A Qualitative Analysis of Exit Decisions for Chinese Younger Hospitality Professionals: Evidence from Previous Chinese Post-90s Hoteliers

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Abstract

The universal phenomenon of high employee turnover rate within the hospitality industry has led interested scholars to study the subject from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, Chinese post-90s (born between 1990 and 1999) hoteliers' voluntary exit decisions come with their career transitions, which has heretofore been neglected by academia, despite they have surpassed the previous generation to become the main workforce in China's hospitality industry. By applying a qualitative methodology, this research analyzes essential factors contributing to their voluntary exit decisions such as personal factors (personal professional identity), organizational factors (organizational support and supervisory support), and job-related factors (salary concern). 15 semi-structured interviews with Chinese post-90s hoteliers who left the hospitality industry after working for an average length of 3.9 years, have been conducted to provide insight on the above factors which triggered such decisions. Unlike their predecessors who concern more about personal and job-related factors, Chinese post-90s pay extra attention to their career development which is closely related to organizational factors. The findings and recommendations might be valuable for industry stakeholders such as human resources managers and departmental leaders, as they could develop pertinent measures to maintain younger employees in China's hospitality industry.

Keywords

Chinese Post-90s Hoteliers; Exit Decisions; Professional Identity; Salary Concern; Organizational Support.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry as the service industry (Bagdan 2013) contributes to providing more employment opportunities and fostering social advancement, while the hospitality industry in China is an indispensable economic sector (Wen, Li and Kwon 2019). According to Meadin Academy statistics (2019), China needs over 8 million professionals in the tourism and hospitality fields, and the talent shortage in the industry has reached at least 2 million people. Nevertheless, the situation of extremely high employee turnover rate within the hospitality industry could not be ignored, especially for China's hospitality industry that had around 30%-40% employee turnover rate, which is about 80% higher than the average across all Chinese industries (Dietschi 2018). For instance, a 300-room hotel may experience a gross margin drop of 7.7 %, and the revenue drops by 22.1% when the turnover rate increases from 5% to 30% (PR Newswire 2020).

Hence, hoteliers as service providers (Ionel 2016) play an irreplaceable role in fulfilling customers' expectations and needs, especially for those well-trained and loyal employees. The latter are more likely to maintain returning guests as they could generate more profit for companies (McEachern 2020). Meanwhile, millennials (born between 1981 and 2000),

especially the post-90s generation (born between 1990 and 2000), will be the main central workforce soon (Brown, Thomas and Bosselman 2015) left the hospitality industry voluntarily after working for a few years and changed their career in a different occupational field.

On the one hand, the exit decisions of experienced hoteliers have resulted in labor shortage and service discontinuity within the industry, leading to customer dissatisfaction and the overall negative performance of the industry. On the other hand, voluntary turnover typically indicates that organizations lost their investments in those departing employees (Klota et al. 2021), while about 50%-200% of one employee's first-year wage covers the cost of employee turnover (Anderson 2019). In other words, it might lead to endless costs of recruitment, training, and probation for new staff when existing employees decide to leave. Moreover, a vicious voluntary turnover spiral (Felps et al. 2009) might happen if employees' exits drive others to quit. In consequence, the profitability of organizations may be negatively affected due to increased customer dissatisfaction and reduced employee satisfaction (Dietschi 2018), because new employees need at least 90 workdays' systematic training before they are able to achieve a 75-100% conversancy level at work (Anderson 2019).

Nevertheless, the previous researches mainly focused on analyzing factors of overall employee turnover intention in the hospitality industry by applying quantitative methods such as surveys or questionnaires as general discussion. Specifically, long working hours, low social status, and low compensation as intrinsic attributes of hospitality jobs have been identified to cause the higher turnover rate in China (Tekleab, Bartol and Liu 2005; Hung 2013; Brown, Thomas and Bosselman 2015; Wang et al. 2020). Meanwhile, factors such as career development, supervisorial support, and employee wellbeing have been found as the most critical exit intentions, which could also affect Chinese hoteliers to leave the industry voluntarily (He, Lai and Lu 2011; He, Morrison and Zhang 2019). However, the majority of those studies mainly discuss either positive or negative influence of these factors, which might affect the relationship between employee job satisfaction and turnover intention without analyzing those exit decisions in depth. Although a few qualitative types of research highlighted some of the above factors (Zopiatis and Theocharous 2020), those researches have not mentioned if it was related to Chinese post-90s hoteliers who have changed their careers completely after they quitted the hospitality industry.

In effect, most antecedent studies mainly researched millennials as the research object, and those studies have analyzed career change and employee exit decisions separately. Nevertheless, there were rare researches to discuss the post-90s generation if there was any relationship between their exit decisions and career transition. Hence, the current research addresses the unfilled gap of exploring Chinese post-90s hotelier's voluntary turnover intentions, which further links their exit decision to career change based on their particular personalities. In other words, the current research analyzes essential factors that trigger post-90s' leaving intentions, which had resulted in their decisions to pursue careers in other industries such as education and technology (Huang and Baker 2021) when limited academic studies stressed this field.

The significance of the research is based on the following reasons. On the one hand, the research analyzed specifically substantial factors that affect Chinese post-90s hoteliers to quit the industry, and further explored the underlying relationship between their exit decisions and career change by conducting semi-structured interviews, which previous researches have not involved. On the other hand, the findings of the research might assist China's hospitality professionals to build up personalized human resources (HR) strategies for maintaining younger hoteliers, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 (Ralph 2020), when uncertain labor mobility is particularly obvious in the hospitality industry.

