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Interpreting students' perceptions of interpreter status, market order, and educational support and their commitment to the profession: a survey in China

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Abstract

Since the rise of a sociological turn in translation studies, industry insiders' perceptions of the translation and interpreting profession have received much attention. So far, interpreting students' perceptions of and commitment to the interpreting profession is yet to be explored. This paper aims at investigating interpreting students' perceptions of the social status of the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, as well as their commitment to the profession. The relation of their perceptions and commitment to their demographic characteristics will also be examined. 983 interpreting students from 35 universities in China participated in the survey. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and chi-square tests were computed. The results indicate that the students' perceptions of interpreters' social status are not high, that interpreting is a semiprofession instead of a full-fledged one in China, and that there is a mismatch between what it takes to do the job and what is returned, making interpreting a less attractive career option. Students' perceptions are related to gender, university reputation, level of learning, interpreting experience, and accreditation status. The results suggest that there is no monopoly over the interpreting job in the interpreting market and that educational support is still to be improved; those from regular universities, beginning students, and those without interpreting experience tend to have a higher rating of market order and educational support than their counterparts. The results also reveal the students' low commitment to the interpreting profession and their reasons to join or reject it. Younger students, beginning students, those with interpreting experience, and those with certificates are more likely to choose interpreting as a profession than their counterparts.

Keywords: interpreting students; professional status; market order; educational support; commitment.

1. Introduction

With the rise of a sociological turn in translation studies, scholarly attention has been increasingly paid to such questions as industry insiders' perceptions of translators' and interpreters' professional status (Chan and Liu, 2013; Dam and Zethsen, 2012; Sela-Sheffy, 2016). Given the contradiction between translators' and interpreters' essential roles in cultural mediation and their insecure and semiprofessional status, research on this under-studied area has the potential not only to reveal problems in the professionalisation process of the industry but also to fill a gap in the sociological study of the translation and interpreting profession (Sela-Sheffy, 2016).

Taken together, the literature on translator and interpreter status has been focused on two directions. One is about perceptions of the translation profession. It has been found that the general public knows little about the translation profession and believes it has low status (Dam and Zethsen, 2008, 2013; Leech, 2005). Compared with other professions like medical doctors and lawyers, translators have a lower status and income (Dam and Zethsen, 2008; Leech, 2005). Translators hold that translation is a low-status profession and lacks social recognition (Bahk-Halberg, 2007; Chan and Liu, 2013; Dam and Zethsen, 2008, 2012; Katan, 2009). The professionalisation level of translation is low (Katan, 2009; Kang, 2018) and varies from country to country (Tyulenev, Zheng, and Johnson, 2017).

Another line of research concerns perceptions of the interpreting profession. According to the current literature, interpreters are generally satisfied with their job (Setton and Guo, 2009). They believe they enjoy a higher social status than translators (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Setton and Guo, 2009), but their status is not as high as that of more established professions (Gentile, 2013; Katan, 2009). They also hold that interpreting is important (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008; Zwischenberger, 2009) and requires skills and expertise (Dam and Zethsen, 2013), but it is not perceived as such by those outside the profession (Gentile, 2013; Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008) and it suffers from low social recognition and influence (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Katan, 2009). As for income, results vary. While conference interpreters think they are well paid (Dam and Zethsen, 2013), community interpreters are not satisfied with their income (Ozolins, 2004; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008).

To have an all-around view of the profession and put forward strategic decisions, data from all stakeholders is necessary, since most of the current studies have elicited data from translators, interpreters, their colleagues, employers, clients, and the public. However, students, as an important cohort among the stakeholders, have been rarely questioned, and their perceptions of the translation and interpreting profession are not clear. Students belong not only to the new workforce generation in the industry but also constitute the bulk of a well-educated workforce on which the prosperity of the translation and interpreting

profession depends. A better understanding is essential of students' perceptions of the profession, their views on market order and educational support, as well as their willingness to remain in the profession. The results may serve as a reference for associations, trainers, students, and other industry stakeholders to make strategic decisions concerning market regulation, career planning, and curriculum updating.

One exception that did involve students as the main data source was the work of Ruokonen (2016), who investigated Finland's translation students' perceptions of the profession and their willingness to work as translators after graduation. It was found that the students' perceptions are very similar to those of translators; they believe that translation is a low-status profession but demanding in expertise, and about one-third of them are committed to the translation profession. Although Leech (2005) and Katan (2009) included students in their studies, the student participants in the former were not translation majors, while the latter primarily focused on professional translators and interpreters. So far, interpreting students' perceptions of and commitment to the interpreting profession are yet to be explored.

Against such a background, this article aims at investigating interpreting students' perceptions of the social status of the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, as well as their commitment to the profession. The relation of their perceptions and commitment to their demographic characteristics will also be examined.

2. Parameters related to the status of the interpreting profession

Students' perceptions will be approached in relation to eight parameters. The first five include remuneration, education/expertise, visibility, power/influence, and value to society (Dam, 2015). They reflect the social position that the occupation (interpreting) affords its members (interpreters) on a prestige scale (Dam, 2015). Remuneration reflects professional standing and is one of the eight criteria of a profession (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). For this reason, previous studies have all included remuneration as a parameter (see Dam and Zethsen, 2009, 2010, 2013; Gentile, 2013; Katan, 2009; Ozolins, 2004; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008; Ruokonen, 2016). The second parameter is education/expertise. According to Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008), possession of a distinctive knowledge base and professional education regulated by members of the profession are both conditions of a real profession. Professionals and students also believe that translation and interpreting are professions because they require education and expertise (Dam and Zethsen, 2011, 2013; Katan, 2009), though it is not perceived as such by those outside the profession (Gentile, 2013; Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008). The next indicator is the general visibility of translators and interpreters, or the degree of having a profile in society. It is important because it is positively correlated to status (Dam and Zethsen, 2009) and brings such benefits to the profession as recognition and respect (Leech, 2005). Power/influence

is also one of the criteria of a profession (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). The literature indicates that practitioners think they have limited influence on their surroundings and others (Dam and Zethsen, 2011, 2012, 2013). In the current study, power/influence refers to interpreters' influence on society and their control over their work. Value to society is an important parameter because it represents the symbolic capital, usefulness, or importance of a profession (Dam and Zethsen, 2013). For this reason, Zwischenberger (2009) considers the value or importance of interpreting to society as an indicator of respondents' perceptions of the interpreting profession.

Market order and educational support were also included as parameters because of their roles as either facilitators or barriers in the process of professionalisation. According to Tseng (1992), professionalisation is closely associated with the market, and an orderly market is one feature of a full-fledged profession. The first phase of professionalisation is market disorder, when practitioners cannot keep outsiders without certified status and specialised education from entering the market and there is fierce competition. Therefore, it is necessary to consider market order when examining professional status. Educational support is also closely related to professional status. For one thing, the link between education and professional status is weak because there is no guarantee that interpreters with institutional training can get an edge on the competition (Wadensjö, 2011). For another, due to differences in admission criteria, training duration, instructor quality, curricula, and graduation standards, training institutes face pressure to compete for students and thus oversupply the market with more practitioners than needed (Tseng, 1992). This leads to increased competition and unprofessional behaviour and is not good for professionalisation. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether education provides support for trainees.

The last parameter was students' commitment to the profession. Similar to Ruokonen (2016), the participants in the current study are students. As a result, their commitment reflects whether interpreting is an attractive profession and is related to the future of the profession. Based on the literature on students' motivations (Lee, 2017; Lin, 2013; Ruokonen, 2016), it is relevant to explore their confidence in securing an interpreting job, their plans to work or not to work as interpreters, and the reasons behind these.

