

# A strategic approach to standing out in the competitive international HE market: Market differentiation in a competitive higher education market



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The University of Hong Kong



# Perceptual Hypotheses



Introduction



```
graph TD; A[Introduction] --> B[HEI marketing]; B --> C[Case study: Facts and figures]; C --> D[Case study: strategy and actions]; D --> E[Conclusions];
```

HEI marketing

Case study: Facts and figures

Case study: strategy and actions

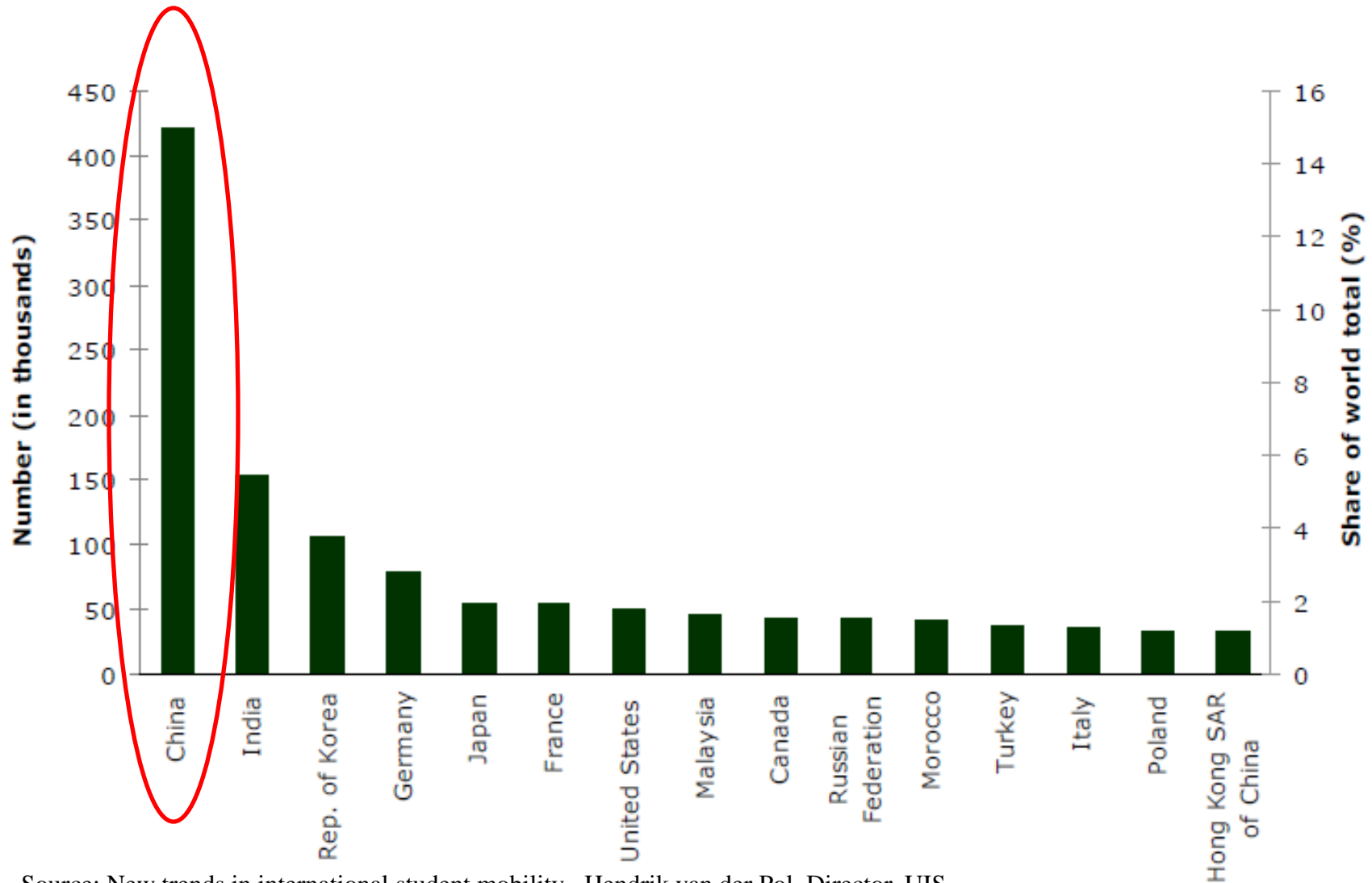
Conclusions

**OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION**

# Which are the major sending countries?



*15 countries together account for 44% of the world's mobile students*

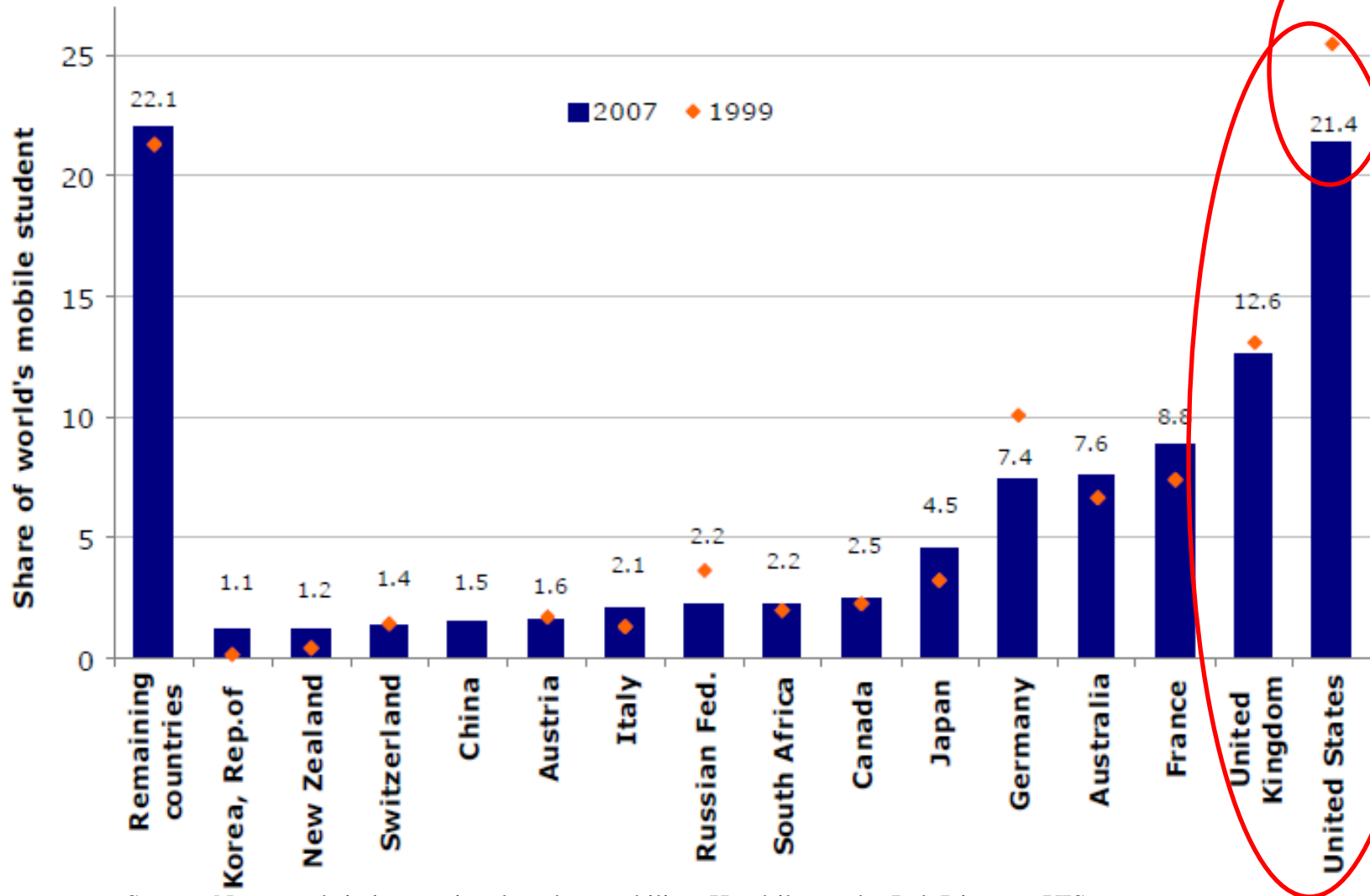




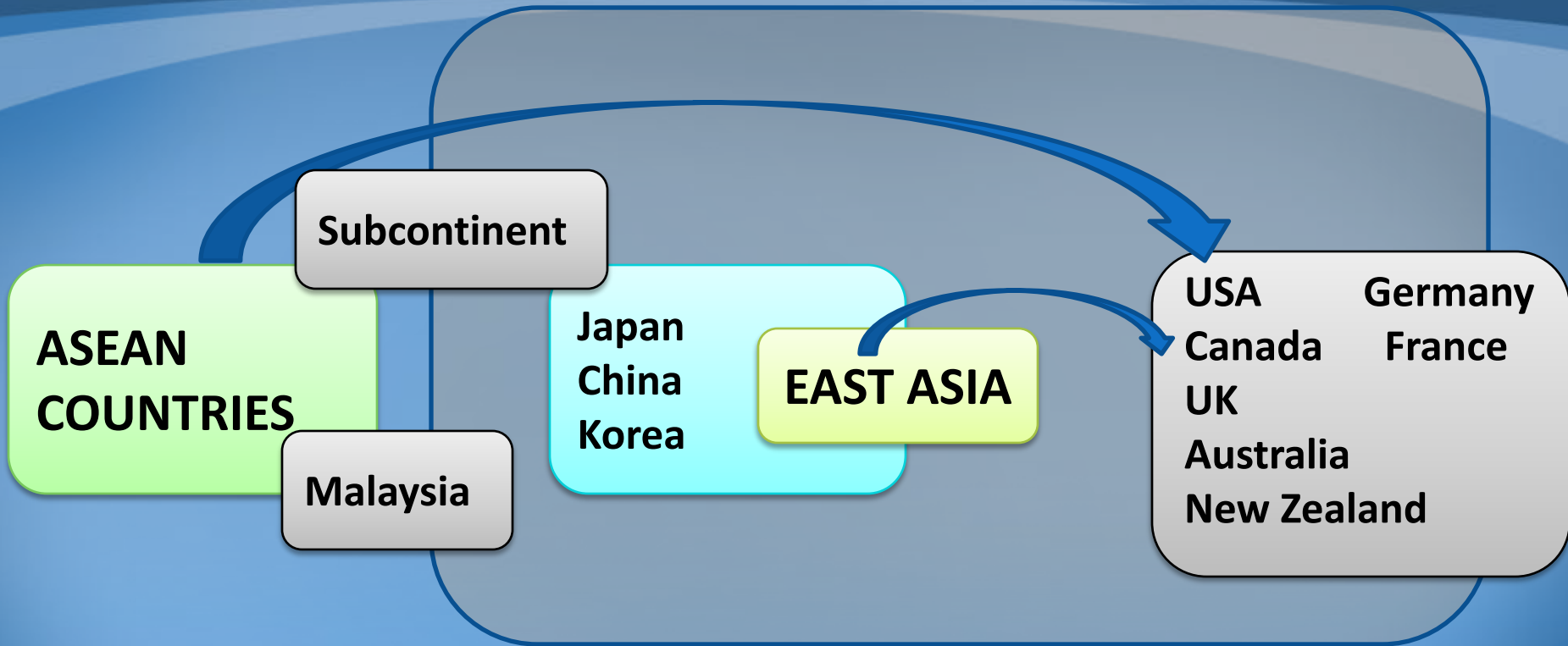
# Which are the major host countries?



*The top six countries hosted 62% of the world's mobile students in 2007, with some changes since 1999*

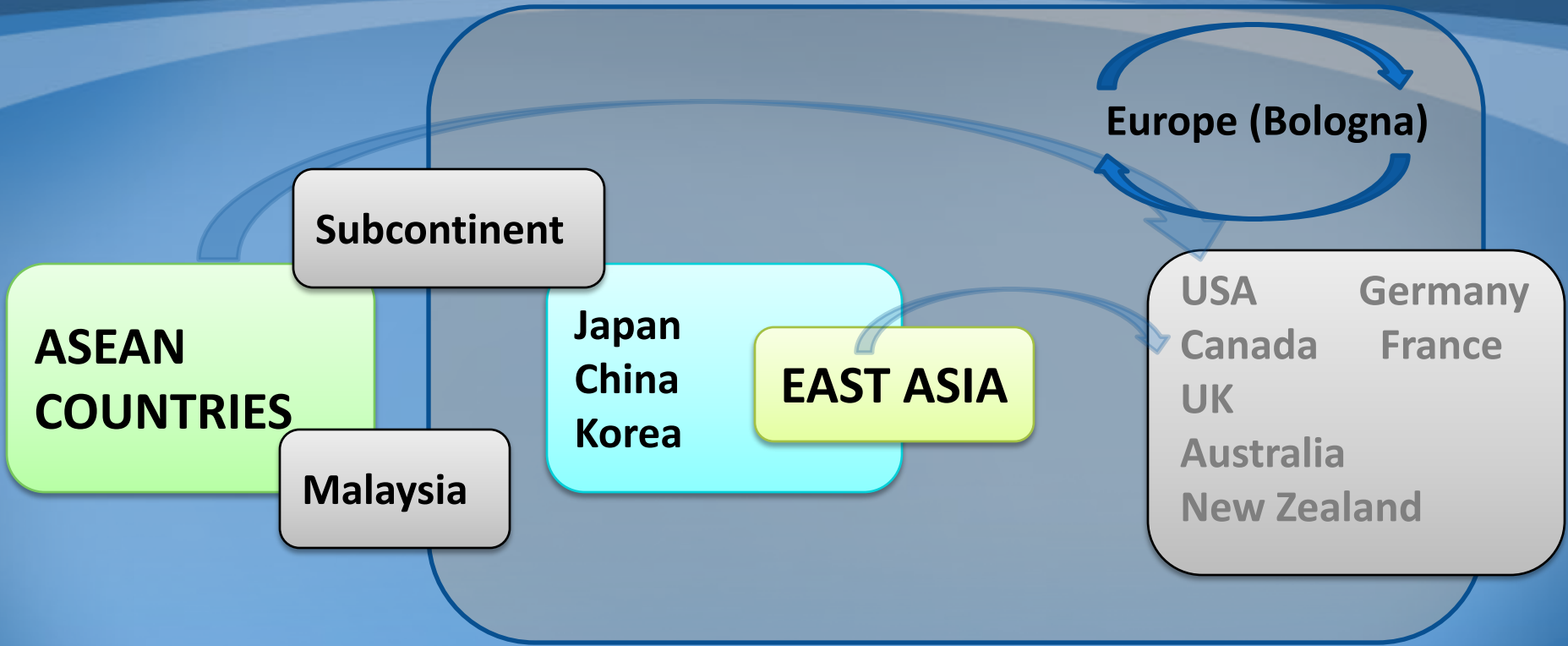


# International Student Mobility



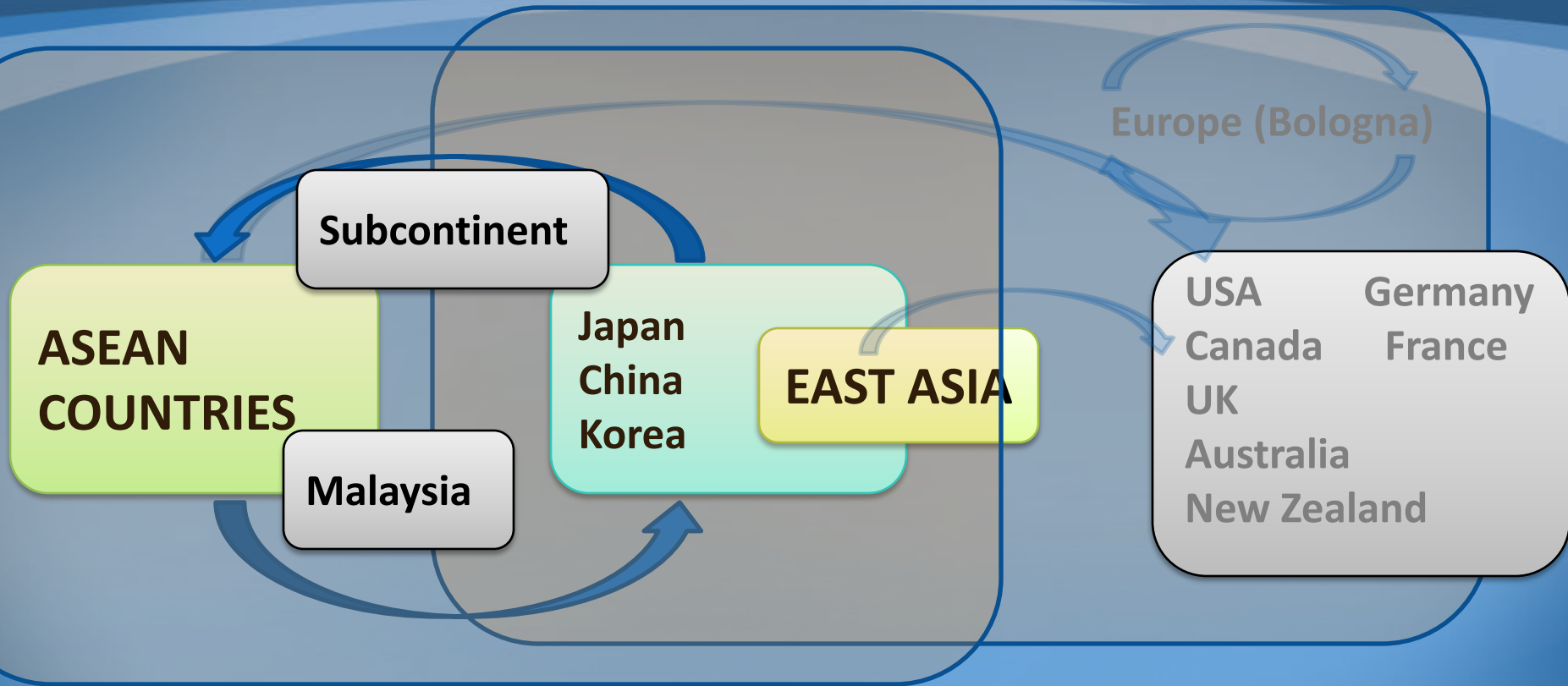
The traditional educational destinations, USA, UK etc.