Specifically, hospitality leaders who are capable of establishing competitive talent management structures are able to develop more professional and loyal younger hoteliers. Therefore, they

are less likely to leave the industry when they are satisfied with acquired benefits such as efficient supervisorial support and attractive employee remuneration. In other words, the research aims to improve the present situation of Chinese post-90s employees' shortage in the hospitality industry, and to stop them from changing their careers based on exploring their exit decisions practically, so China's hospitality industry could be more prosperous and competitive.

Firstly, the research was developed by reviewing related literature regarding post-90s' characteristics, China's hospitality industry, employee exit decisions, and career change. Secondly, the researcher collected primary data through semi-structured interviews to analyze 15 Chinese 'post-90s' who used to work in the hospitality industry based on discussing actual reasons for their exit decisions, which resulted in career transitions. Hence, a qualitative methodology was applied to analyze those factors for finding the connection between exit decisions and career change of those younger hoteliers, who perform differently at work from their predecessors and newcomers. Finally, hospitality HR leaders are able to act appropriately based on the findings and recommendations of the research, and therefore the situation of younger hoteliers' shortage in China's hospitality industry could be improved accordingly.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Post-90s' Characteristics

Generally, 'post-90s' refers to a generation of Chinese who was born between 1990 and 1999 (Li and Lu 2014), which means their attributes are more diverse and sophisticated as they are the intersection between Generation Y (1981-1996) and Generation Z (1997-2012). Compared with precedent generations, more post-90s have accomplished higher-level education such as being bachelor and masters, especially after implementing compulsory education in 1990 (Lien, Shien and Li 2021). Meanwhile, those post-90s started to experience cultural conflict between China and Western countries (Jiang and Yang 2016) due to China's 'opening-up' policy (Lien, Shien and Li 2021).

Besides, they are more likely to be described as a spoiled generation due to China's policy of "one-child" (Warner and Zhu 2018), and they have grown up in an affluent era which underlies their considerable concerns regarding spiritual pursuit rather than material requirements. Specifically, Chinese 'post-90s' care more about work-life balance and individual well-being (He et al. 2019). They desire to control their own lives instead of being arranged by anyone else, especially when they are faced with a job choice. Hence, they are self-centered and capricious individuals (Dinnell 2007) who are less likely to accept criticism (Li and Lu 2014) or concerned with any authoritative leadership, which reflects their behavioral feature of egocentrism.

Additionally, the situation of over-protection from parents and a comfortable living environment signifies the negative impact of Chinese 'post-90s' tolerance and resistance to pressure, especially when they feel aggrieved at work. At the same time, they are easier to lack patience on the road to career success which shows their intense desire for short-term returns (Twenge et al. 2010). In other words, they are more likely to experience frequent job-hopping (Jiang and Hui 2016) due to their dislike of obeying regulations and rules at work, which might generate low employee loyalty (Meister and Willyerd 2010) and job dissatisfaction. What's more, Chinese 'post-90s' are more ambitious for success than their predecessors. Meanwhile, they are weak to perform well in terms of social interaction and communication even though they have a computer and technical expertise (Wey Smola and Sutton 2002).

However, the Chinese 'post-90s' is, to a great extent, the generation which is willing to accept unique or fresh things (Lien, Shien and Li 2021). Hence, they praise individualism and innovation highly as they are more than welcome to differ because of the rapid development and popularization of the Internet. Meanwhile, they are more likely to welcome challenges without being afraid of them as they are eager to learn (Huang et al. 2016) as long as it could

positively affect their career to be advanced. Moreover, they desire to express their thoughts if it's related to enhancing the overall quality of life instead of hiding them to themselves.

In general, Chinese 'post-90s' values individual responsibility, the work environment, their relationship with superiors (Kim et al. 2016), and challenging work (Naim and Lenka 2018) as more crucial factors in a job than their predecessors. Therefore, they are the generation of pursuing self-actualization, and their strong-minded traits let them realize that being recognized by themselves is more important than being valued by the public. As a result, they devote themselves to pursuing a job based on respecting their own perceptions rather than following others' values. Compared to most western researches have mainly concentrated on targeting the overall millennial generation, the subject of this research has refined to Chinese post-90s who has part of millennial's characteristics such as higher educational level and strong cultural shock, and its own features of the era such as the high level of social development and the particular policy of 'one child' of China.

2.2. Introduction of China's Hospitality Industry

Beginning with implementing the policy of 'opening-up' in 1978 (Wang 2017), China aimed to attract foreign investments and businesses, which indeed enlarged the international hospitality market during the last three decades. Additionally, the Chinese government introduced the Sixth 'Five-Year' Plan between 1981 and 1985 to emphasize the development of the hospitality industry (Yu 1992) through establishing more related facilities such as local hotels, which stimulated the rapid growth of hotels from 296 to 710 (He 1999). Furthermore, large-scale events, such as Guangzhou Asian Games in 2010, Shanghai World Expo in 2010 (Dogru 2016), and the Beijing Olympics in 2018 have triggered China's hospitality industry into the golden age of development such as the birth and expansion of economic chain hotel.