3. Research questions

Eight research questions drove the current study. The first three are centred on students' perceptions of interpreter's social status:

RQ 1: *What are the students' overall perceptions of interpreters' social status?*

RQ 2: *What are the students' perceptions of the interpreting profession in terms of remuneration, education/expertise, visibility, power/influence, and value to society?*

RQ 3: *Are there any relationships between students' perceptions of the interpreting profession and their demographic characteristics?*

Questions four and five are related to students' perceptions of factors influencing market entry, namely market order and educational support:

RQ 4: *How do student interpreters perceive market order and educational support?*

RQ 5: *Are there any relationships between students' perceptions of market order and educational support and their demographic characteristics?*

Questions six to eight are related to students' commitment to the interpreting profession:

RQ 6: *Are students confident about entering the interpreting profession, and what other working fields do students plan to enter after graduation?*

RQ 7: *Why are students joining or rejecting the interpreting profession?*

RQ 8: *Are their career choices related to students' demographic characteristics?*

4. Methodology

4.1. Questionnaire development

To address the research questions, an online questionnaire was developed. To ensure content validity, the construction of the questionnaire was based on previous studies on the status of the translation or interpreting profession (see Table 1). The authors also referred to literature on the status of the teaching and nursing professions to verify whether other aspects could be added (Al-Kandari and Lew, 2005; Bamford, 2012; Haresaku et al., 2018; Kiziltepe, 2015; Lo et al., 2017; Htang, 2019; Wang, 2004).

The questionnaire was written in Chinese, the mother tongue of the majority of the participants. It started with a short briefing. Participants were informed of the purpose of the survey, its potential use, its voluntary nature, as well as the duration required for completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. It was made clear that interpreting in the survey refers to simultaneous or consecutive interpreting services at international events or conferences organised by governments, NGOs, and enterprises of various kinds, rather than those in community settings.

The questionnaire fell into four sections. The first section consisted of forced-choice answers about participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, affiliation, discipline of undergraduate education, mother tongue, grade (first, second, or third year), interpreting experience, and status of certification.

TABLE 1

Questionnaire framework

PARAMETERS	DEFINITION	ITEMS
I. Demographic information	Demographic information of the participants	Those include age, affiliation, gender, fields of undergraduate study, mother tongue, grade (first-year or second- and third-year), interpreting experience, and status of certification.
II. Students' perceptions of the occupational status of interpreters (Dam, 2015; Dam and Zethsen, 2009, 2010, 2013; Gentile, 2013; Katan, 2009; Liu, 2011; Ruokonen, 2016; Setton and Guo, 2009)	Overall judgment	A multiple-choice question on interpreters' social standing compared with other more established professions, and a 1 to 7 Likert scale item on the overall judgment of the social status of interpreters.
	Remuneration (income levels)	Three 1 to 7 Likert scale items, regarding the income level, income stability, and chances of promotion.
	Education/expertise (level of education and degree of expertise and knowledge required)	Three 1 to 7 Likert scale items, regarding the professional skills, overall qualities and specialised training required on the part of interpreters.
	Visibility (degree of interpreters' being known to the public)	Two 1 to 7 Likert scale items, on the profile of the profession with the public and chances of coverage in mass media.
	Power/influence (level of influence on society)	Two 1 to 7 Likert scale items, regarding the power of interpreters over society and their work.
	Value to society (importance of interpreting work to society)	Two 1 to 7 Likert scale items, concerning whether the profession is a respected one and if it makes significant contributions to society.
III. Students' perceptions of factors influencing market entry (Ozolins, 2004; Tseng, 1992; Wadensjö, 2011; Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008)	Market order	Three 1 to 7 Likert scale items regarding chances of obtaining a job as an interpreter and chances of entering the market without relevant degrees and certificates in interpreting.
	Educational support	Three 1 to 7 Likert scale items concerning the uniformity of the curriculum of different programmes, internship opportunities, and effect of curriculum on market preparedness.
IV. Commitment (Lee, 2017; Lin, 2013; Ruokonen, 2016)	Students' confidence in the profession and their reasons to choose to interpret or not to interpret after graduation	Two yes-no questions to ask if they have ever doubted their choice of interpreting as their major and if they want to choose interpreting as their career after graduation, and three multiple-choice questions on why they choose to interpret or not to interpret and which fields they would enter after graduation.

The second section contained questions about students' perceptions of the occupational status of interpreters, and was designed based on the current literature (Dam, 2015; Dam and Zethsen, 2009, 2010, 2013; Gentile, 2013; Katan, 2009; Liu, 2011; Ruokonen, 2016; Setton and Guo, 2009). This section can be further divided into six parts. Part one concerned participants' general judgment of the profession. It consisted of a multiple-choice question where participants were asked to pick from a list of more established professions those that enjoy higher social standing than interpreting does, and a selected-response item where participants respond to a general statement of the social status of interpreters on a 1 to 7 Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Parts two to five consisted of 12 items, all requiring participants to make response options on a 1 to 7 Likert scale. Part two, which was about remuneration, contained three items regarding income level, income stability, and chances of promotion. The three items in part three were concerned with education/expertise: specifically, professional skills, overall qualities, and specialised training required on the part of interpreters. Part four was about visibility. In this part, participants responded to two items on how well-known the profession was to the public and the chance of coverage in mass media. In part five, which was about power/influence, participants rated two items on the powers of interpreters within society, and regarding their work. In the last part, concerning the perceived value to society, participants responded regarding two statements relating to respect of the interpreting profession and the contributions it makes to society.

Section three examined participants' perceptions of two factors that influence market entry (Ozolins, 2004; Tseng, 1992; Wadensjö, 2011; Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008)—namely, market order and educational support. Concerning each one, three 1 to 7 Likert scale items were provided for participants to respond to. The three items concerning market order were related to the availability of job opportunities and possibilities of entering the market without specialised degrees and certificates in interpreting. The three items relating to educational support were concerned with the uniformity of the curriculum of different programmes, availability of internship opportunities, and the effect of the curriculum on students' market preparedness.

The focus of section four was commitment (Lee, 2017; Lin, 2013; Ruokonen, 2016). This section began with two yes-no questions about whether participants ever doubted their choice of interpreting as their major and if they would choose interpreting as their career after graduation. What followed were three multiple-choice questions, two on factors that impacted their decisions to interpret or not to interpret, and one on career fields in which they planned to establish themselves after graduation.

4.2. Pilot test

The questionnaire draft was reviewed by the authors to check if the wording was clear and the presentation was respondent-friendly. Then it was piloted with a convenience sample of six volunteers. They were invited to complete the survey without the imposition of a

time limit and provide feedback on the wording and content of the items. As a result, the wording of two items was improved. No items were deleted or added because all items were considered necessary to address the research questions, and the participants were able to complete the survey without difficulty. They were also invited to time how long it took them to complete the survey. The time ranged from 295 to 720 seconds. The estimated time for respondents to complete the survey was added to the first section. The pilot data gathered were then deleted before the questionnaire was distributed among the target population.

4.3. Setting and sampling

The survey was conducted among students in the interpreting tracks of the Master for Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programmes in mainland China. Although interpreter training started in the 1970s in China, the first group of 15 MTI programmes was officially approved by the Ministry of Education in 2007. The MTI programmes are different from traditional translation programmes within Linguistics because the former aim at producing qualified translators and interpreters for industry, while the latter are theory-oriented. According to the China National Committee for Translation and Interpreting Education, 255 MTI programs have been established in 255 universities since 2007. Of those programmes, 90 offer interpreting tracks.

To ensure that the sample was representative of the whole population, the sampling procedure recommended by Dörnyei (2003: 73), stratified random sampling, was used. The target programmes were stratified into groups based on four variables: 1) reputation and history, 2) type of host university, 3) period of study, and 4) geographical location.

Thirty-five programmes were selected, including the most reputable and well-established programmes, as well as new ones. The 90 interpreting programmes fall into two strata. The first stratum consists of 32 programmes established in 2007 and 2008. They are within top universities (in terms of overall ranking as well as standing within the translation discipline), have more teachers with a background in the industry and enrol more students every year. The second stratum includes 58 interpreting programmes established between 2010 and 2018. Those are not as good as those in the first stratum in terms of the reputation of the university, faculty quality, and enrollment size. Twenty programmes were selected from the first stratum. Among them, two are CIUTI members and one is cooperating with the European Commission. Fifteen were selected from the second stratum.