# International Student Mobility



The new Global Regionalism (Don Olcott), EU

# International Student Mobility



The new Global Regionalism (Don Olcott), Asia

Malaysians → UK dropped from 18K (1997) to 11K (2006); → Egypt were 5.5K (2006)



World University Rankings 2009

# Rankings 09: Asia advances

8 October 2009

By [Phil Baty](#)

**America's superpower status is slipping as other countries' efforts to join the global elite begin to pay dividends. Phil Baty reports**

The US domination of the top ranks of global higher education is not as strong as



MONASH

Singapore's  
Science and Technology  
University



THE UNIVERSITY OF ASIA PACIFIC

Asia's Leading

Take PTE Academic!  
Accepted worldwide

All roles

All locations

Enter your keyw

# Crouching tigers ready to pounce

4 February 2010

By [Phil Baty](#)

**Yale boss welcomes 'audacious' ambitions of emerging Asian nations. Phil Baty reports**

The drive by China and other Asian nations to create world-class universities to rival the traditional Western elite has "every prospect of success".



MOE

Singapore's  
Science and Technology  
University



THE U

Asia's Leading



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Case study: Facts and figures

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# OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION

# Effect on education as business (from Vrontis et al, 2007)



University  
offerings

Customer  
needs

# Effect on education as business



Concentration on  
educational quality  
and outcomes

Concentration on  
university rankings?



# Effect on education as business



Universities  
choosing students

Students choosing  
universities

# BRAND





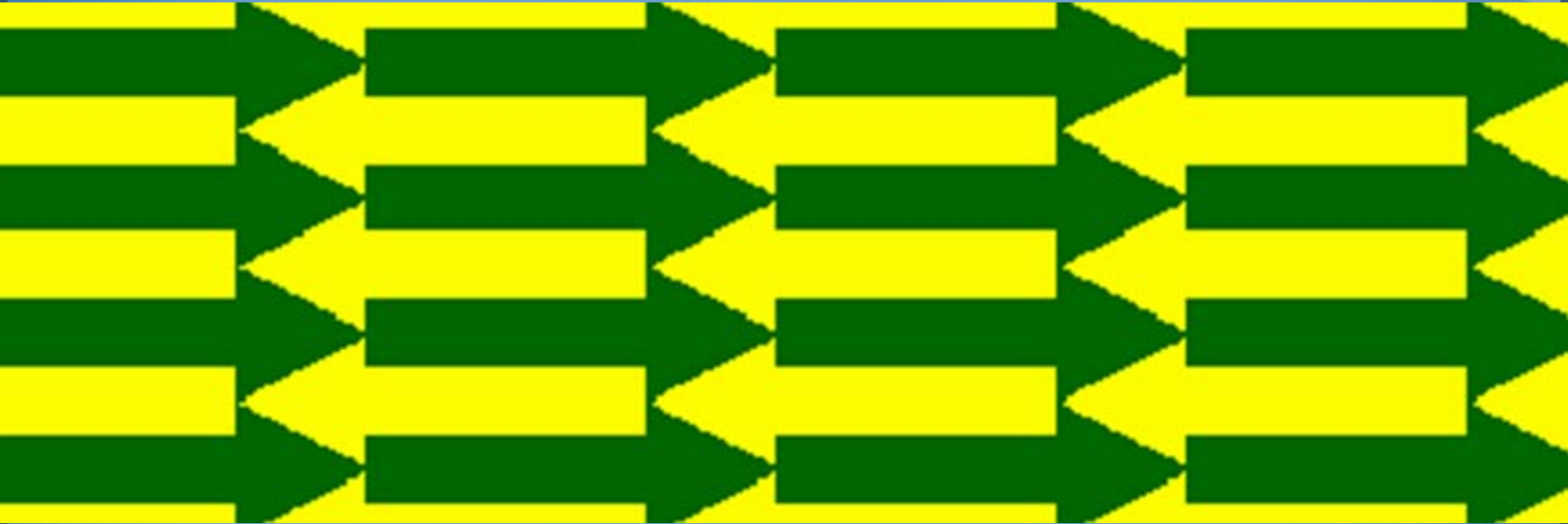
(Roberts, cited in Lewis, 2003, p.21)

“Branding is anathema to higher education: It implies central control and consistency, whereas universities have to be about freedom and action. Branding in business is about creating personality where none exists but there’s almost too much personality in universities.”

**BRANDING**



# Perceptual Hypotheses













UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



radio, produce media  
content, or learn to handle  
the news media effectively.

# UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark jacket, speaking into a professional microphone. She is positioned on the left side of the block. The background features large, green, stylized letters 'U' and 'B'.

Tradition matters.  
Ours is all about  
breaking new ground.

Rachel Burrows  
Head of Communications

# HKU EVOLUTION



**THE UNIVERSITY  
OF HONG KONG**



## CASE STUDY: HKU



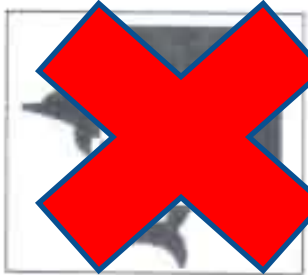
So that's all right then.

**SO.** Farewell then to the University of Southampton's jolly dolphin logo, which has been ditched after a £160,000 branding exercise.

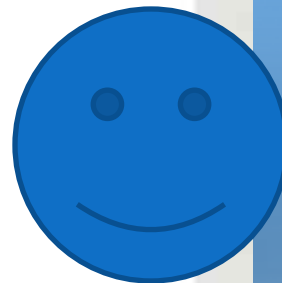
Announcing the change, the university said that "the attributes of friendliness and intelligence as represented by the dolphin are still core to the university's identity", but that the 15-year-old logo was too dated. So the obvious solution was to spend a fortune on the university's new dolphin logo.

From Private Eye, U.K. satirical magazine, 2008.

university buildings have already been removed.