According to the statistics from China Business Industry Research Institute (2021), the total number of domestic tourists in China increased from 2.6 billion to 6.01 billion between 2011 to 2019, with a compound annual growth rate of 10.82% during the period, while the overall number of hotels in China has been increasing year by year. In 2019, the number of hotels was 884,000, including local and foreign properties, individual and chain hotels. And the market size of China's hospitality industry was CNY 538.6 billion (approximately 83.5 billion USD) based on the statistics from Qianzhan Industrial Research Institute (2019). However, the hospitality industry's service quality, operation level, and management development have not been improved effectively in China during the past 30 years. In effect, the fundamental reason is that China's hospitality industry is facing a long-term "talent shortage" situation severely, especially for younger hoteliers who have become the major workforce nowadays left the industry constantly. In other words, there is a considerable gap between younger hoteliers' supply and demand that needs to be addressed in China's hospitality industry.

2.3. The Impact of COVID-19 on China's Hospitality Industry

China has been the first country affected by COVID-19 (Hao, Xiao and Chon 2020), which means its hospitality industry has encountered formidable challenges such as rapidly decreasing tourists due to traveling bans and insecure employees because of uncertain recovery timing. According to China Hospitality Association (2020), China's hospitality industry lost more than US$9.44 billion in revenue with the closure of 74.29% of hotels for an average period of nearly one month from January to February 2020. For instance, the largest domestic brand named Jinjiang International in China, as the second-largest hotel group in the world reported a net loss of approximately US$24.1 million in the first quarter of 2020 (Zhang 2020). Meanwhile, InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG) temporarily closed 160 out of 470 hotels in China during February 2020 as its occupancy rate dramatically declined by 90% (Sun 2020).

In effect, the pandemic further destroyed many hoteliers' confidence as some of them encountered unpaid leave, so they started to consider whether the hospitality industry was worth staying in. Although the overall hospitality market began witnessing positive signs in 2021 and a loosening of traveling regulations after vaccination, staff who realized the pandemic might come back started to rethink their career path as recovery remains uncertain, especially for the international market. In consequence, many hoteliers, especially post-90s talents who experienced salary reduction and career uncertainty, might exit as the future of staying in the industry is not promising for them. To be specific, the recurrence of COVID-19 is more likely to slow down the expansion of the hospitality market, which might result in a shrinking industry profit and staff reduction. Hence, those post-90s would rather leave voluntarily than getting laid off, which may negatively affect their credibility in getting their next jobs. As a result, the shortage of younger employees has become the intractable problem China's hospitality industry needs to solve in the coming years.

2.4. Turnover Situation in China's Hospitality Industries

According to the statistics from China Hotel Management Corporation (Group)'s annual development report (2020), the turnover rate of entry-level employees exceeded 20% in the overall hospitality industry, And the turnover rate of middle and senior managers was below 10%, whereas the usual staff turnover rate from both international and local luxury hotels was as high as 26.9%. Meanwhile, the turnover rate of general managers of mid-range hotels was significantly higher than that of high-end and luxury hotels. In China, most post-90s hoteliers are mid-level supervisors and entry-level employees, so the high turnover phenomenon of younger talents has become a more serious concern in the industry. Hence, the current research has analyzed determining factors of their exit decisions in the following section.

Additionally, more than 40% of hotels in China presented Food & Beverage (42.7%), Front Office (30.6%), and Housekeeping (16.1%) as the top 3 departments where existed the most frequent turnover phenomenon based on the figures from Meadin Academy (2017). Moreover, the turnover rate of hotel management trainees has decreased from 20% to 10% in 2019, whereas hotel interns' turnover situation remains negative. Less than 5% of interns were considering staying after their internship (Wu and Qi 2020). Instead of exiting the industry immediately, many post-90s hoteliers had remained in the industry for several years before they left. Then they changed their careers after they had accumulated adequate working experience. Therefore, the research has discussed reasons behind their leaving decisions as they could have developed themselves in the industry.

The hospitality industry is a labor-intensive industry in China, the employee turnover rate is notably high. Meanwhile, fast personnel flow might substantially increase hotels' recruitment and training costs, and directly affect their financial performance and sustainable development in the future. In general, there is at least 1 month's recruitment period, 3 months' probation period, and 6 months' integration period after losing a talent (PR Newswire 2020). On the one hand, the replacement cost of finding new recruits after an employee resigns reaches up to 150% of the annual salary of the resigned employee, and the cost is even higher if management-level members leave (PR Newswire 2020). Hence, the above labor cost is more likely to be saved if HR professionals could realize the majority of the turnover group, post-90s employees' exit decisions that the current research addressed. On the other hand, one employee's exit is able to result in approximately three employees for generating the idea of leaving. Specifically, 60% of employees are going to look for a new job if the current employee turnover rate is 20% (PR Newswire 2020). In other words, fewer hoteliers will generate an idea of leaving if post-90s staff as a significant percentage of employee turnover segment decide to stay longer in the industry.

2.5. Exit Decisions of Chinese Hoteliers

Any employee demission involves an evident attribute-a decision to exit. Specifically, voluntary turnover, involuntary turnover, temporary exit, and top management turnover as four significant exit decisions types (Klotz et al. 2021) are formed to analyze further employees' leaving intention. Hence, this research mainly discusses Chinese 'post-90s' hoteliers who voluntarily exit their hospitality jobs, moving their careers toward another field. In other words, factors that affect those younger talents to quit China's hospitality industry have always been particularly significant. In contrast, the previous studies emphasized either Generation Y or Generation Z without refining the 'post-90s' generation as an overlapping group between them. In other words, most analyses of exiting decisions of China's hoteliers demonstrated below mainly represent related discussion concerning Gen Y and Gen Z rather than 'post-90s', which the research has concentrated on the particular generation for exploring their leaving decisions and career transitions.