The selected programmes varied in terms of the type of their host universities. Seventeen (selected out of 30) are comprehensive universities, six (selected out of 10) specialise in foreign languages, and twelve (selected out of 50) are within education, business, and economics, or science and technology. More programmes were selected from the first two cohorts because they admit more students every year and are more reputable and better-established. Those in the third cohort were so new that some had no graduates at the time of the current survey, and thus fewer were selected out of this stratum.

As for the period of study, the 35 selected universities also showed variation. Twenty-six run on a two-year track while nine do so on a three-year track. Since the majority of the programmes run on a two-year track, more two-year programmes were selected than three-year ones.

In terms of location, the programmes are located in 23 of the 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four municipalities within mainland China. Some regions were not represented either because there are no interpreting programmes in the area or because there was a temporary halt in student enrollment for the programme concerned.

4.4. Questionnaire administration and response rate

The questionnaire was distributed online between December 17, 2019, and January 3, 2020, to the participating programmes with the help of liaisons, who were teachers and students teaching or learning within the programmes concerned.

To increase the response rate, incentives (a chance to win books) were offered to those who completed the questionnaire. The incentives had no relation to how participants responded to the questions. At the end of the questionnaire, they were asked to enter their email addresses if they would like to enter the draw to win the e-books. The email addresses were not used to breach the anonymity of the participants.

The questionnaire reached approximately 1998 students (an estimated number based on the figure provided by the liaison within each programme). 1083 responses were received. The overall response rate was thus 54.2%.

4.5. Data processing

Measures were taken to identify and delete invalid responses. The survey was conducted in a low-consequence situation where being honest had no effect on the participants. Although participants who completed the survey had a chance of winning some e-books, it was made clear that the fulfilment of rewards had no relation to their response. Therefore, the issue of carelessness while responding needs to be borne in mind since some participants may have responded to the questions with a low level of commitment.

Following the proposals of Curran (2016: 14), the researchers used in concert response time (the time it takes for one to complete a survey) and long-string analysis (examination of the longest sequential string of identical responses) to detect invalid responses.

Seventeen responders who completed the questionnaire within 120 seconds were removed. Four students were invited to respond to the survey as quickly but as thoroughly as possible; the time range was between 134 and 251 seconds. Since the time for comprehensive completion of a survey varies from person to person, the researchers decided on a conservative cut score of 120 seconds as the minimum time, based on suggestions from the

literature (see Huang et al., 2012). For slow respondents, there is no relevant literature to rely on, and thus the researchers did not impose a cut score.

Thirty-eight responders were removed because of the existence of an unbroken sequence of identical responses. This is based on the assumption that some individuals may answer questions without taking time and effort by choosing the same options. Nineteen items in the questionnaire used a 1 to 7 Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. According to Curran (2016), respondents with a sequence of unbroken responses equal to or longer than half the length of the total scale can be considered to be careless or inattentive respondents. In the current research, the baseline of consistent sequences of identical responses was nine. In other words, a participant was removed if he or she responded to the 19 items with nine or more sequential strings of identical options. Since participants' lack of motivation is manifested in different ways, the detection of invalid responses is very complex. Though it is extremely hard to identify all cases of careless responders, as Curran (2016) does, the researchers believe that the measures mentioned above can remove some, if not all, invalid responses.

Another group of 45 careless responders was also removed, though there was no evidence of an unbroken sequence of the same responses. They were those who did not devote much effort to the survey but who did not want to be identified as careless responders and did so by selecting the same response option a majority of the time and occasionally varying their options in a minimal fashion (Curran, 2016). If a respondent selected "agree" to a majority of the questions, occasionally chose "strongly agree", and not a single "disagree" answer was identified, then he or she was also removed from the data.

After detecting and deleting careless respondents, 983 responses were left for analysis.

4.6. Participants' profiles

The participants differed in terms of the period of study. Some were on two-year programmes and others on three-year programmes. For a two-year track (four semesters), the first three semesters are devoted to training courses and the fourth to internships and internship-based report writing. For a three-year track, the first three semesters are for training, and the last three are for internships and internship-based report writing or a graduation thesis (depending on students' preferences).

Based on their standing, the participants were divided into three cohorts. The first cohort consisted of 461 beginners or first-year students on a two-year or three-year track. The second cohort comprised 105 continuing or second-year students on a third-year track. The last cohort was made up of 417 graduating students (second-year students on a two-year track and third-year students on a three-year track). At the point of completing the questionnaire, the beginner students had just completed their first semester and would take more courses in the following two semesters. The continuing students were towards the end

of their courses in the third semester, which was the last semester of training, and would then start their internships. The graduating students were in the mid of their internship or report writing and usually already had plans for career options. Table 2 shows the profile of respondents by age, gender, affiliated university, field of undergraduate education, level of learning, interpreting experience, accreditation status, and career plan.

TABLE 2

Sample description (N=983)

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	%
Age		
≤24	715	73%
>24	268	27%
Gender		
Female	824	84%
Male	159	16%
University		
Four high-profile universities*	300	30%
Other 31 universities	683	70%
Fields of undergraduate education		
Translation	245	25%
Others	738	75%
Levels of learning		
Beginner students	461	47%
Continuing students	105	11%
Graduating students	417	42%
Interpreting experience		
Yes	660	67%
No	323	33%
Accreditation status		
Yes	323	33%
No	660	67%

Career plan		
Work as an interpreter	378	62%
Will not work as an interpreter	605	38%

*The four universities include two CIUTI members, one programme cooperating with the Directorate-General for Interpretation (European Commission), and another programme well-known for its long history and its accreditation test for interpreters.

4.7. Data analyses

The data was imported into IBM SPSS statistics version 19.0 for analysis. To answer research questions one, two, and four, descriptive statistics were used to report the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum of the selected variables. To address research question one, frequency distributions and percentages were also used for quantitative analysis of students' choice of professions that are considered to enjoy higher social status than interpreting.

Regarding research questions three and five, independent samples t-tests were computed. Students were divided into the following binary categories according to their demographic characteristics: male vs. female students, those who were 24 or younger vs. those over 24, those attending high-profile universities vs. those attending ordinary ones, those with translation as their discipline in undergraduate education vs. those with other disciplines in undergraduate education, new students vs. graduating students, students with interpreting experience vs. those without, those with professional accreditation vs. those without, and those who planned to be interpreters vs. those who planned to work in some other profession. Independent samples t-tests were run to check if any of the two categories of students were significantly different in their perceptions of the occupational status of interpreters and of factors that influence market entry. Since SPSS does not provide the effect size of independent samples t-test, the authors manually calculated them. Hedges' *g*, a measure of effect size weighted according to the relative size of each sample, was used as an alternative to Cohen's *d*, which requires that two groups are of the same size.

Concerning research questions six and seven, frequency distributions and percentages were used, and to answer research question eight, chi-square tests were run.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Students' overall perception of interpreters' social status

The students' overall judgment of the social status of interpreters is displayed in Table 3. It suggests that they have a low rating of interpreters' social status (M=4.41, SD=1.337). A rating of 4.41 (between 4 "neither agree nor disagree" and 5 "somewhat agree") shows that

their agreement level is low with the statement that interpreting enjoys a high social status, indicating that interpreting is not a high-profile profession in their eyes. It seems that interpreting students' perceptions of interpreters' status are similar to that of professional interpreters who believe that their status is lower than expected, lying in the middle of the status continuum (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Setton and Guo, 2009). Additionally, it indicates that, compared with translation students' perception of translators' status (Ruokonen, 2016), interpreting students' perception of interpreters' status is no higher.

TABLE 3

Descriptive statistics showing students' overall judgment of interpreters' social status (n=983)

	MIN	MAX	M	SD
...enjoys high social status.	1	7	4.41	1.337

To compare students' perceptions of interpreters' social standing with other professions, they were asked to select from a list of professions the ones that enjoy higher social status than interpreting. As can be seen from Table 4, the students' choice of the top six professions includes university professors (75.3%), researchers (71.6%), doctors (64.1%), lawyers (60.7%), department managers in top 500 companies (58.3%), and engineers (43.0%), most of which are more established professions. Again, this indicates that in the eyes of the students, the social status of interpreters is low compared with those professions. This is more or less consistent with the literature on interpreters' comparison of their profession to other professions. It has been found that interpreters see the interpreting profession as equal to, or in most cases lower than, that of lawyers, medical doctors, and university lecturers (Gentile, 2013; Katan, 2009; Setton and Guo, 2009). Such perceptions may be related to two ideas, as argued by Dam and Zethsen (2010, 2013): one is that the reproductive nature of translation and interpreting activities makes it hard to consider them as active participants in the communication process, and the other is that translation and interpreting, as "feminine" professions, can hardly be promoted to a social status as high as that of male-dominant professions such as the legal profession.