Boring old logo





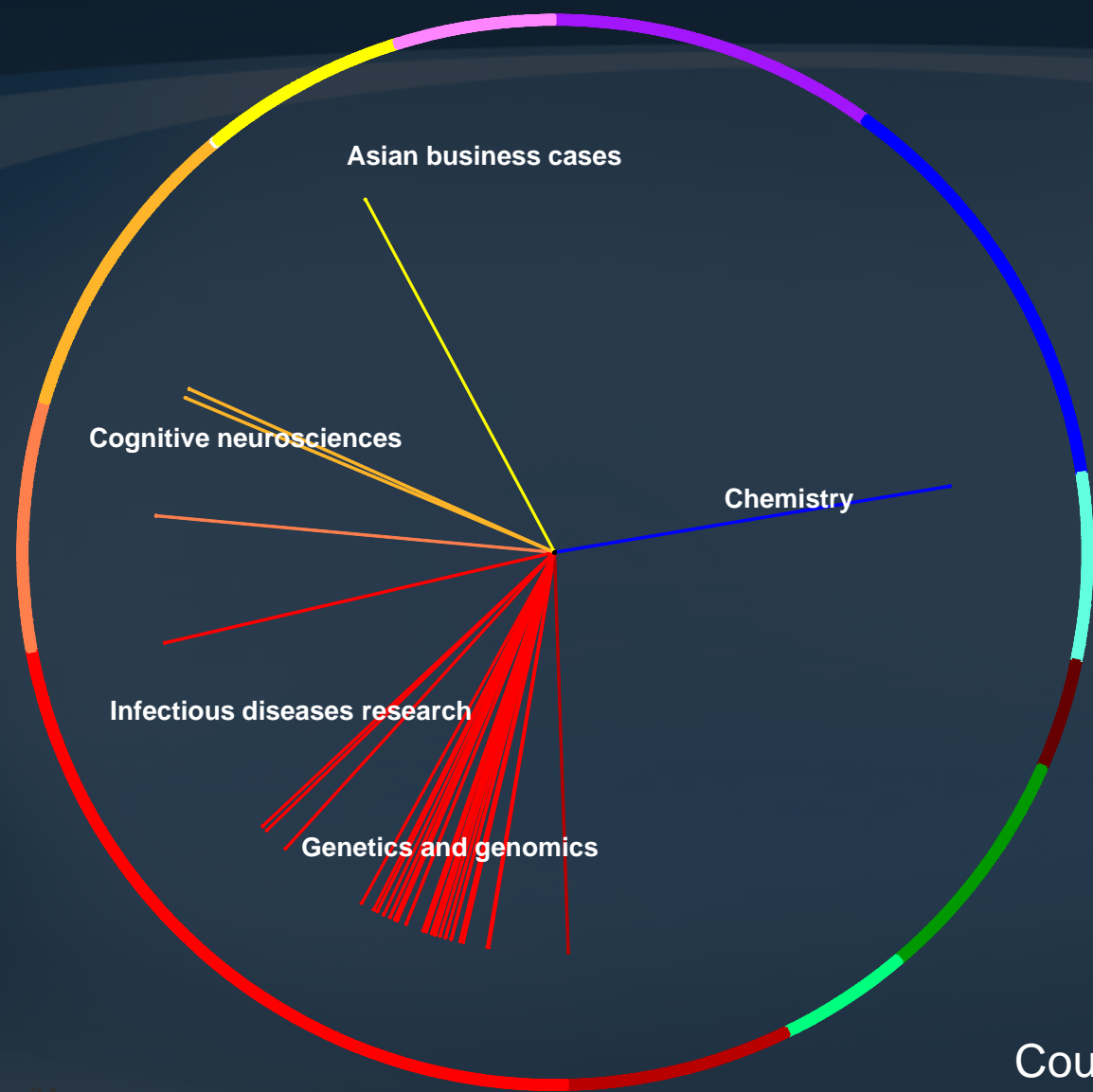
*“Institutional positioning” (Newby)*

**DIFFERENTIATION**



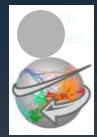


# DISTINCTIVE COMPETENCY #26



- █ Medical Specialties (27)
- █ Chemistry (1)
- Math & Physics
- █ Brain Research (2)
- █ Health Services (1)
- Biology
- █ Infectious Disease (1)
- █ Social Sciences (1)
- Engineering
- Computer Science
- Biotechnology
- Earth Sciences
- Humanities

Courtesy: Elsevier/Scopus



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**OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION**



# CASE STUDY: HKU



# Where are we?





- **1999 Started to recruit undergraduate students from ML (Mainland China)**
- **30 students initially**
- **Selected from about 100**





**Last three years, average of over 10,000  
undergraduate applications each year from  
Mainland China.**

**Probably ALL applicants could get into their  
top university in their province.**

**Up to 10 Zhuàng Yuan each year (15 yr old  
this year).**

**We only admit 280 (1 out of 35).**

**APPLICATIONS 2007-10**



**10 year  
strategic  
plan?**

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**OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION**



# An international strategy





HKU has its limitations to branding and marketing, namely fiercely independent units and thinkers

These are, academically, also its strengths!

No marketing department.

No advertising budget...

**CASE STUDY: HKU**





# Analysis: So, how did it come about?



- Market
- Differentiation
- Association
- Brand
- Communication

**CASE STUDY: HKU**





**Understand the China market....**

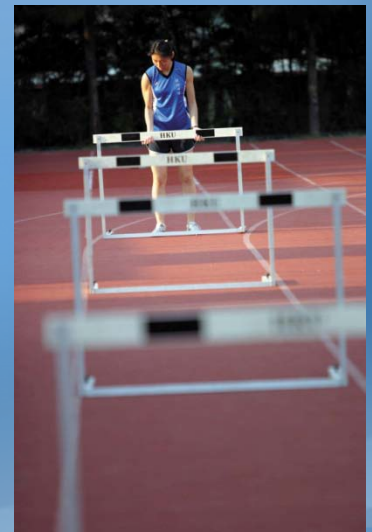
**What do the students (parents) want?**

**How do they value these desired components of HE?**

**Which ones are the most important (e.g. cost, reputation, English language?)**

**How can we add value to the student (parent)?**

**MARKET INTELLIGENCE**





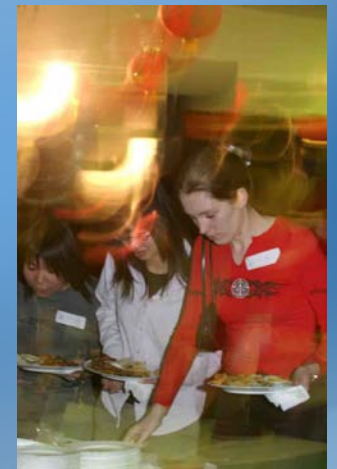
Want reputable university (well ranked?)

Want a university that commands respect amongst peers.

Want to open as many doors as possible (English, Western education, facilitating upward mobility)

Perhaps better described by *employability*.

# MARKET INTELLIGENCE





**The OBSERVATORY**  
on borderless higher education

# Report

## Understanding Student Recruitment in Mainland China: A Case Study

January 2010

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Isabella Y.S. Wong

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[www.obhe.ac.uk](http://www.obhe.ac.uk)





**Employability (INTO, 2009)**

**International experience (INTO 2009)**

**Language skills (INTO, 2009)**

**Personal safety (Chung et al, 2009; INTO, 2009, Li, 2008)**

**Perceived quality of teaching (Yang, 2009, INTO, 2009)**

**But these are surveys of Chinese students, not Mainland Chinese students!**

**MARKET INTELLIGENCE**



# Pull factors for parents

- Employment prospects on graduation
- Social and emotional support services
- Range of programmes available
- Migration possibilities

Bodycott, 2009

## MARKET INTELLIGENCE





# Pull factors for students

- Onsite accommodation
- Range of programmes available (the only common factor)
- English speaking environment
- Language and academic support services
- Facilities, buildings and grounds

Bodycott, 2009

## MARKET INTELLIGENCE



# Reputations

- **Reputations in China determined by:**
  - **Rankings (cases of India, Korea HS)**
  - **Admissions standards**
- **Advice of friends trusted (Bodycott, 2009)**
- **Mainland understood well**