2.5.1. Low Professional Identity within China's Hospitality Industry

Until now, researchers have typically acknowledged that professional identity (PI) refers to individual and situational aspects (Wang et al. 2010). The personal perspective indicates personal beliefs such as self-affirmation of a particular profession. In contrast, the situational philosophy stresses the evaluation from the public or the society for a specific occupation (Peng and Li 2019). On the one hand, the individual aspect means people's self-judgment in terms of being valued or not in a job instead of caring about others' opinions. On the other hand, the situational perspective implies people pay more attention to others' judgment or the social impression towards their jobs, so their working values are more likely to be given by the public and society rather than themselves. For instance, hoteliers who believe their work is worth as much as others who work in another industry have a high professional identity based on individual perspectives. Meanwhile, employees of developed countries who work in the hospitality industry are highly respected with higher social status (Khantimirov and Karande 2018), which presents a high professional identity in terms of situational perspective.

However, China's hospitality industry as part of the service sector initially impressed the public with low-skilled and low-threshold to entry due to the influence of the deep-rooted Confucianism concept (Qin 2019). Specifically, the public in China usually holds an adverse view of hospitality professionals who is equivalent to serving others doing manual work without presenting any technical value. As identified by former scholars, the social impression of hospitality careers in China has been linked apparently with low social status (Hung 2013), which has led to the high turnover rate in China's hospitality industry. Therefore, the low professional identity of China's hospitality industry from the situational aspect might affect talents to leave, especially for those employees who hold traditional opinions of the industry. Consequently, service providers will be negatively affected by this environment that they decide to leave such an embarrassing and disrespectful situation, especially when compared to other jobs such as governmental officials, teachers and doctors in China (Cheng et al. 2015). Nevertheless, there is almost no research exploring the professional identity of Chinese post-90s hoteliers as the representative of self-centered employees (Dinnell 2007) who are concerned more about their personal feelings when discussing professional identity in terms of individual aspect. In other words, younger Chinese hoteliers might not consider low professional identity based on the situational aspect as the trigger to exit the industry. Hence, the first sub research question is given by the above analysis as below:

1. What effect does professional identity have on Chinese post-90s hoteliers who decided to exit the industry?

2.5.2. Unattractive Salary Situation within China's Hospitality Industry

The reality of China's hospitality industry has always been representative of the low salary industry (Qin 2019), especially the entry-level employees who bear the heaviest work with earning the lowest wage. In effect, the average monthly salary of hospitality employees is still at a low level compared with other industries (PR Newswire 2020). From the perspective of different classes of hotels, the monthly salary levels of a luxury hotel are generally higher than the industry's average. However, it has been found that since 2015 the monthly salary level of the entry-level employees has not shown a significant increase, which underlying the situation that most of the basic-level hoteliers' current earnings remained almost the same as in 2015. Furthermore, China's Consumer Price Index as an indicator that reflects price changes of consumer goods and services commonly purchased by households (Fernando 2022) showed a 17.4% rise in recent years based on the figure from the China National Bureau of Statistics (2020). Therefore, post-90s hoteliers, as the major workforce in the industry, have been experiencing a dilemma between low salaries and high living costs, which is more likely to trigger their exit intentions.

Specifically, for grassroots employees, hospitality companies in China with a monthly salary of 2,501-3,500 CNY (approximately 388 to 543 USD) accounted for 62%. Meanwhile, hotels with a monthly salary of 4,001 CNY (approximately 621 USD) and above" accounted for only 6%. And there was still 0.8% of primary-level hotel staff living with a monthly salary of less than 2,000 CNY (approximately 310 USD) before tax in 2019 compared to 22% of that proportion in 2015 (Wu and Qi 2020). Therefore, the lasting presence of low salaries is considered as the most determining factor that hoteliers are quitting China's hospitality industry on a general basis. Moreover, the unattractive salary is less likely to recruit high-quality professionals, which aggravates the unfavorable situation of a labor shortage resulting from forming a vicious circle (Qin 2020).

However, previous research rarely mentioned the post-90s generation as the primary beneficiary of the 'one-child' policy (Warner and Zhu 2018) who enjoy a comfortable life without worrying about having no money, so that they might be less likely to be concerned about unattractive salary level as their exit decisions. Besides, most previous studies have mainly targeted the salary of basic-level employees in the hospitality industry. In contrast, employees' salary at the supervisory and managerial level is rarely mentioned due to unequal distribution (Casado-díaz and Simon 2016) and non-transparent features. Hence, wage differences in the hospitality industry might negatively affect Chinese younger hoteliers' leaving intentions, which leads to the second sub research question is as below:

2. What effect does the salary situation have on Chinese post-90s hoteliers who decided to exit the industry?

2.5.3. Particular Supervisory Support within China's Hospitality Industry

Supervisory support is defined as "the level to which employees acknowledge that their managers offer valuable support and encouragement based on concerns and working performances of employees (Kang et al. 2014 p. 71)". Employees are more probable to support their leaders and to achieve organizational goals wholeheartedly when their superiors are trustworthy (Kang et al., 2014). According to recent hospitality findings, supervisory support has played an essential role in the work satisfaction and burnout of hoteliers in China (Chen et al. 2012). Furthermore, Bandura (1999) states self-efficacy refers to the confidence of people to fulfill the task, while their confidence is more likely to be developed through perceived supervisory support at the workplace (Silbert 2005). Thus, supervisory support as a latent source of self-efficacy "instills a spirit of self-confidence among the employees (Afzal et al. 2019 p.2)". Conversely, employees who do not receive the necessary support from their supervisors could consider individuals with lower self-efficacy levels, which means they are less likely to

build up self-confidence when working in a hostile work environment. In consequence, they are prone to generating the idea of leaving when supervisory support is absent.