5.2. Students' perceptions of individual status parameters

The students' perceptions of interpreters' remuneration, education/expertise, visibility, power/influence, and value to society, are presented in Table 5.

The students believed that the remuneration of the interpreting profession is not high. Their agreement level with the statement that interpreting is a well-paid profession is relatively low (M=4.72, SD=1.312), lower than "somewhat agree". As for stability and promotion opportunities, their ratings are even lower, respectively between "disagree" and "somewhat dis-

TABLE 4

Students' perceptions of professions enjoying higher relative social status than interpreting (N=983)

PROFESSIONS	FREQUENCY	%
University professors	740	75.3%
Researchers	704	71.6%
Doctors	630	64.1%
Lawyers	597	60.7%
Department managers in top 500 companies	573	58.3%
Engineers	423	43.0%
Writers	277	28.2%
Civil servants	272	27.7%
University lecturers	260	26.4%
Consultants	175	17.8%
Journalists	115	11.7%
Banking clerks	73	7.4%
Editors	63	6.4%
Secondary school teachers	54	5.5%
Others	50	5.1%
Nurses	32	3.3%
Secretaries	31	3.2%
Translators	19	1.9%

agree" (M=2.97, SD=1.112) and between "somewhat disagree" and "neither disagree nor agree" (M=3.83, SD=1.418). It seems that interpreting students rated interpreters' income as being lower than professional interpreters did. The literature indicates that conference interpreters tend to be satisfied with their income (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Gentile, 2013), though community interpreters are not satisfied with theirs (Ozolins, 2004; Salaets and Van Gucht, 2008). Compared with translation students who believe that translators have low incomes (Ruokonen, 2016), interpreting students seem more positive about interpreters' incomes.

The students' reactions to the education/expertise required on the part of interpreters are almost unanimous. They agree that interpreting is a demanding profession in terms of skills and

TABLE 5

Descriptive statistics concerning agreement with various statements about the interpreting profession (n=983)

	MIN	MAX	M	SD
Remuneration	1	7	4.41	1.337
...a well-paid profession.	1	7	4.72	1.312
...a stable profession.	1	7	2.97	1.112
...good promotion opportunities.	1	7	3.83	1.418
Education/expertise				
...demanding in skills and expertise.	1	7	6.37	.900
...requires specialised training.	1	7	6.28	.940
...demanding in overall qualities.	1	7	6.49	.797
Visibility				
...a well-known profession.	1	7	3.86	1.321
...receives attention from the mass media.	1	7	3.82	1.379
Power/influence				
...a socially empowering profession.	1	7	3.15	1.181
...power to decide their work.	1	7	2.86	1.293
Value to society				
...a respected profession.	1	7	4.48	1.206
...contributes to society.	1	7	5.84	1.056

expertise as well as overall qualities, and requires specialised training (M=6.37, SD=.900; M=6.49, SD=.797; M=6.28, SD=.940). It seems that interpreting students see eye to eye with interpreters on the point that interpreters are highly skilled professionals (Dam and Zethsen, 2013; Katan, 2009).

Regarding visibility, the students take a neutral stance. Their responses to the statements that interpreting is a well-known profession and receives attention from the mass media are both close to "neither agree nor disagree" (M=3.86, SD=1.321; M=3.82, SD=1.379). Such a neutral stance is a contrast from professional interpreters, who believe that interpreters are not well-known by the public (Dam and Zethsen, 2013).

The next issue investigated was the perceived power and influence of the interpreting profession. The participants believe that interpreters have low power and influence, as they

disagree that interpreting is a socially empowering profession and that interpreters have the power to decide regarding their work (M=3.15, SD=1.181; M=2.86, SD=1.293). This echoes the view of conference interpreters, who believe that interpreters do not have the expected levels of power and influence (Dam and Zethsen, 2013). Such low job influence might be related to the tasks of interpreters, which are reproductive in nature (Dam and Zethsen, 2013), and the role of interpreters, who are considered to be invisible communication facilitators (Zwischenberger, 2009) or neutral powerless intermediaries (Setton and Guo, 2009). Therefore, it is hard to think of interpreters as influential and responsible agents, though they do in fact take on responsibilities and are active in the communication process.

Regarding value, the participants generally hold that interpreting contributes to society (M=5.84, SD=1.056). Their agreement level as to whether interpreting is a respected profession is between "neither agree nor disagree" and "somewhat agree" (M=4.48, SD=1.206). This is consistent with the view of conference interpreters, who believe that interpreters make important contributions to society, but are not recognised and appreciated as such by the public (Gentile, 2013; Dam and Zethsen, 2013).

To sum up, the interpreting students believe that interpreting requires skill and expertise, specialised training and certain overall qualities, and contributes to society, but their perceptions of the income, visibility, and influence of interpreters are much lower than expected. Such results are quite worrisome. In other words, the students believe that it takes a lot to be an interpreter, but they also think that the return is not as good as expected.

Usually, professions that require expertise and specialised training and contribute to society should be associated with good income, visibility, recognition, and influence. However, when it comes to interpreting, the mismatch between what it takes to do the job and the returns one gets makes it a less attractive career option.

Interpreting students' overall perceptions of interpreters' social status, combined with their perceptions of the five individual status parameters, seem to indicate that interpreting is far from being a full-fledged profession in China. According to Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008), an occupation has developed into a profession if the following criteria are met: professional status recognised by the public, appropriate remuneration and prestige, monopoly over their specific work types, autonomy of action, demand for specialised expertise and knowledge, standard ethical codes, effective professional associations, and authority over professional education. The students' perceptions of the interpreting profession indicate that, although interpreting requires specialised expertise, interpreters' status is not highly recognised by the public, their remuneration and prestige are much lower than expected, and they have limited influence over their work. Such findings echo the literature on the occupational status of translation and interpreting, and thus they might be classed as semi-professions (Dam and Zethsen, 2011; Gentile, 2013).

5.3. Relationship between students' perceptions of the interpreting profession and their demographic characteristics

Results of independent samples t-tests suggest that the students' perceptions of the interpreting profession are related to gender, university reputation, level of learning, interpreting experience, and accreditation status.

As displayed in Table 6, female students tend to give a higher rating than male students, though some of the differences are not statistically significant. In terms of the overall perception of interpreters' social status, there was a significant difference in the mean scores between female students (M=4.46, SD=1.31) and male students (M=4.13, SD=1.46), t(981)= 2.86, p=.004, g=.25. The results show that female students tend to give a higher rating to interpreters' social status than male students. As for perceptions of the skills required of the profession, female students (M=6.41, SD=.86) give a higher rating than their male counterparts (M=6.21, SD=1.09), t(981)=2.56, p=.011, g=.22. However, they (M=2.94, SD=1.10) tend to give a lower rating of the stability of the profession than male students (M=3.16, SD=1.14), t(981)= -2.28, p=.023, g=.20. The effect sizes are respectively .25, .22, and .20, falling between small and medium. Such differences between female and male students may be attributed to gender differences in career attitudes (Luzzo, 1995). This generally agrees with the literature, which suggests, as a 'female' occupation, that translation is rated as a more prestigious profession by female translators as well as by female core employees than their male counterparts (Dam and Zethsen, 2009, 2010; Zwischenberger, 2009).

As can be seen in Table 7, university reputation is also related to the participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession. Students from high-profile universities tend to give a lower rating in the overall judgment of interpreters' social status and related aspects than those from other universities. The difference is statistically significant, though the effect size is not large. No literature reports on similar results. This is an interesting point and deserves future exploration.

