, females put relatively more emphasis on company ethical policy and location. In Hong Kong, females put relatively more attention on company type and location and less attention on company ethical policy and philanthropic policy compared to their male counterparts. It should be noted that the options for location for Hong Kong respondents include leaving Hong Kong for mainland China. This may explain the degree of importance placed, particularly by young, female job seekers, on location. Work environment is relatively more important for both genders in mainland China and Taiwan. Starting salary dominates in all research locations, particularly among males in Hong Kong.

Table 6. Gender differences in Job selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Attributes</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Xi'an</th>
<th>Shanghai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting Salary</td>
<td>29.16</td>
<td>28.67</td>
<td>36.42</td>
<td>27.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td>16.13</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>20.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>22.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>18.22</td>
<td>28.68</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>17.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic Policy</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>13.36</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Policy</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qtest</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>22.07</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>22.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The critical value of the Qtest is 12.59.

Among Shanghai females, company ethical policy is the most important job attribute while among their male counterparts it is not relatively important. In contrast, males put more importance on company philanthropic policy compared to females. In Xi’an there is a stark difference between genders on company ethical policy where males ranked it as their most important job attribute.

In Taiwan, the choice of job attributes among males and females are quite similar. However, work environment seems to dominate job choice among females.

In Hong Kong, although starting salary is very important among males, company philanthropic and ethical policies are relatively more important than for females. Apart from salary, for females, location and company type are important. Thus, overall, the results from our study provide only partial support for our Hypothesis 2.

⁴ (H₀: p_{Xian}=p_{SH}=p_{TW}=p_{HK}) is 16.998 (p-value=0.001, df=3).
⁵ (H₀: p_{Xian}=p_{SH}=p_{TW}=p_{HK}) is 17.837 (p-value=0.000, df=3)
⁶ (H₀: p_{Xian}=p_{SH}=p_{TW}=p_{HK}) is 6.499 (p-value=0.09, df=3)
Discussion

Some commentators argue CSR can be used to help attract staff because it: “serves as a genuine point of differentiation for the company” (Bhattacharya et al. 2008: 37). Our study aimed to determine if CSR job attributes are attractive (or not) enough to warrant an application (or non-application) by job seekers. By using conjoint analysis our study simulated a more real-life situation where trade-offs between job attributes need to be considered. Among the job attributes that are of most interest to us are those related to the non-economic CSR-related issues (legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities).

In mainland China and Taiwan the non-economic CSR issues account for more than 50% of the importance in job choice. The relative importance of these CSR issues for job non-application is also nearly as important. In Taiwan, for instance, it accounts for 50% of relative total importance. This implies that signaling CSR attributes can attract job seekers; in addition, failure to have CSR issues can dissuade job seekers from applying. This situation is not the case for Hong Kong, however. Here the relative importance of non-economic CSR issues for job non-application is less than 12%. The more traditional job attributes (salary and company type), seem to play more dominant roles. Thus, the job attributes that make jobs attractive are different from those that make them unattractive. Interestingly, the Hong Kong results are more consistent with previous studies based on US data (Turban et al., 2001).

Our study shows that among the three non-economic CSR issues it is work environment and ethical policy that are important among job seekers in mainland China and Taiwan. Events, such as reports of accidents at work and bribery in mainland China and Taiwan (Ip, 2008; Steidlmeier, 1999; Xinhua News Agency, 2008), could have raised awareness of these issues among job seekers. In these locations CSR issues are not only a job attraction, but also results in job non-application.

In contrast, job seekers in Hong Kong are more concerned about philanthropic policy. This is consistent with surveys in Hong Kong that tend to point to donations to charities as the single most important CSR activity (Mahtani and Leo, 2007; Mahtani and Welford, 2004). These differences in CSR foci show an emphasis on internal stakeholders (i.e. concerns about the workplace) in mainland China and Taiwan versus an emphasis on external stakeholders (i.e. concerns about the community) in Hong Kong (Brammer et. al., 2007). However, failure to have philanthropic policy is not a strong reason for job non-application. This finding might reflect the more general business environment in Hong Kong where a strong rule of law dominates such that acceptable minimum working conditions prevail and illegal business practices are seen as the exception rather than the rule. As such, job seekers may pay more attention to traditional job factors (salary and company type). In contrast, more lax enforcement of the law in mainland China forces job seekers to be more concerned about the work environment.

Finally, gender does not really provide a clear indication of the role of CSR in job choice. Ethical policy is important for Shanghai’s females and also among Xi’an’s males. Females in Hong Kong and Taiwan put more emphasis on the work environment, but males in Hong Kong prefer companies with philanthropic policies. Future research may consider more the roles of individual values as an explanatory variable to explain differences in job choice, rather than the more obvious gender information.