Meanwhile, the interpersonal relationship between superiors and subordinates is the core part of supervisory support, especially in Chinese society; each employee generally connects themselves with their direct leaders in the relation-based cultural context (Li, Duverger and Yu 2018). Additionally, Chinese employees consider relationships not only focus on job relations with their bosses but also personal relations beyond a working relationship. In effect, it is widely recognized that employees are encouraged to perform their roles proactively after they finish the work that day, which might mean staff who are not willing to behave in that way are less likely to be promoted by their leaders. In other words, Chinese managers may consider those 'show-off' subordinates because they are more inclined to choose the one they are more familiar with.

Unlike their predecessors, many Chinese post-90s cannot manage their social relationships (Wey Smola and Sutton 2002) as they are the generation of individualism and egocentrism, which implies they are not fond of socializing. In other words, they desire to follow western working values such as avoiding close relationships with their colleagues (Stone 2019) as they are tired of personnel struggle or "office politics." Hence, post-90s is possible to quit this environment. Meanwhile, the hospitality business as an industry in China that works closely with people, employees who are unable to perform strong interpersonal communication abilities might lose an advantage to compete with others. However, the majority of previous researches rarely involved this factor which highlighted the embodiment of China's supervisory relationship in the post-90s generation. Hence, the third sub research question is elicited as below:

3. What effect does supervisory support have on Chinese post-90s hoteliers who decided to exit the industry?

2.5.4. Limited Organizational Support Within China's Hospitality Industry

Career development as the lifelong process focuses on managing learning, work-life balance, and transitions towards pursuing an individually preferred future (Gyansah and Guantai 2018). Specifically, career development involves achieving objective career success such as promotion (Wang 2013), and subjective career success such as personal experiences of job satisfaction (Stumpf and Tymon 2012). In order to advance employees' both objective and subjective career success (Ng et al. 2005), certain organizational support for career advancement is necessary to attract qualified employees (Kong, Cheung and Song 2011). When career development (Iverson and Deery 1997) is sufficiently promising, employees are more likely to stay longer in one industry instead of considering to exit the current job. Conversely, insufficient organizational support may pose a risk on employees' turnover decisions as their career development in that organization is less likely to be guaranteed.

However, a few previous surveys reveal employees experienced limited professional development in China's hospitality industry (Zhang, Cai and Liu 2002; Hai-yan and Baum 2006) because of uncertain promotion opportunities. Since the industry's unfavorable situation of career development has existed, there were almost no qualitative researches to analyze detailed factors behind the phenomenon. Compared with previous generations, China's post-90s generation has grown up under the era of big data and informatization. Hence, their career development closely interrelates career mobility which refers to employees who prefer movement between positions within an organization or switching jobs between different organizations as complete career change (Sicherman and Galor 1990). In other words, younger talents have more career choices than their predecessors, because their natural curiosity and personalities of pursuing challenges stop them from staying in the same job for the rest of their lives. Hence, the fourth sub research question is shaped as below:

4. What effect does or organizational support have on Chinese post-90s hoteliers who decided to exit the industry?

2.6. Career Change

Career change refers to the individual's transition and adaptability to a new career (Zopiatis and Theocharous 2020). Based on analyzing employees' exit decisions, if employees cannot achieve their career pursuit within a certain industry, it is more likely to trigger their intentions of undertaking a career in other industries that could fulfill their career expectations. Hence, low professional identity, unattractive salary situation, non-effective supervisory, and organizational support as significant factors might affect those employees to exit the previous industry. In other words, those aspects mentioned above may be more likely to limit their career development, so they change their careers in a different occupation category or field when a competitive job opportunity appears.

In effect, the phenomenon of labor mobility in the hospitality industry means perpetual employment is almost impossible to happen (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom 2005). Unlike their predecessors who have stayed in one job for their whole life, younger hospitality professionals in China are not afraid of changing their careers from time to time because they consider it as an added-experience choice (Kilber, Barclay and Ohmer 2014). Therefore, post-90s are eager to switch their careers, including physical mobility such as career transitions across cities and countries, and psychological mobility such as cognitive capacity transitions (Kost, Fieseler and Wong 2020).

To be specific, every individual who desires to change career after exiting from their current industries must contend with two pivotal factors, which are competency factor such as know-how knowledge and abilities (DeFillippi and Arth 1994), and psychological factors including attractiveness (how appealing that certain position is) and achievability (transition feasibility based on their skills already possessed) (Gunz et al., 2007). Therefore, the current research further connects these two significant factors for exploring the relationship between exit decisions and career transitions of Chinese post-90s hoteliers. In effect, the skill profiles of hospitality positions overlap with jobs from other industries such as information technology, business/finance, and education industries (Huang and Baker 2021) have been proved. Hence, hoteliers who are adept at communicating effectively and dealing with various people-related complaints efficiently are more likely to make a positive career move towards another industry. In other words, those hoteliers who decided to make a career move have the professional and relevant working ability as a competency factor to fulfill their career transition (achievability) when another job is more attractive to them (attractiveness).