It seems that the level of learning is related to the students' perceptions. From Table 8, it can be seen that beginner students give higher ratings than graduating students in terms of the overall social status of interpreters, as well as the income, visibility, and power of interpreters. This might be related to students' psychological changes in the process of learning interpreting. Students' perceptions are based on self-assessment of their beliefs about the interpreting profession. According to Hill and Betz (2005), students' standards of assessment may change as they proceed through their learning. As beginner students, they know little about their competence and the interpreting profession, and thus may aim high and overestimate certain aspects. Over time, they come to know more about themselves and the profession through learning and interpreting experience, and then their assessment of the profession may change and become more realistic.

TABLE 6

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for the participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession by gender

	GENDER									
	FEMALE			MALE						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Overall judgment										
...enjoys a high social status.	4.46	1.307	824	4.13	1.459	159	2.862	981	.004*	.247
Remuneration										
...a well-paid profession.	4.72	1.291	824	4.69	1.419	159	.311	981	.756	.023
...a stable profession.	2.94	1.103	824	3.16	1.139	159	-2.281	981	.023*	.198
...good promotion opportunities.	3.86	1.411	824	3.72	1.454	159	1.077	981	.282	.099
Education/expertise										
...demanding in skills and expertise.	6.41	.856	824	6.21	1.091	159	2.559	981	.011*	.223
...requires specialised training.	6.29	.927	824	6.23	1.008	159	.763	981	.445	.064
...demanding in overall qualities.	6.49	.796	824	6.47	.802	159	.269	981	.788	.025
Visibility										
...a well-known profession.	3.87	1.290	824	3.81	1.473	159	.590	981	.555	.045
...receives attention from mass media.	3.84	1.369	824	3.70	1.426	159	1.207	981	.228	.102
Power/influence										
...a socially empowering profession.	3.18	1.168	824	2.99	1.238	159	1.894	981	.059	.161
...power to decide their working.	2.87	1.292	824	2.79	1.303	159	.726	981	.468	.062
Value to society										
...a respected profession.	4.49	1.191	824	4.41	1.279	159	.769	981	.442	.066
...contributes to society.	5.86	1.026	824	5.71	1.193	159	1.679	981	.094	.142

*P<.05; g=effect size; levels of .2, .5, and .8 represent small, medium, and large effect respectively.

TABLE 7

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for the participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession by university reputation

	UNIVERSITY REPUTATION									
	HIGH-PROFILE UNIVERSITIES			OTHERS						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Overall judgment										
...enjoys a high social status.	4.20	1.293	300	4.50	1.347	683	-3.263	981	.001*	.225
Remuneration										
...a well-paid profession.	4.54	1.294	300	4.79	1.314	683	-2.730	981	.006*	.191
...a stable profession.	2.96	1.048	300	2.98	1.139	683	-.191	981	.849	.018
...good promotion opportunities.	3.65	1.386	300	3.92	1.425	683	-2.757	981	.006*	.191
Education/expertise										
...demanding in skills and expertise.	6.20	.988	300	6.45	.849	683	-4.055	981	.000*	.280
...requires specialised training.	6.13	.986	300	6.35	.912	683	-3.366	981	.001*	.235
...demanding in overall qualities.	6.31	.842	300	6.57	.764	683	-4.672	981	.000*	.330
Visibility										
...a well-known profession.	3.52	1.299	300	4.01	1.304	683	-5.398	981	.000*	.376
...receives attention from mass media.	3.68	1.411	300	3.88	1.362	683	-2.046	981	.041*	.145
Power/influence										
...a socially empowering profession.	2.92	1.102	300	3.25	1.201	683	-4.011	981	.000*	.282
...power to decide their working.	2.67	1.262	300	2.94	1.299	683	-3.022	981	.003*	.210
Value to society										
...a respected profession.	4.32	1.226	300	4.54	1.191	683	-2.699	981	.007*	.183
...contributes to society.	5.67	1.137	300	5.92	1.010	683	-3.415	981	.001*	.238

*p<.05

TABLE 8

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession by level of learning

	LEVEL OF LEARNING									
	BEGINNING STUDENTS			GRADUATING STUDENTS						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Overall judgment										
...enjoys a high social status.	4.47	1.286	461	4.26	1.352	417	2.375	876	.018*	.159
Remuneration										
...a well-paid profession.	4.80	1.265	461	4.58	1.341	417	2.532	876	.012*	.169
...a stable profession.	3.12	1.091	461	2.78	1.095	417	4.599	876	.000*	.311
...good promotion opportunities.	3.92	1.328	461	3.77	1.493	417	1.502	876	.133	.106
Education/expertise										
...demanding in skills and expertise.	6.39	.951	461	6.31	.900	417	1.295	876	.196	.086
...requires specialised training.	6.31	.949	461	6.21	.976	417	1.599	876	.110	.104
...demanding in overall qualities.	6.52	.795	461	6.42	.837	417	1.836	876	.067	.123
Visibility										
...a well-known profession.	4.00	1.259	461	3.66	1.367	417	3.791	876	.000*	.259
...receives attention from mass media.	3.91	1.368	461	3.70	1.379	417	2.271	876	.023*	.152
Power/influence										
...a socially empowering profession.	3.24	1.161	461	3.06	1.190	417	2.308	876	.021*	.153
...power to decide their working.	2.96	1.275	461	2.76	1.311	417	2.351	876	.019*	.155
Value to society										
...a respected profession.	4.52	1.154	461	4.38	1.241	417	1.777	876	.076	.117
...contributes to society.	5.89	1.049	461	5.79	1.052	417	1.418	876	.157	.095

*p<.05; 105 continuing students excluded.

Interpreting experience and accreditation status also relate to the students' perceptions. Those with interpreting experience tend to give a lower rating on many aspects than those without (Table 9). Those with interpreting certificates give a lower rating than those without (Table 10). This may also be explained from the perspective of students' shifts in the standard of assessment resulting from their psychological changes (Hill and Betz, 2005). Those without experience and certificates are usually beginning students who know little about their competence and the interpreting profession, while those with both tend to have a better understanding of their major and the profession.

In summary, students' perceptions of the interpreting profession seem to be related to gender, university reputation, level of learning, interpreting experience, and accreditation status. Female students generally tend to give a higher rating than male students. Those from universities with a better reputation, at higher levels of learning, with interpreting experience, or with certificates tend to give lower ratings of the profession.

5.4. Students' perceptions of market order and educational support

As can be seen from Table 11, students' responses indicate that the market is not perceived to be orderly. They somewhat disagree that only those with specialised training in interpreting can work as interpreters in the local market. Regarding certification status, their agreement level to the item that only those with interpreting certificates can interpret in the market is not high (M=3.64, SD=1.685). Their stance on the availability of interpreting job opportunities is undecided, close to "neither disagree nor agree" (M=3.95, SD=1.340). This is basically in agreement with Katan's (2009) findings.

As for educational support, the students are generally not satisfied, holding that interpreting programmes do not share the same curriculum (M=2.70, SD=1.242) and do not provide enough internship opportunities (M=2.83, SD=1.218).

The students' perceptions of market order and educational support suggest that there is no monopoly over the interpreting job in the Chinese interpreting market and that educational support needs to be improved—two of the parameters of a real profession (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). Thus, the findings here indicate that interpreting in China is still perceived as a semiprofession.