## MARKET INTELLIGENCE







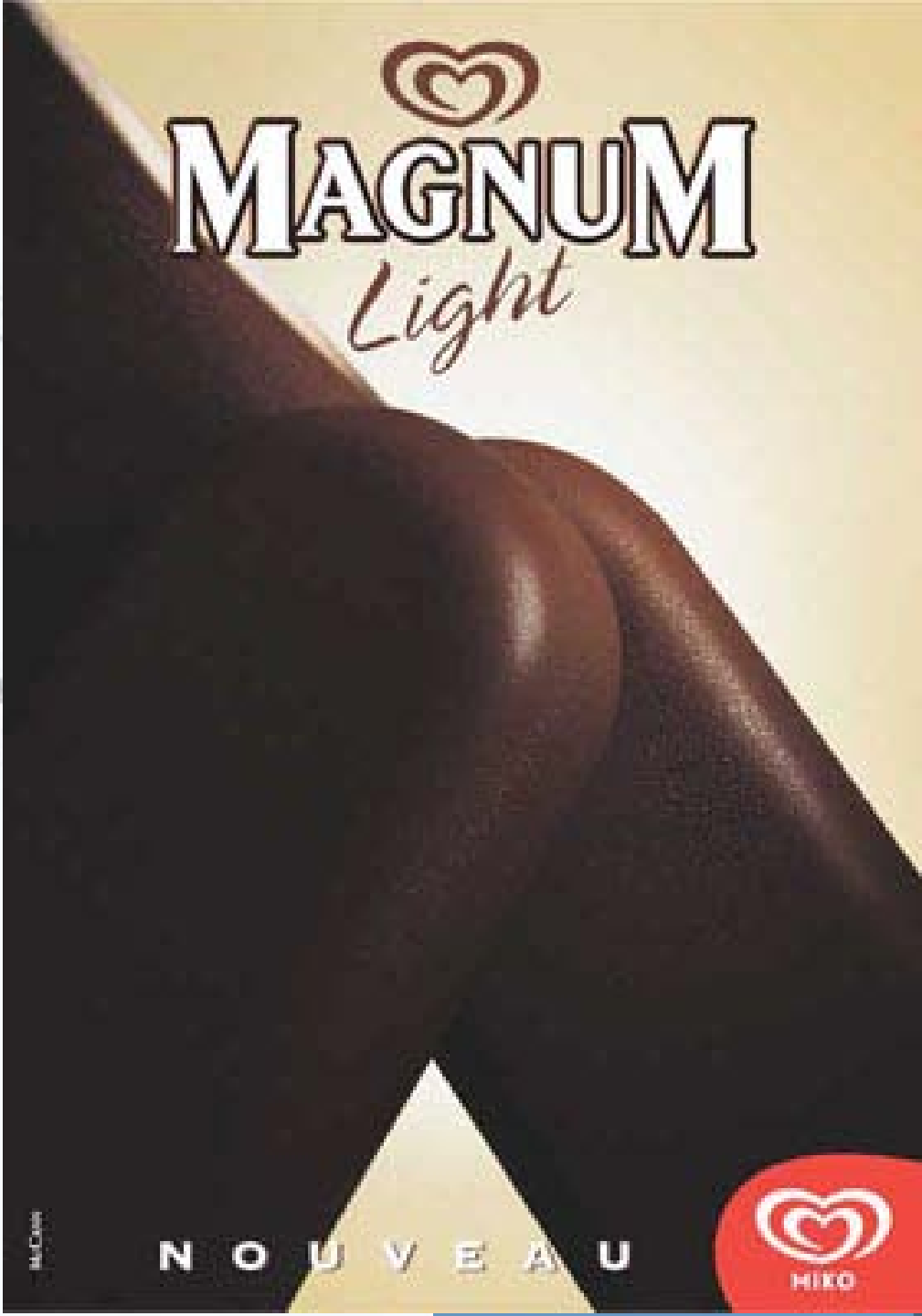
**Education and pedagogy.**  
**Difficult selection process.**  
**Personal.**  
**Chinese or international?**

**DIFFERENTIATION**





*Your feet*



  
**MAGNUM**  
*Light*

MCM

NOUVEAU





## Five reasons for choosing Hong Kong for study...

- Position in the world's ~~rankings~~ <sup>economy</sup>
- ~~Chinese~~ <sup>Chinese</sup> language and culture
- Safety, law and order
- Exciting, vibrant city
- ~~Gateway to rest of world~~ <sup>Gateway to China</sup>

Travel hub for S.E. Asian holidays





**Lack of visibility → initially partner with only the top ML universities. Value their educational system.**

**(The stakeholders use their local knowledge, not the university's characteristics and context to understand the relative values of the university.)**

**ASSOCIATION**







# Brand...summary

- **International university in China, comprising:**
  - Knowledge versus competencies
  - Pedagogy
  - Selection procedures aligned to that pedagogy
  - High admissions standards
  - Easy to move to US p/g study
  - English language
  - East meets West city and institution
  - Exchanges





# Recruitment is not about recruitment!

Promote the brand, minimize recruitment. Talks hardly mention admission or admissions procedures. Meeting of Minds...talks about HKU research. Listeners may or may not have the opportunity of applying.

**BRAND**





## Increase desirability

Focus on high admissions standards

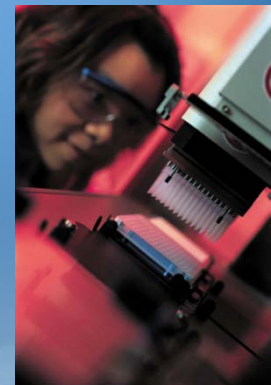
Quality not numbers (just 30 allowed to interview initially).

Selection ratios, not admissions.

Set of admissions tests, including interviews.

Aligns with educational philosophy. Give students full opportunities to show their worth.

Selection itself have predictive validity? Also about perception.



# BRAND



# Personal approaches

Always senior professors, NEVER agents  
(respect the students)

5000 interviews in 3 days.

Understand personal issues and liaise  
personally. Even in letter of rejection (very  
important for Chinese culture, loss of face  
etc.).

Counselling.

First time students in China have had a  
choice of universities.

# BRAND/COMMUNICATION



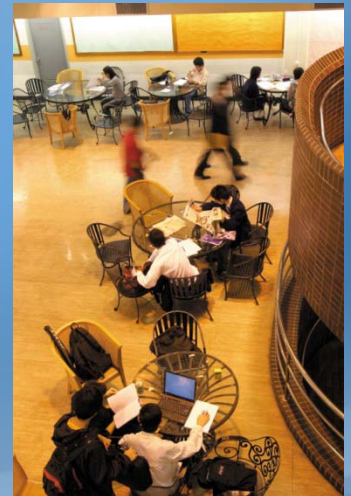




Partners help communication...the market's own recognition (partner school principals, partner universities – later supplemented by student ambassadors and then graduates).

“Reputation defined by the unsolicited opinions of respected and trusted third parties” (Louise Simpson, 2010)

**COMMUNICATION**





Media issues (selection system appropriate?  
rejection of Zhuàng Yuan student in 1999 --  
aligned with educational philosophy;  
scholarships buy students). Debates very  
valuable, get our principles across.