Given the above, the exit decisions of Chinese post-90s hoteliers might trigger their determination to transition their careers completely and even lead to a direct career change based on the previous analysis. Consequently, the rapid outflow of younger talents poses a tremendous risk in the hospitality industry. Hence, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview of 15 Chinese post-90s who used to work in the hospitality industry to investigate their exit decisions in detail and further explore the relationship between exit decisions and career change in China's hospitality industry. In other words, the following sector explains the methodology of the research in order to present the research's philosophy, approach, and sampling method in detail.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

The research aimed to address significant factors that affected Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions and career change in order to maintain them by implementing more reasonable HR

practices. Thereby, it could improve the situation of Chinese post-90's talent shortage within the hospitality industry, which might positively affect the industry's overall performance. Furthermore, the first primary objective was to explore the underlying relationship between Chinese post-90's' exit decisions and career change based on their particular characteristics. And the second objective was to suggest feasible and personalized HR strategies and policies for maintaining younger hospitality talents in China. Hence, the previous four sub-questions were highlighted to further explore those factors by conducting semi-structured interviews, which elicited the general question of the research was to identify determining factors that affected Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the hospitality industry.

3.2. Research Philosophy and Research Approach

Therefore, the research philosophy of this research was interpretivism which represented more abundant interpretations and insights (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) were generated in the research. In other words, the research explored more specific factors that triggered Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions, which aroused their intentions of changing careers completely. Meanwhile, the research focused on interviewees' empirical experiences, which were based on their recollections and explanations of those experiences (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). Hence, an empathetic stance was applied accordingly to explore the relationship between exit decisions and career change of previous Chinese post-90s hoteliers. At the same time, the researcher's personal experiences within the hospitality industry were blended into the research to develop the research's value further.

As exploratory research, it discovered a causal phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) about employees' exit decisions and career change according to the perspective of Chinese post-90s in the hospitality industry. In other words, the research explored the particular insights of previous Chinese post-90s hoteliers' actual leaving reasons based on their unique working values. Then the findings and results of the research could conduce to build up correspondent HR practices to maintain those younger employees and positively affect the current labor shortage situation in China's hospitality industry.

The research commenced with an inductive approach to theory development (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016), which concentrated on collecting primary data by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore why Chinese post-90s employees decided to leave the hospitality industry completely. And then has built theories based on the findings of those interviews after comparing differences between literature review and actual results, which might contribute to setting up a suitable talent management structure and more attractive HR policies for maintaining younger Chinese hospitality professionals. Specifically, how low professional identity, unattractive salary situation, absent particular supervisory and organizational support affected either positively or negatively Chinese post-90 hoteliers' leaving intentions, which could be the main reasons that they have changed their careers into other industries. Besides, the inductive approach was able to develop a surprising conclusion of the research based on combining theories from literature review into the findings of data as new discoveries may exist. For example, low professional identity had no longer affected Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions when they were asked the question.

3.3. Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

Non-probability sampling as a sampling technique involving subjective judgment (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) applied to the research, because non-probability sampling was more likely to answer the research questions further and presented more valuable insights in terms of suggesting meaningful talent management and HR practices. Besides, this sampling technique was more time-saving and cost-effective compared to the probability sampling, which was consistent with the research when participants needed to be found easily in a limited time. Specifically, this research adopted purposive sampling to concentrate on selected

interviewees who have similar personalities. Moreover, they could express personal opinions and share individual experiences in a reflective manner (Etikan et al. 2016). Therefore, homogenous sampling with a sample size of 15 (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) was applied to focus on China's post-90s hoteliers for exploring their exit decisions in connection with their career transitions.

Hence, the methodological choice of this research was the mono method, which emphasized using a single data collection technique, especially non-numeric data collection (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) to specifically explore the connection between Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions and career transitions. Additionally, the correlation between their exit reasons and professional identity, salary concern, supervisory and organizational support further reflected their determinations of considering a career change as an alternative when the above factors may become unsatisfied in the hospitality industry. Meanwhile, the research was less likely to record the constant change for an unlimited time as it was based on an academic course which was time-constrained (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).

Semi-structured interview was applied for this research to collect primary data, As the type of non-standardized interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016), a list of themes about doubts based on the previous literature reviews was covered. Furthermore, questions such as "how do you think low professional identity is related to your exit decision?" were included. In effect, 15 interviewees who mentioned certain perspectives have presented more surprising and valuable results for the subsequent findings. Additionally, 15 respondents were Chinese post-90s who used to work within the hospitality industry for an average of 3.8 years. Moreover, they have decided to transform their careers into other industries such as education, the Internet, and luxury-goods industries. Among all interviewees, five male and ten female respondents born between 1990-1999 (Li and Lu 2014) in China were selected regardless of educational background and growth environment. Meanwhile, all respondents were asked to explain their leaving decisions in detail, including answering the above questions that directly or indirectly affect their thoughts of career transition.

In addition to the previous literature review, the researcher's prior work experiences in China's hospitality industry were able to organize rational semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, which has promoted credibility based on the knowledgeable level of the research topic (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). As it was unnecessary to take cultural differences into consideration when 15 respondents are Chinese, the researcher translated every interview question into Mandarin in advance to avoid language barriers, contributing to maximizing the validity of the research. Nevertheless, telephone interviews were adopted in this research because of the COVID-19 situation and the regional diversity of involved respondents, which also meant the difficulty of observing their facial expressions that might reflect more valuable emotions.