Their perceptions also provide evidence that the professionalisation process of interpreting in China is still in its initial phase, which is characterised by market disorder and training institutions as a source of disturbance (Tseng, 1992). Currently, interpreters have no monopoly over their work and outsiders without specialised training and certificates can enter the market. This can lead to unfair competition and client confusion about interpreting quality. Training schools are supposed to be a source of cohesion. However, current training programmes vary in terms of admission standards, curricula, training duration, and instruc-

TABLE 9

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession by interpreting experience

	INTERPRETING EXPERIENCE									
	WITHOUT EXPERIENCE			WITH EXPERIENCE						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Overall judgment										
...enjoys a high social status.	4.59	1.279	323	4.32	1.357	660	2.901	981	.004*	.203
Remuneration										
...a well-paid profession.	4.81	1.225	323	4.67	1.351	660	1.658	981	.098	.107
...a stable profession.	3.11	1.110	323	2.91	1.108	660	2.607	981	.009*	.180
...good promotion opportunities.	3.96	1.360	323	3.77	1.442	660	1.993	981	.046*	.134
Education/expertise										
...demanding in skills and expertise.	6.51	.786	323	6.31	.945	660	3.265	981	.001*	.223
...requires specialised training.	6.32	.936	323	6.27	.943	660	.794	981	.427	.053
...demanding in overall qualities.	6.55	.764	323	6.45	.811	660	1.843	981	.066	.126
Visibility										
...a well-known profession.	4.02	1.261	323	3.78	1.343	660	2.614	981	.009*	.182
...receives attention from mass media.	3.96	1.364	323	3.75	1.382	660	2.195	981	.028*	.152
Power/influence										
...a socially empowering profession.	3.28	1.154	323	3.09	1.190	660	2.346	981	.019*	.161
...power to decide their working.	2.97	1.259	323	2.81	1.307	660	1.894	981	.059	.124
Value to society										
...a respected profession.	4.67	1.155	323	4.38	1.219	660	3.468	981	.001*	.242
...contributes to society.	5.84	1.044	323	5.84	1.062	660	.059	981	.953	.000

*p<.05

TABLE 10

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of the interpreting profession by accreditation status

	ACCREDITATION STATUS									
	WITHOUT CERTIFICATES			WITH CERTIFICATES						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Overall judgment										
...enjoys a high social status.	4.47	1.329	660	4.29	1.347	323	1.988	981	.047*	.135
Remuneration										
...a well-paid profession.	4.80	1.302	660	4.55	1.319	323	2.752	981	.006*	.191
...a stable profession.	3.05	1.128	660	2.83	1.064	323	2.910	981	.004*	.199
...good promotion opportunities.	3.95	1.396	660	3.60	1.435	323	3.636	981	.000*	.248
Education/expertise										
...demanding in skills and expertise.	6.43	.886	660	6.27	.921	323	2.641	981	.008*	.178
...requires specialised training.	6.33	.945	660	6.20	.926	323	1.953	981	.051	.138
...demanding in overall qualities.	6.54	.785	660	6.38	.812	323	2.856	981	.004*	.202
Visibility										
...a well-known profession.	3.95	1.308	660	3.69	1.332	323	2.854	981	.004*	.198
...receives attention from mass media.	3.84	1.324	660	3.78	1.487	323	.665	981	.506	.043
Power/influence										
...a socially empowering profession.	3.23	1.157	660	2.98	1.210	323	3.254	981	.001*	.213
...power to decide their working.	2.91	1.277	660	2.75	1.321	323	1.839	981	.066	.124
Value to society										
...a respected profession.	4.55	1.184	660	4.33	1.238	323	2.700	981	.007*	.183
...contributes to society.	5.90	1.029	660	5.72	1.100	323	2.586	981	.010*	.171

*p<.05

TABLE 11

Descriptive statistics (n=983)

	MIN	MAX	M	SD
Market order				
There are plentiful opportunities to work as interpreters.	1	7	3.95	1.340
Only those who have received specialised training in interpreting can work as interpreters.	1	7	3.12	1.444
Only those with interpreting certificates can interpret in the market.	1	7	3.64	1.685
Educational support				
In China, interpreting programmes share the same curriculum.	1	7	2.70	1.242
Interpreting programmes provide enough internship opportunities.	1	7	2.83	1.218
Interpreting programmes can effectively prepare graduates for the interpreting market.	1	7	4.01	1.535

tor qualifications. They produce a large number of interpreting service providers, some of whom are not suitably qualified, which creates unfair competition in the market and affects the interests of clients. This makes recognition and respect from clients more difficult to attain. In this way, as argued by Mikkelson (2004), a vicious circle of unprofessional interpreting service and subsequent mistrust by clients may arise.

5.5. Relationship between students' perceptions of market order and educational support and demographic characteristics

As can be seen from Table 12, students from high-profile universities tend to give a lower rating to market order and educational support factors than those from other universities. Since no previous studies report on similar results, it is hard to explain the observed differences. The authors believe that this would be an interesting point to explore in future research.

Level of learning and interpreting experience are also related to the students' perceptions. As displayed in Table 13 and Table 14, beginner students and those without interpreting experience tend to give a higher rating to market order and educational support factors than graduating students and those with interpreting experience. As mentioned previously, it may be due to changes in students' standards of assessment (Hill and Betz, 2005). Higher levels of learning and interpreting experience mean more knowledge of their competence and of the interpreting profession, which reduces the chances of overestimation.

TABLE 12

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of market order and educational support by university reputation

	UNIVERSITY REPUTATION									
	HIGH-PROFILE UNIVERSITIES			OTHERS						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Market order										
...plentiful opportunities...	3.99	1.366	300	3.93	1.328	683	.733	981	.464	.045
...specialised training...	2.87	1.338	300	3.23	1.476	683	-3.616	981	.000*	.251
...with certificates...	3.25	1.576	300	3.81	1.704	683	-4.847	981	.000*	.336
Educational support										
...the same curriculum.	2.54	1.151	300	2.76	1.275	683	-2.575	981	.010*	.178
...enough internship...	2.81	1.167	300	2.83	1.240	683	-.251	981	.801	.016
...prepare graduates for the market.	4.07	1.561	300	3.98	1.524	683	.910	981	.363	.059

*p<.05

TABLE 13

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of market order and educational support by level of learning

	LEVEL OF LEARNING									
	BEGINNING STUDENTS			GRADUATING STUDENTS						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Market order										
...plentiful opportunities...	4.15	1.298	461	3.71	1.306	417	4.949	876	.000*	.338
...specialised training...	3.06	1.379	461	3.08	1.463	417	-.219	876	.827	.014
...with certificates...	3.73	1.692	461	3.45	1.663	417	2.493	876	.013*	.167
Educational support										
...the same curriculum.	2.67	1.235	461	2.70	1.251	417	-.331	876	.741	.024
...enough internship...	3.03	1.209	461	2.61	1.192	417	5.104	876	.000*	.350

...prepare graduates for the market.	4.15	1.460	461	3.83	1.600	417	3.163	876	.002*	.210

*p<.05; 105 continuing students excluded.

TABLE 14

Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of market order and educational support by interpreting experience

	INTERPRETING EXPERIENCE									
	WITHOUT EXPERIENCE			WITH EXPERIENCE						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	p	g
Market order										
...plentiful opportunities...	3.93	1.254	323	3.96	1.380	660	-.334	981	.739	.022
...specialised training...	3.30	1.438	323	3.03	1.440	660	2.748	981	.006*	.188
...with certificates...	3.94	1.658	323	3.50	1.680	660	3.883	981	.000*	.263
Educational support										
...the same curriculum.	2.74	1.244	323	2.68	1.242	660	.706	981	.480	.048
...enough internship...	2.86	1.110	323	2.81	1.267	660	.587	981	.557	.041
...prepare graduates for the market.	3.94	1.484	323	4.04	1.560	660	-.883	981	.377	.065

*p<.05

In summary, those from regular universities, beginner students, and those without interpreting experience tend to have a higher rating of market order and educational support factors than their counterparts.

5.6. Students' confidence about entering the interpreting profession and their choices of other fields of work

The participants' confidence in relation to entering the interpreting profession is low. As presented in Table 15, as high as 63.7% of them have doubts about choosing interpreting as their major, while 61.5% of them do not plan to work as interpreters. This is similar to the attitudes of translation students towards the translation profession in Finland. According to Ruokonen (2016), about 62% of their participants considered changing their field of study.

TABLE 15

Students' confidence about entering the interpreting profession (n=983)

	FREQUENCY	%
Doubts about choosing interpreting as a major		
Yes. I had doubts	626	63.7%
No. I did not have doubts	357	36.3%
Career plans		
Will not work as an interpreter	605	61.5%
Work as an interpreter	378	38.5%

For those who do not want to enter the interpreting profession, their choice of alternative working domains is presented in Table 16. It can be seen that education and training make up 41.7% of their preferred areas of working field, which is followed by government and non-profit organisations (19.3%). This is similar to Choi (2007), who found that education is the preferred area (53%) where interpreters in South Korea would like to engage. This provides guides for training institutions to tailor their curriculum to the students' needs.