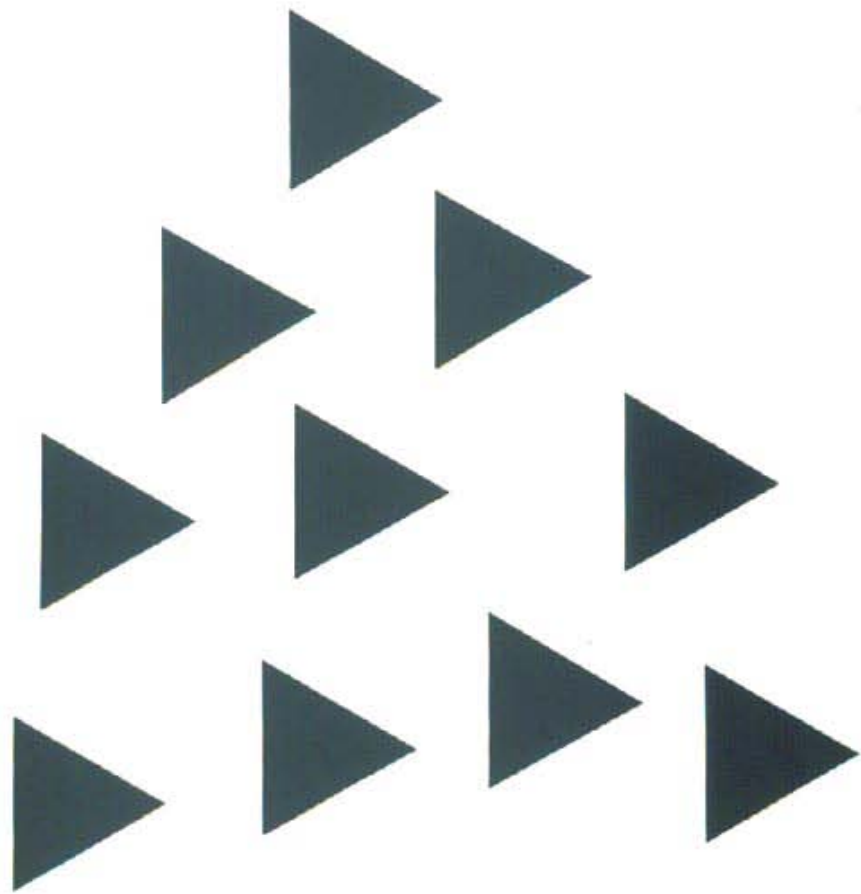


**COMMUNICATION**

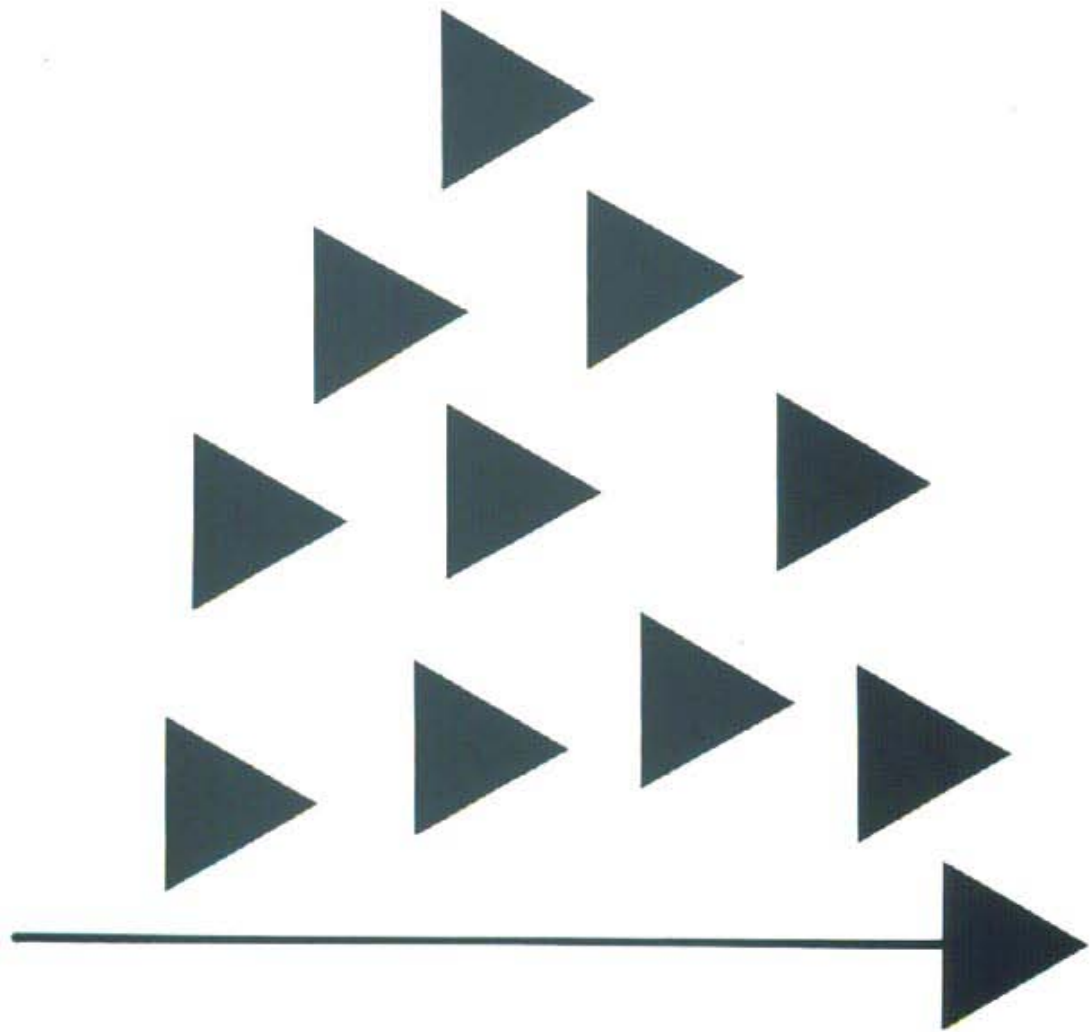


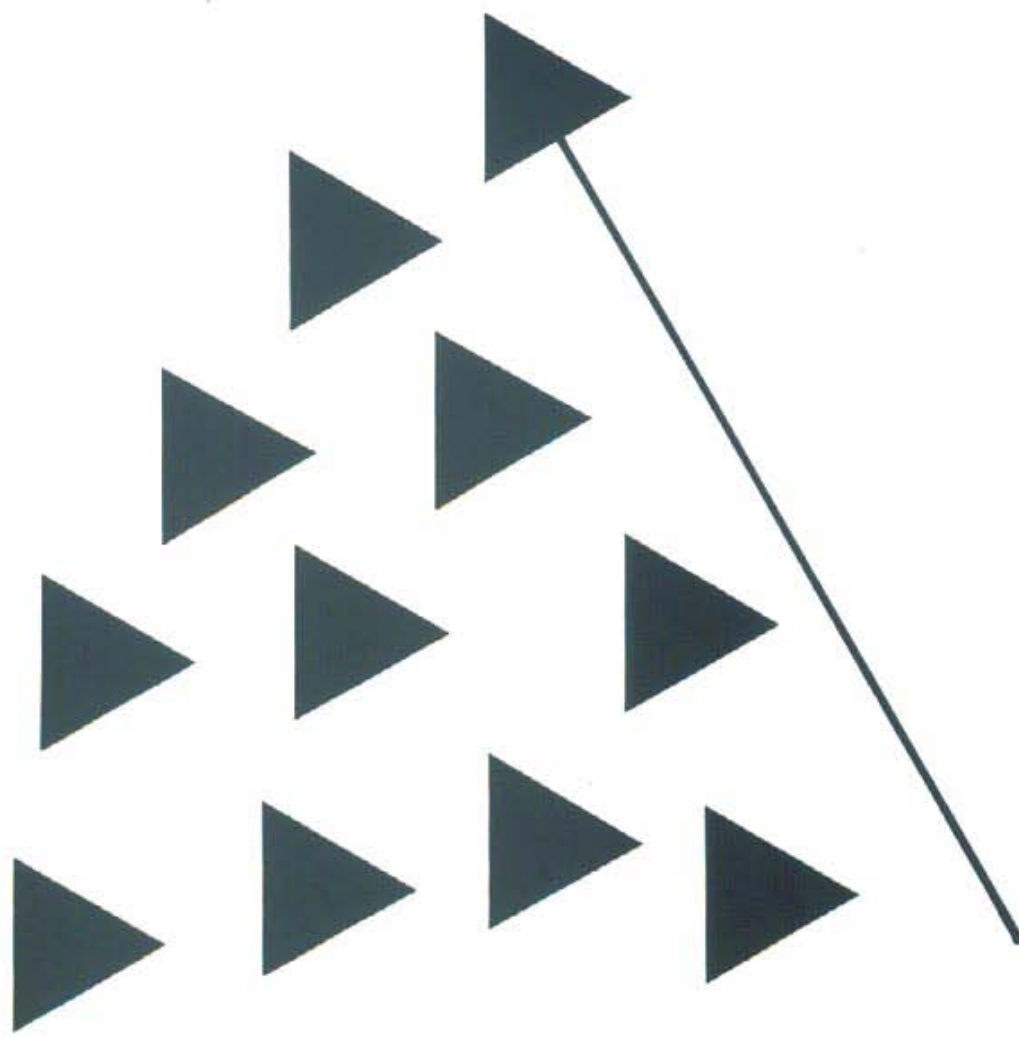
# Painting by numbers?