The data were analyzed by applying a thematic analysis approach based on the NVivo software to assist in the coding and comparing the responses. After re-reading the transcripts, three major themes were developed by using inductive coding to capture why Chinese post-90s hoteliers left the hospitality industry and changed their careers completely. Respectively, those three themes were personal factors, organizational factors, and job-related factors (Sun and Yun 2021). Take organizational factors as an example, the researcher coded sentences from interviewees who mentioned any word related to organizational support or supervisory support as sub-themes and analyzed if those references affected their exit decisions. Specifically, interviewees' sentences such as "I left the hospitality industry because I never got emotional support from my managers" could be included under the theme of organizational factors. In effect, the process of interpreting the responses aimed at classifying similar texts into particular categories, called nodes (Zopiatis and Theocharous 2020), which connected each type for developing a theoretical construction of Chinese post-90s hoteliers who left the

industry voluntarily and completely. In other words, selective coding was based on those nodes, which assisted the researcher in discovering the internal relationships between exit decisions and career change of Chinese post-90s hoteliers.

Specifically, there were sub-themes under three major themes, which were developed to combine all interviewees' transcriptions with relevant theories. For instance, personal factors as the first theme were extended to personal and social professional identity, and the theme of organizational factors was expanded into supervisory support and organizational support. Meanwhile, job-related factors were involved with salary concerns, such as wages differences and salary increments. Hence, Figure 1 shows the world cloud of data that emphasized the most frequent words 15 interviewees mentioned, which indicated their concerns when they decided to leave China's hospitality industry completely. From the below figure, a phrase such as "development," "career," "promotion," and "salary" was highlighted obviously, which indicated those post-90s' potential concerns when they decided to change their career directions after exiting the hospitality industry.

Figure 1. Word could by NVivo software

To summarize, Figure 2 visualizes the results of 15 previous Chinese post-90s hoteliers who considered organizational factors such as organizational and supervisory support were more significant factors affecting their exit decisions than job-related factors such as salary concern and personal factors such as professional identity.

Figure 2. Node hierarchy diagram by NVivo software

All interviewees participated in this research according to informed consent, so they were well-informed about the purpose of this research. Moreover, they were able to share any viewpoint without being forced. Additionally, 15 respondents acknowledged that they participated in the research voluntarily, and all participants were engaged in the whole interview even though they were allowed to exit at any stage. However, some potentially sensitive expressions such as mean superiors and miserable wages appeared during interviews, which evoked respondents' emotional reactions. Therefore, the researcher tried to avert those expressions and to be as objective as possible. Besides, 15 participants' privacy and anonymity were ensured, while any collected data during the process of every interview would not disclose to outsiders. At the same time, the private information of 15 interviewees and their direct narrations to the research would never be shared with the public, because this research was formed strictly based on integrity.

Furthermore, telephone interviews were adopted in the research as the outbreak of COVID-19 and various living locations of involved interviewees. Meanwhile, audio-recording of each participant's interview was allowed to be adopted after getting permission from them, ensuring the accuracy and unbiased (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) of collected data. Unlike face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews could not capture non-verbal cues such as body language (DeFranzo 2021), which might lose some findings that could further explore interviewees' actual reactions accordingly.

4. Results and Analysis

Table 1. Interviewees' profile

Interviewee	Gender	Years of employment prior to career change	Year of career change	Employment level prior to career change	Current industry
1	F	2	2021	Entry level	Government sector
2	M	3	2019	Entry level	Internet company
3	M	5	2021	Entry level	Freelance
4	M	3.5	2019	Entry level	Customer service
5	F	5	2021	Supervisory level	Education
6	F	5	2021	Entry-level	Education
7	M	3	2020	Entry-level	Real estate
8	F	5	2021	Supervisory level	Foreign trade
9	F	4.5	2021	Supervisory level	Freelance
10	F	5.5	2020	Supervisory level	Real estate
11	F	3.5	2020	Supervisory level	Education
12	M	2	2019	Entry-level	Self Media
13	F	2.5	2018	Entry-level	Foreign trade
14	F	3	2018	Entry-level	Consultancy
15	F	6	2021	Supervisory level	Luxury goods

In order to understand why and what factors led to Chinese post-90s hoteliers' left the hospitality industry voluntarily while they have changed their careers into another industry

instead, a total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted to achieve the purposes of the research. Among the below 15 post-90s interviewees, all of them worked in China's hospitality industry for an average of 3.9 years. Table 1 presents the general profile of the participants based on their genders, years of employment prior to career change, year of change, and current industry.

Agreeing with Sun and Yun's (2021) findings, in the analysis three categories were identified as the major factors that affect employees' exit decisions: personal factors such as people's work values and beliefs, job-related factors such as employee remuneration and benefits, and organizational factors such as leaders' management style and supervisory support.