5.7. Students' reasons to join or reject the interpreting profession

The students' reasons to join the interpreting profession are displayed in Table 17. They can be classified into four categories, as follows: internal motivation (71.5%), occupational characteristics (26%), external motivation (2.0%), and other reasons (0.5%). While internal motivation accounts for 71.5%, external factors take up 28%. It seems that internal factors, such as interest and psychological reward, are the dominant reasons why they choose to join the interpreting profession. The occupational features of interpreting fail to play an important role in retaining the students. As mentioned previously, the students believe that interpreting is demanding in terms of expertise and training but it does not receive due income, respect, or influence. Therefore, it is hard to convince them that interpreting is an attractive career. According to Lee (2017), internal factors like interest and psychological rewards are not as important as external factors such as job security, promotion chances, and income in job satisfaction. Although some students would like to pursue interpreting as their profession out of their internal motivation, their attitudes may suggest an "underlying naïveté", as suggested by Ruokonen (2016), because without external motivation it is still premature to conclude how many of them will eventually work as interpreters after graduation.

TABLE 16

Preferred working areas of those who do not plan to work as interpreters

PREFERRED AREAS OF WORKING FIELD	FREQUENCY	%
Education / training (secondary and primary school, professional and technical training institute, etc.)	253	41.7%
Government / non-profit organisations	117	19.3%
Trade / import and export / retailing / manufacturing (costume, mechanics, food, office supplies, automobile, etc.)	73	12.0%
Advertising / media (advertising, publishing, public relations, media, cultural communication, etc.)	38	6.3%
Finance (banking, security, insurance, trust, accounting, etc.)	28	4.6%
Computer / internet / telecommunication / e-commerce / game	21	3.5%
International organisations (United Nations, WTO, etc.)	17	2.8%
Others	17	2.8%
Professional services (translation, intermediary, law, counselling, etc.)	16	2.6%
Freelancers	15	2.5%
Entertainment (hotel, tourism, catering, etc.)	6	1.0%
Energy / raw material (petroleum, chemical engineering, water conservancy, new energy, etc.)	5	0.8%
Health (pharmacy, health care, biological engineering, etc.)	1	0.2%

TABLE 17

Reasons to join the interpreting profession

REASONS TO JOIN THE INTERPRETING PROFESSION	FREQUENCY	%
Internal motivation (internal factor)	**1846**	**71.5%**
My interest	325	12.6%
Like learning new things	325	12.6%
Like helping people communicate	277	10.7%
A sense of achievement	274	10.6%
A way to challenge myself	233	9.0%
My dream	229	8.9%

Improve my bilingual competence	183	7.1%
Occupational characteristics (external factor)	**671**	**26.0%**
Good income	237	9.2%
Good working context	134	5.2%
Contribution to social and economic development	118	4.6%
Good professional image	115	4.5%
A respected profession	49	1.9%
Good promotion opportunities	18	0.7%
External motivation (external factor)	**52**	**2.0%**
Influence of friends, teachers or family	38	1.5%
Influence of mass media	14	0.5%
Others	**14**	**0.5%**
Others	8	0.3%
Never thought about why	6	0.2%

The reasons given to reject the interpreting profession are displayed in Table 18. They can be divided into five categories: occupational characteristics (35.1%), personal attributes (34.5%), market factors (17.8%), educational factors (12.2%), and other factors (0.3%). Apart from personal attributes (34.5%), which is an internal factor, all others are external factors, which account for 65.1%. In parallel with the section on students' perceptions of the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, the results suggest that external factors are predominantly responsible for students leaving the interpreting profession and that the external environment is not appealing enough to attract students. Those factors include the mismatch between the specialised expertise and training required for the interpreting profession and the inadequate income and low recognition of interpreters. Worse still, there is the perception of a lack of control over market entry and limited support from training institutions. The results are consistent with Ozolins (2004) and Choi (2007). Ozolins (2004) discovered that community interpreters' sources of dissatisfaction about their jobs are mostly external (low income, pressures, insecurity, lack of respect and recognition, market disorder, unfair competition, course problems), though they believe interpreting is a helpful, interesting, challenging, and flexible job. Choi (2007) found that interpreters' job dissatisfaction is more influenced by external factors (limited promotion opportunities, ever-changing assignments topics, too much business travel, low recognition, low job security, too much pressure) than by internal factors (lack of sense of achievement as message converters). The results also agree with those of Lee

(2017), who found that, among the top factors influencing job satisfaction, external factors like job security, promotion opportunity, and income come first compared with internal factors such as interest and psychological reward. If nothing is done to improve the current situation, it will be hard to retain talented students in the profession, including those who now plan to work as interpreters.

The results of the students' reasons to join or reject the profession should be taken seriously, as they concern professional retention. According to Lee (2017), even graduates who are working as interpreters hold a pessimistic view of job security and its prospects. To retain talented students in the interpreting profession, training institutes may consider various curricula or methodological innovations to prepare students better for the job market. Associations should work with interpreter employers and training institutes to strengthen market entry and promote interpreters' professional status.

TABLE 18

Reasons to reject the interpreting profession

REASONS TO REJECT THE INTERPRETING PROFESSION	FREQUENCY	%
Occupational characteristics (external factor)	**1,010**	**35.1%**
Not a stable job	248	8.6%
Too much pressure	245	8.5%
Income not guaranteed	231	8.0%
Lack of promotion opportunities	152	5.3%
Ever-changing topics of assignments	74	2.6%
Too many business travels	60	2.1%
Personal attributes (internal factor)	**993**	**34.5%**
Inadequate competence	440	15.3%
Lack of the right personality traits	158	5.5%
Not a holder of an interpreting certificate	157	5.5%
Development of interest in other areas	125	4.3%
No sense of achievement as message converters	113	3.9%
Market factors (external factor)	**511**	**17.8%**
Inadequate job opportunities	283	9.8%
Market not ordered	228	7.9%

Educational factors (external factor)	**352**	**12.2%**
Lack of guidance from experienced interpreters	177	6.2%
Mismatch between training and market	175	6.1%
Others	**10**	**0.3%**
Others	10	0.3%

5.8. Relationship between students' career choices and their demographic characteristics

The results of chi-square tests show that the students' career choices are related to age, level of learning, interpreting experience, and accreditation status.

The students' age and level of learning are related to career choice. As can be seen from Table 19, the relationship between career choice and age is significant, X^2 (1, N = 983) = 4.28, p =.039, though the effect size is small (φ=-.066). Younger students (24 or younger) were more likely to choose interpreting as a profession than their older counterparts. This is consistent with work done by Dam and Zethsen (2009), who found that younger translators and non-translator employees are more likely to give a high rating of the profession. Moreover, beginner students are more likely to choose interpreting as their career plan compared with graduating students, X^2 (2, N = 983) = 50.62, p =.000, φ=.227.

Younger and beginner students are more likely to choose interpreting as their career compared with their older and graduating students because of their psychological changes in the process of learning interpreting. Beginner and younger students know less about their competence and the interpreting profession compared with their graduating and older counterparts. They are more likely to focus on their dreams. Amundson and Borgen (1987) proposed four stages of job search—enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration, and apathy. The authors believe they also apply to interpreting students' career planning. At the initial stage of learning, students usually have high hopes or even unrealistic expectations about themselves. Over time, they may find continuous challenges in learning as they come to know more about the interpreting profession and themselves. As a result, learning stagnates and they may get frustrated. When they become older graduating students, they know more about the realities of the interpreting profession, such as high pressure, job insecurity, inadequate income, low recognition, and limited opportunities for promotion, as well as market disorder and personal inadequacies, all of which are reasons to reject the profession discussed, as in the previous section. As a result, some of them may become disinterested in pursuing their set goals of being interpreters.