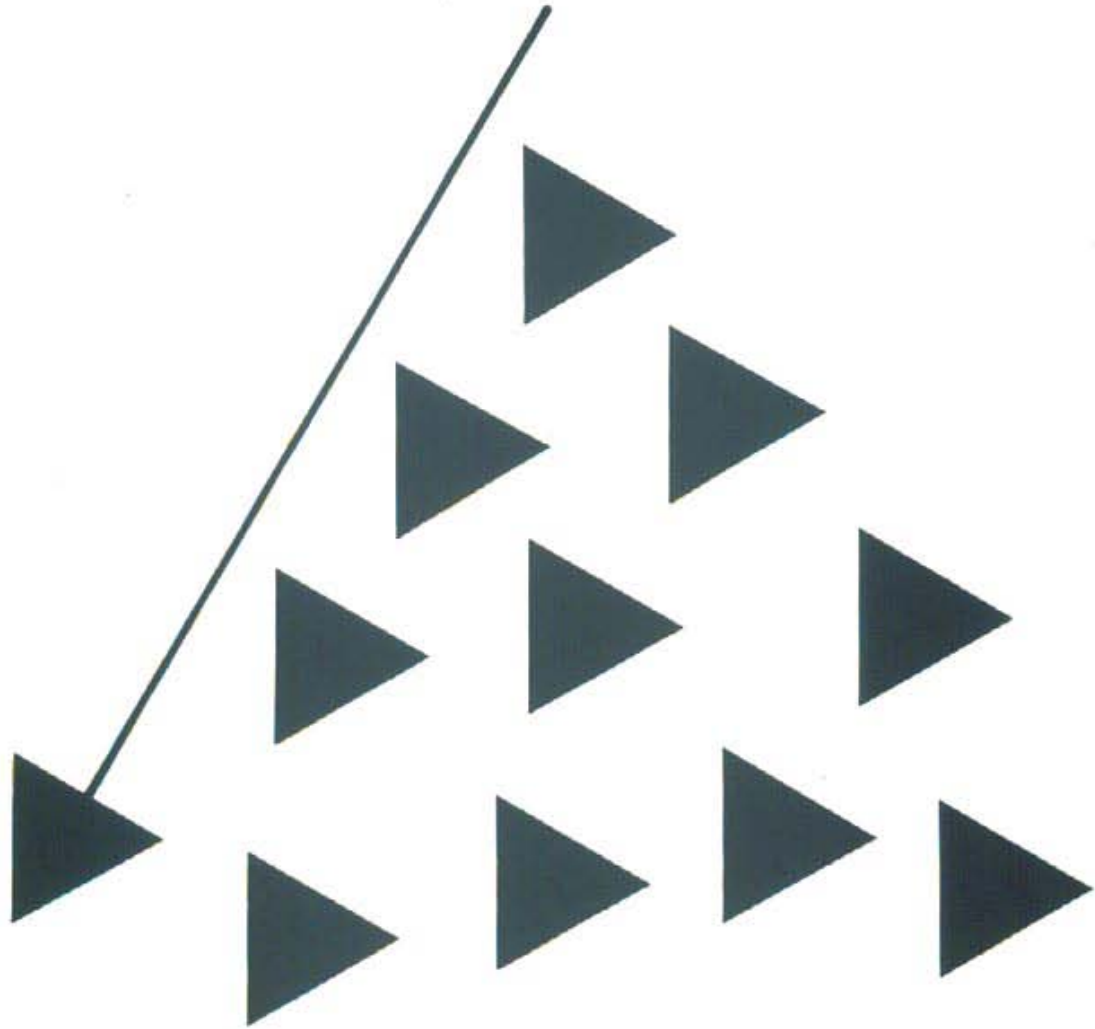


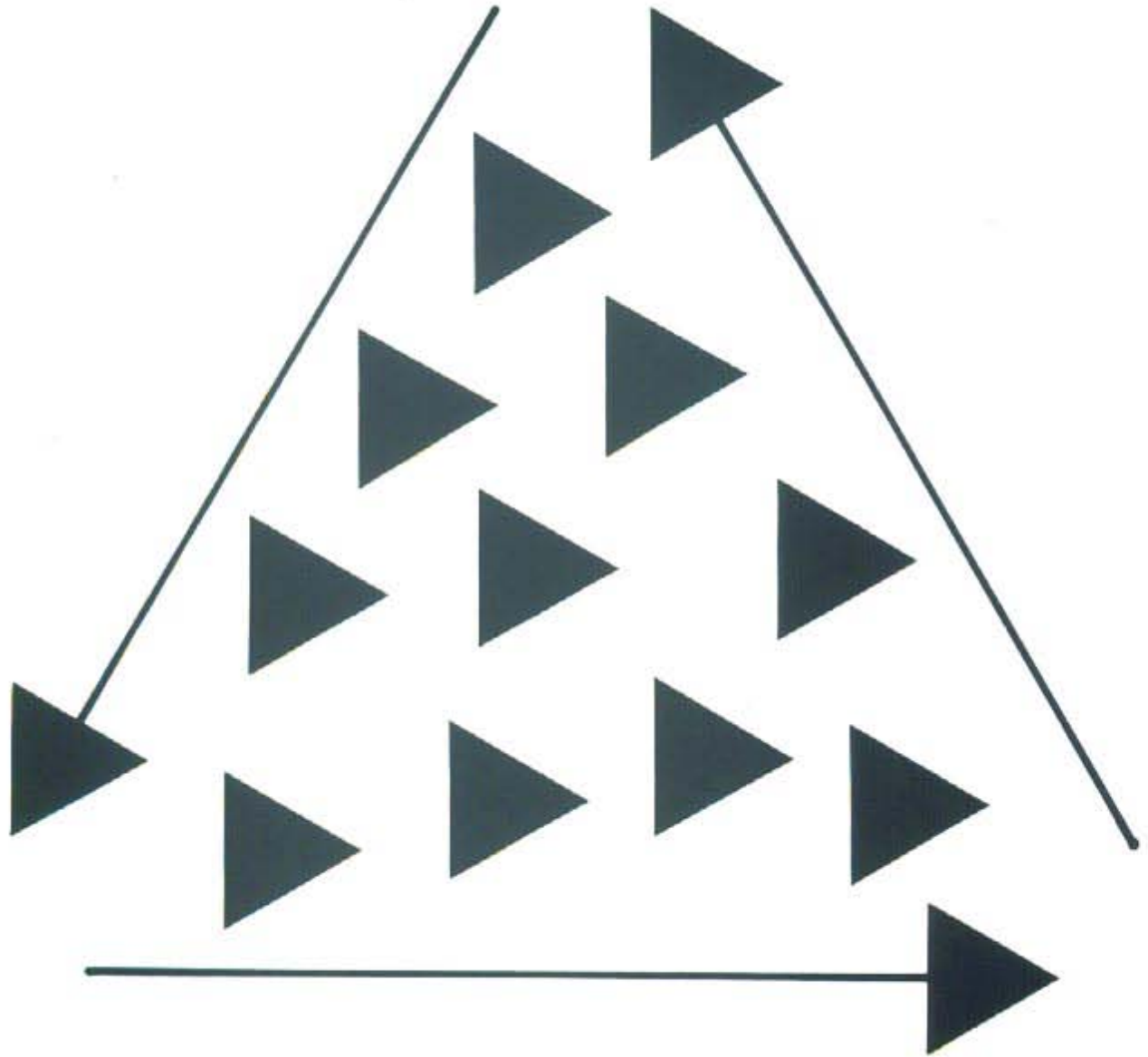




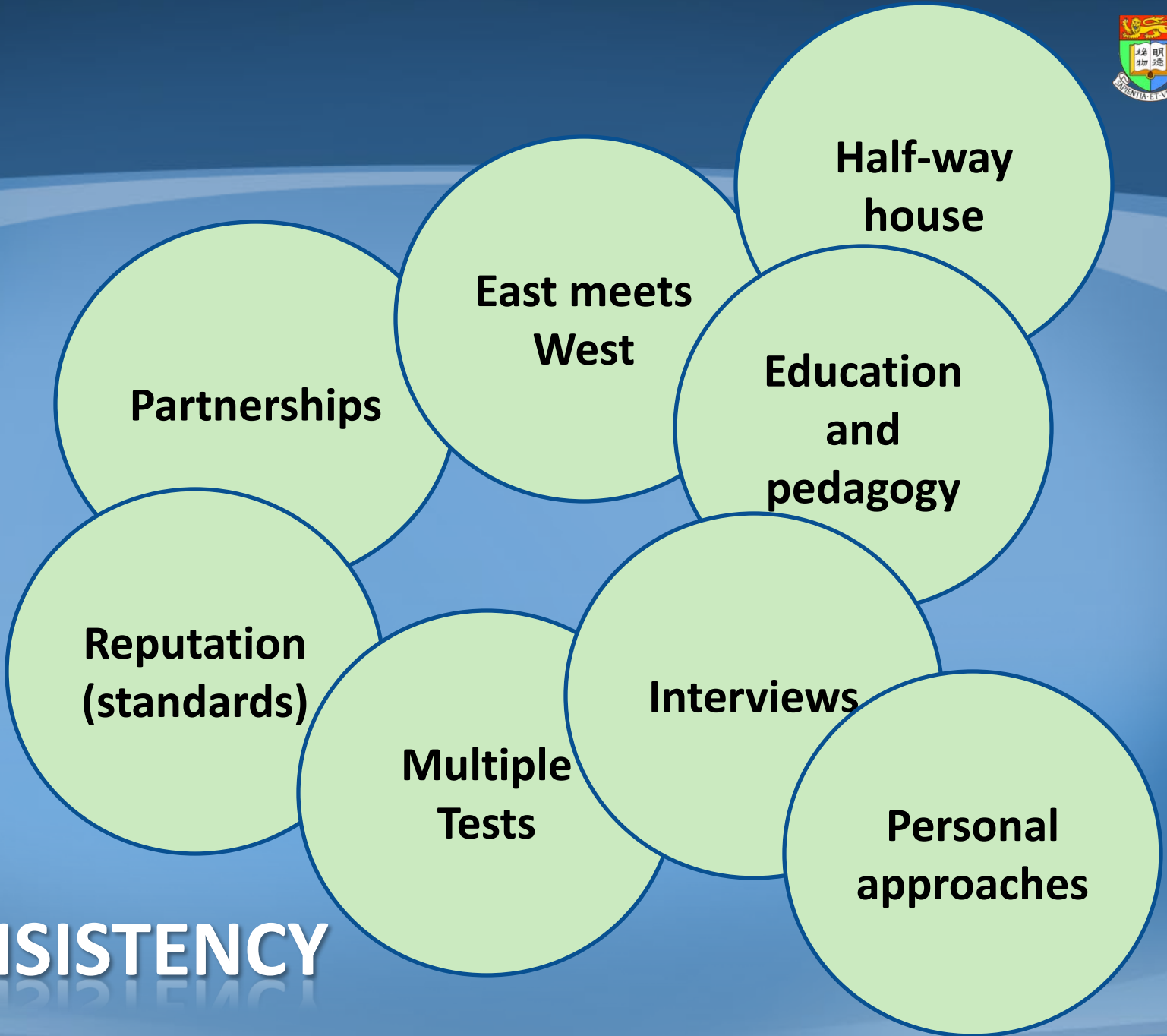




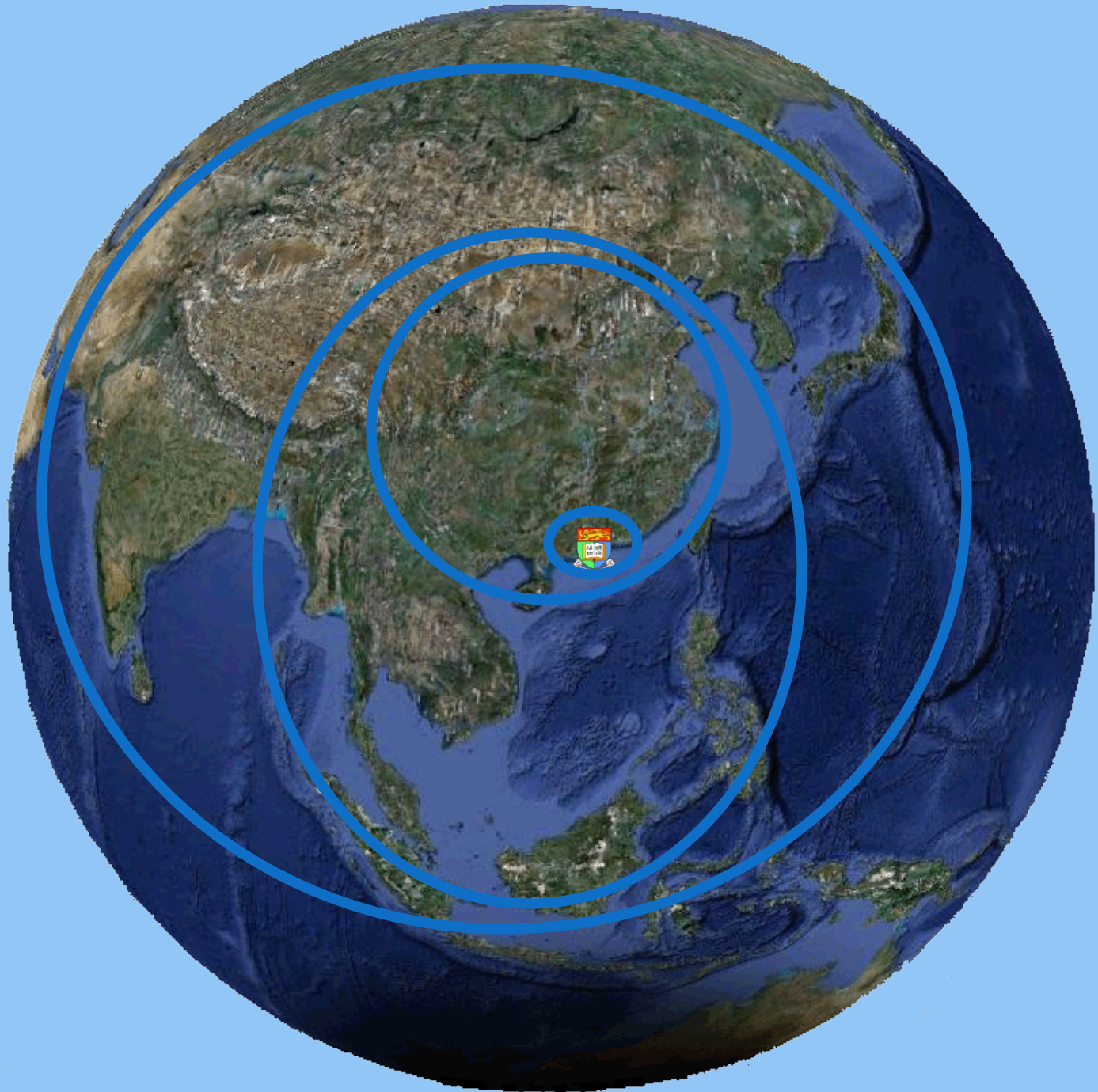


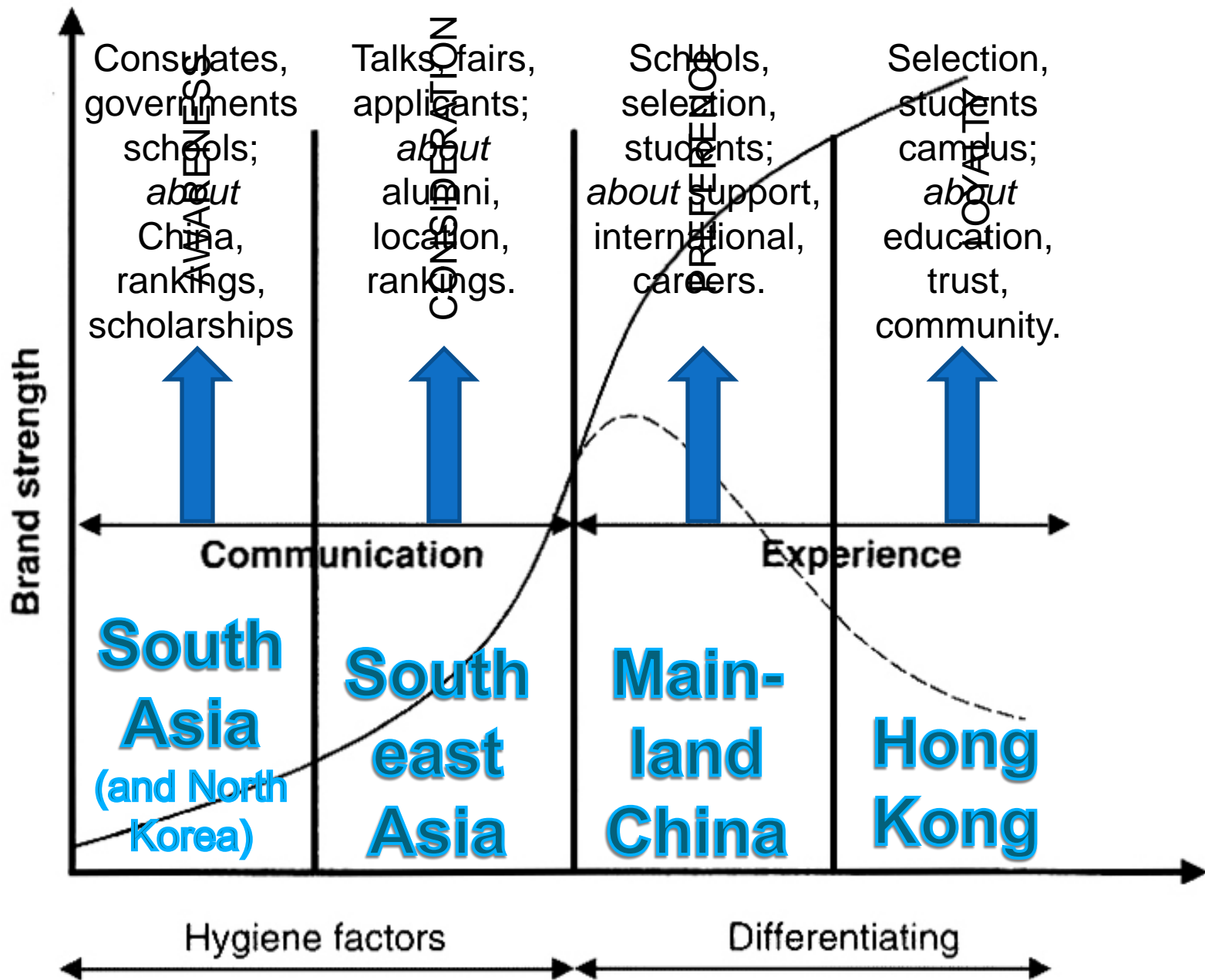






**CONSISTENCY**





**Figure 2.1** Brand strength model

(from Ind, 2007, Living the Brand)



# One plan no longer sufficient



Involves all levels of the organization (development and practice)







# Marketing and strategic planning

- Both shape mission and vision, and are shaped by them
- Both utilize similar information for decision making
- Both have communication of vision, mission, and values to constituents as outputs

(From Hayes, 2007)

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**OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION**

# Brand is a promise

Deliver → positive  
feedback → better

Reputation is a rare commodity.  
The losers will outnumber the winners.  
Success breeds success and failure breeds  
failure. (Frank)

of the consumer →  
reputational risk



# Thank you!



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Isabella Wong  
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