Signaling theory explains how job seekers are attracted to a company based on the information and signals they receive (directly and indirectly) about the organization. Job seekers tend to interpret the signals they receive from these different sources and form an impression of the organization. Our findings confirm these findings in the Greater China region context. Combining this view with Carroll’s responsibilities, we find that job seekers in the different parts of the region put varying weights on each of the social responsibilities. No doubt, economic responsibilities are important (as exemplified by the importance placed on salaries and job prospects) but weights assigned to non-economic responsibilities do differ. For instance, we find that in Hong Kong the philanthropic responsibility is more important than the legal responsibility. In contrast, in mainland China the legal responsibility is of
more importance. This would mean that companies that intend to send CSR signals in an effort to
attract applicants will need to send the right ones as there is a significant difference in the perceived
importance placed on the various types of responsibilities. This is true to a large extent in the context
of geography (mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and gender, to a lesser extent. In this regard,
social identity theory’s suggestions that individuals want a sense of belonging to a group may explain
the reason for such a variation. Female job seekers, for instance, tend to place a greater importance
on the work environment (or the legal environment more generally) because of the need to identify
themselves with safety and security. Similarly, job seekers in mainland China are attracted to ethical
signals sent out by firms because of the perceived dubious business environment prevalent in the
region.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, there are issues related to our respondents. As students, they
may have limited job choice experience and may be incapable of evaluating jobs efficiently. In
addition, students need not necessarily represent skilled staff. Future research could consider using
MBA students with potentially greater experience to analyze job choices. Second, the reduced job
choices may still be too many for rational decision making. Limiting these job choices further,
however, requires further reductions in the number of options and attributes. Therefore, future
research may use focus groups to prioritize job attributes to reduce the final number for more reliable
choice decisions. Third, field studies can be superior to simulated research (Chapman et al., 2005),
as we used here. However, the use of conjoint analysis in our work forces respondents to make trade-
offs, which is more akin to reality. Fourth, our research is cross-sectional and a snapshot of a
particular moment in time. A temporal dimension would be interesting, with research giving both
replication over other time frames and also following cohorts over time to see how their views change.
Of course, this is a much bigger, demanding and costly research agenda and project. Fifth, our
research contexts – four cities - may not be representative. It ties into the point above for future
research and support.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations, the scope of our research raises interesting future research
questions, which could include other populations, how students learn about the CSR of potential
employers and how this may differ once they are working, how things change when students start
families or identify more with current employers and colleagues. Also, our findings offer some
valuable implications, both for research and theory as well as practice.

Implications for theory and research

Our paper has implications for theory and research. First, the differences in the importance of job
attributes across the Greater China region in our study fit Carroll’s (1979) pyramid of responsibilities
rather well and support his model. Economic responsibilities are important among job seekers
irrespective of location. Our study also finds that in locations where ‘lower’ level responsibilities have
been met (e.g. legal), the focus shifts towards ‘higher’ level responsibilities (e.g. philanthropic). For
instance, in Hong Kong, where lower level responsibilities have been met, philanthropic responsibility
is prominent. On the other hand, in mainland China, and to a certain degree in Taiwan, legal and
ethical responsibilities dominate the CSR demand structure among job seekers.

Second, there are implications for signaling theory, which suggests that job seekers use information
put forward by organizations (explicitly and implicitly) to draw conclusions regarding the organization’s
objectives and actions (Srivasta and Lurie, 2001). These conclusions are used to infer the type of
working conditions (Turban and Greening, 1997). CSR can provide signals to job seekers about the
values and norms prevalent in the organization (Greening and Turban, 2000), although the impact of
the type of responsibilities may differ from one region to another, or even among male and female job
seekers.
Implications for practice

Our paper has several implications for practice, for government as well as management and organizations operating, or considering doing business, in the Greater China region.

CSR, if used as a strategy, can be used as a source of employee attraction in the Greater China region. CSR can contribute positively to the attraction, retention and motivation of employees because they are likely to identify strongly with positive organizational values. Organizations that wish to attract job applications using CSR should note that in mainland China and Taiwan initiatives that emphasize internal stakeholders (i.e. employees, suppliers etc.) could provide organizational commitment (Brammer et. al., 2007). In Hong Kong, however, external stakeholders, (i.e. the community), is what needs to be emphasized by organizations to attract applicants.

Our results show a large degree of consistency in job choices between Shanghai and Xi’an and to a lesser degree, Taipei. Job choices made in Hong Kong, on the other hand, seem quite distinct. This implies a difference in lifestyle, outlook, attitudes and values in Hong Kong’s young labor force compared to their counterparts in mainland China and Taiwan. This observation provides an important lesson for organizations operating in the region. For example, a common human resource management (HRM) policy across the region is not advisable. Similarly, Chinese companies operating in Hong Kong should not merely replicate the policies they have at home; neither should Hong Kong companies in mainland China expect a similar outcome from their home based HRM policies.

In other words, our findings imply that no ‘one size fits all’ CSR (and HRM) strategy will work effectively in the Greater China region. The variations that exist among job choice factors shows that strategies have to be location specific, i.e. what works in Shanghai may not produce the same outcome in Xian. Thus, managers should evaluate those factors that drive new job seekers in various locations before designing appropriate strategies. The findings show an emphasis on a safe working environment and ethical policies work better in mainland China and Taiwan, whereas philanthropic policies (community outreach programs, such as charitable giving), are more attractive in Hong Kong.

CSR issues like work environment, ethics and philanthropy are seen to be significant factors that influence job choice decisions. It would benefit organizations to invest resources in these areas and portray a CSR image to job seekers. Linked to this is that we can see CSR in the context of employer branding with implications for organizations. This can help convince management that being a good corporate citizen has payoffs.

Finally, our findings of a clear aversion to working in the countryside by those from mainland China, has both a political and developmental implications. It puts the country’s policy of ‘harmonious development’ (Hu, 2007) between coastal and inland provinces into question. In order to attract talent to inland provinces, other job features like salary, work environment, company ethics, etc. will have to be more prominently featured in job advertisements.

Conclusion

Our paper examined choices in applying (or not) for jobs across differing locations within the Greater China region. This is in terms of job attributes, the role of CSR and the influence of ‘individual-difference’ characteristics, focusing on gender. We used a questionnaire and conjoint analysis, forcing more real-life like trade-offs between desirable job attributes. So, job factors such as salary, prospects and location are seen vis-à-vis others, such as CSR related attributes. The findings, albeit with their limitations, of similarities and differences have key implications for academia as well as management policy and practice. In short, CSR does indeed make a difference to job seekers, albeit there is a difference between the internal versus external focus and can play a critical role in company resourcing strategy.
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