Interpreting experience and accreditation status are related to career choice. As shown in Table 19, those with interpreting experience or certificates are more likely to choose interpreting as a profession. One possible explanation is that interpreting experience, even that obtained from mock conferences, can boost students' motivation to become professional interpreters (Conde and Chouc, 2019; Li, 2015).

TABLE 19

Chi-square tests between the participants' career plans and their demographic characteristics

	CAREER PLAN						
Demographic characteristics	**Others**	**Interpreters**	**Total**	**χ^2**	**df**	***p***	**φ**
Gender				1.491	1	.222	.039
Female	514 (85.0%)	310 (82.0%)	824 (83.8%)				
Male	91 (15.0%)	68 (18.0%)	159 (16.2%)				
Age				4.282	1	.039*	-.066
≤24	426 (70.4%)	289 (76.5%)	715 (72.7%)				
>24	179 (29.6%)	89 (23.5%)	268 (27.3%)				
University reputation				2.746	1	.098	-.053
High-profile universities	173 (28.6%)	127 (33.6%)	300 (30.5%)				
Others	432 (71.4%)	251 (66.4%)	683 (69.5%)				
Levels of learning				50.621	2	.000*	.227
Beginning students	231 (38.2%)	230 (60.8%)	461 (46.9%)				
Continuing students	68 (11.2%)	37 (9.8%)	105 (10.7%)				
Graduating students	306 (50.6%)	111 (29.4%)	417 (42.4%)				
Interpreting experience				7.187	1	.007*	.086
Without experience	218 (36.0%)	105 (27.8%)	323 (32.9%)				
With experience	387 (64.0%)	273 (72.2%)	660 (67.1%)				
Accreditation status				5.495	1	.019*	.075
Without certificates	423 (69.9%)	237 (62.7%)	660 (67.1%)				
With certificates	182 (30.1%)	141 (37.3%)	323 (32.9%)				

*p<.05. φ=effect size (phi coefficient), a value of .1, .3, and .5 respectively represent a small, medium, and large effect.

6. Concluding remarks

This research was intended to investigate students' perceptions of interpreter social status, the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, as well as their commitment to the profession. The relationship between their perceptions and commitment to their demographic characteristics was also explored. The findings are presented as follows.

The interpreting students' perception of interpreters' social status is not high, lower than that of more established professions such as university professors, researchers, medical doctors, lawyers, etc. The students believe that interpreting requires skills and expertise, specialised training and overall qualities, and contributes to society, but their perceptions of the income, visibility profile, and influence of interpreters are much lower than expected. It seems that there is a mismatch between what it takes to do the job and what is actually gained, making interpreting a less attractive career option for students. In relation to the criteria of a mature profession proposed by Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008), interpreting is apparently still a semiprofession in China, instead of a full-fledged one.

Students' perceptions of the interpreting profession appear to be related to gender, university reputation, level of learning, interpreting experience, and accreditation status. Female students generally tend to give a higher rating than male students. Those from higher-ranked universities, at higher levels of learning, with interpreting experience, or with certificates, tend to give lower ratings of the profession. The results generally agree with the literature which suggests that, as a "female" occupation (i.e. one with females as the majority), translation is rated as a more prestigious profession by female translators as well as female core employees than by their male counterparts (Dam and Zethsen, 2009, 2010; Zwischenberger, 2009). Students at a higher level of learning or with interpreting experience or qualifications are more likely to give a lower rating because this may be related to changes in their standard of assessment as they advance through their learning (Hill and Betz, 2005). Beginner students or those without experience or qualifications usually know little about their competence and the interpreting profession, and thus may aim high and overestimate certain factors related to it. With more learning and experience, their assessment of the profession may change and become more realistic.

The students' perceptions of market order and educational support suggest that there is no monopoly over interpreting jobs in the Chinese interpreting market and educational support is yet to be improved. According to the criteria of a professionalised occupation (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008), it seems that the interpreting professionalisation process in China is still in its initial phase, which is characterised by market disorder and training schools as a source of disturbance (Tseng, 1992).

Among the participants, those from regular universities, beginner students, and those without interpreting experience tended to have a higher rating of market order and educational support than their counterparts, those from high-profile universities, graduating students, and those with interpreting experience. The impact of the level of learning and experience may be due to changes in students' standards of assessment (Hill and Betz, 2005). Higher levels of learning and interpreting experience mean more knowledge of their competence and the interpreting profession which reduces the chances of high hopes and overestimations.

The participants' confidence in entering the interpreting profession is low. About 63.7% have doubts about choosing interpreting as their major, while 61.5% do not plan to work as interpreters. Among those who do not want to enter the interpreting profession, the top two choices of their working domains are education and training (41.7%) and government and non-profit organisations (19.3%) respectively.

The results indicate that internal factors, such as interest and psychological rewards, are the dominant reasons why students choose to join the interpreting profession. However, the occupational features of interpreting fail to play an important role in retaining the students. According to Lee (2017), internal factors like interest and psychological rewards are not as important as external factors such as job security, promotion opportunities, and income in terms of their relationship with job satisfaction. Although some students would like to pursue interpreting as their profession based on their internal motivation, their attitudes may suggest an "underlying naïveté" as believed by Ruokonen (2016). The students' reasons to reject the interpreting profession are in parallel with their perceptions of the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, suggesting that external factors are predominantly responsible for the students' rejection of the profession and that the external environment is not supportive enough to attract them. Those factors include the mismatch between the specialised expertise and training required for the interpreting profession versus the inadequate income and low social recognition of interpreters. Worse still, there is a lack of control over market entry and limited educational support from training institutions. These results regarding the students' reasons to join or reject the profession should be taken seriously, as it has significant ramifications for professional retention. According to Lee (2017), even graduates who are working as interpreters hold a pessimistic view regarding job security and its prospects. To retain talented students in the interpreting profession, training institutes may consider curricular or methodological innovations to better prepare students for the job market. Associations may work with interpreter employers and training institutes to strengthen market entry procedures and to promote interpreters' professional status.

The students' career choices are related to their age and level of learning. Younger and beginner students are more likely to choose interpreting as a profession than their older and

graduating counterparts. That may be because young and beginner students' enthusiasm tends to be replaced by stagnation and frustration over time when they come to understand more about the realities of the profession, such as high pressure, job insecurity, inadequate income, low recognition, and limited chances of promotion, as well as market disorder and their own personal inadequacies. Their career choices are also related to interpreting experience and accreditation status. Those with interpreting experience or qualifications are more likely to choose interpreting as a profession. One possible explanation is that interpreting experience, even that obtained from mock conferences, can boost students' motivation to become professional interpreters (Conde and Chouc, 2019; Li, 2015).

The perceptions of students regarding the social status of the interpreting profession, market order, and educational support, as well as their commitment to the profession, all ring a warning bell concerning the future of the profession. As a response, professional associations may consider lifting the market entry standard by cooperating with the government and allowing only qualification holders as legitimate interpreters. Training institutions may innovate the curriculum design, providing more internship opportunities for those who want to be interpreters and offering additional course choices specific to the needs of those who do not want to be interpreters. Trainers need to inform students realistically of the features of the profession, including its social status, income, influence, visibility, and value, so that they can make career plans on a rational basis. If nothing is done, the most talented students may reject interpreting as their major or leave the profession after graduation.

7. Limitations and prospects

The limitations of this study warrant mention. Caution should be taken in generalising the findings globally because all the participants were from interpreting programmes within China. Further research may explore the same issue by involving participants from different countries so that comparisons and contrasts between the findings may help form a global view of interpreting students' perceptions.

In addition, when interpreting the results, it should be noted that they only reflect a snapshot in time, though the study involved the two cohorts of beginner and graduating students. A longitudinal design is of benefit, by comparing the same student cohort's perceptions on entering and exiting the programme and examining why students with positive attitudes towards the interpreting profession at admission then may go on to change their career plans at graduation. Such research may provide insights for trainers to get involved in easing the transition process.

Another limitation lies in the fact that this study is mainly quantitative. A qualitative study would be beneficial in the future in order to provide richer information on students' perceptions of the interpreting profession as well as the reasons behind them.

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