4.1. Personal Factor: Professional Identity

Interviewees were asked to clarify whether professional identity was a determining reason to be considered when they intended to leave the hospitality industry completely. More than half of respondents said they understood that they were less likely to receive social recognition if they decided to be hoteliers, because Chinese hoteliers with low social status as the public's impression exist since they have entered the industry. Nevertheless, it never affected them as they believed the profession, they chose was worth doing more than people think, and most of them stayed in the hospitality industry because of their personal interests. Meanwhile, they never considered low professional identity based on the situational perspective of professional identity as a factor, which could trigger their leaving intentions. Instead of being affected by social and public prejudice, they only followed their own judgments if they believed they were valuable to provide professional service to customers. In other words, they thought they had got self-identity personally, which could be linked to the personal perspective of professional identity. Specifically, indicative comments included:

'Maybe according to the traditional concept, a hotelier is the kind of a servant in China, only a few people may give you a certain amount of respect. However, it does not affect me as I think this is something within my expectations". (Interviewee 2)

"Personally speaking, this does not have a great impact on me, because I do not care much about how others view my career, as long as I think it is worth doing." (Interviewee 5)

"Because I like working in the hospitality industry very much, I do not care what others think of me. Although my family members sometimes do not understand me, it does not change my original intention". (Interviewee 7)

Hence, the above statements from interviewees reflected they never left the hospitality industry due to its low social status in the society or negative judgments from the public, therefore their decisions to stay or leave the hospitality industry was not due to low professional identity as Hung (2013) found in his research. In the analysis it was found that individuals were less likely to leave if their personal beliefs and motives could be fulfilled in terms of self-recognition. For instance, two of the respondents defended their roles in the hospitality industry because they believed they used to offer the similar or even higher work value than other respectable professions such as attorney and teacher to others, which reflected as below:

"With economic development of the whole society, most industries such as the sales industry, industrial company or financial sector in the future are serviced-related. Therefore, I do not think that hospitality industry as the part of the service industry is just to serve others, but the service itself can bring a lot of value-added effects to the enterprise". (Interviewee 4)

"I think the industry itself accounts for the largest proportion of social work. I do not think there is any reason to be looked down upon by others because compared to other office jobs, we deal with more complicated things than they do, such as the ability to handle complaints. Thus, I do not think it is necessary to say that it is inferior due to lower income than other jobs like doctors and lawyers in China." (Interviewee 13)

From the above analysis and responses, some participants reflected their personal and social aspects of professional identity. On the one hand, Tsakissiris (2015) states that professional identity is built based on an individual's unique values, beliefs, and personal experiences that people define themselves. On the other hand, professional identity describes an "individual's identification with social groups to which one belongs by virtue of one's job (Mancini et al. 2015 p. 141)". In effect, previous researchers claimed, "professional identity results from a combination of personal and social factors (Wang et al. 2020 p.11)". Therefore, professional identity can be divided into personal professional identity and social professional identity (Wang et al. 2020). Specifically, some respondents mentioned their own perceptions of the hospitality industry as an indispensable presence in society, while they believed they offered equivalent or even more meaningful value than others who worked in a different industry. Hence, they might perceive personal professional identity as an underlying factor that affected their exit decision.

Meanwhile, they rarely considered social professional identity as a necessary factor that could trigger their leaving intentions. Unlike the previous researches, which mainly emphasized low social status as the reflection of social professional identity that negatively affected hoteliers' exit decisions, the current research indicated there was no such an effect on those interviewees when they decided to quit. In other words, they never left the industry due to negative judgments from the public, such as low social status in society, and they might exit the industry once they feel they could not realize their self-value, such as personal interests in the industry. Although Chinese post-90s are different from the previous generations who showed much concern about others' opinions when they made a career decision, most younger employees are more likely to follow their own will. Instead of being affected by the social professional identity, their exit decisions are more likely to be influenced if their personal professional identity is not achieved. Therefore, the first sub-research question regarding what effects professional identity has on Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the industry was explored in the above two aspects.

4.2.   Job-related Factor: Salary Concern

In effect, most people regarded salary concern as the determining reason causing voluntary employee turnover (Han 2020), especially in the hospitality industry where salary is less competitive than other industries, hoteliers have been widely accepted as a low-skilled occupation (Casado-díaz and Simon 2016). At the same time, younger hoteliers with higher educational backgrounds who entered the industry still could not avoid facing the above situation. However, one third of respondents perceived starting salary was not their primary concern as they cared more about building a career than salary level. Besides, they claimed the salary increment between the entry-level and supervisor was unapparent, while the space of salary increment was too limited during the past years, which were significant reasons that they decided to quit:

"I totally understand the salary is not attractive, but I may not tolerate that rising prices of commodities with unchanged salary in these years." (Interviewee 2) (Interviewee 5)

"In recent years, all kinds of industries have developed, their wages have been rising at the basic level, but the salary in the hotel industry has not changed much." (Interviewee 2)

"Compare with other industries, the space of salary increment in the hospitality industry is minimal." (Interviewee 1) (Interviewee 14)

"The supervisor's salary is not higher than that of ordinary employees. However, the work we do is much heavier than our previous roles".

(Interviewee 1) (Interviewee 3)

"I think it has nothing to do with salary. I mainly consider it from the aspect of career planning". (Interviewee 7)

"Salary is not an important factor for me, and I just do not want to be here for 8 or 10 years as a supervisor". (Interviewee 13)

"Unless you are doing business, you may make a million dollars a year. Otherwise, it is really hard to make money these days, no matter what industry you are in. Thus, I left mainly because I did not know how to control my job towards the direction I want". (Interviewee 14)

In effect, Dobre (2013) argues that salaries only motivate employees to stay within an organization when they still feel financial insecurity and instability, whereas the above interviewees who were born in the era of material abundance experienced numerous financial benefits from the "one-child" policy. Therefore, most of them paid less attention to pursuing money blindly but caring career planning and development for achieving their self-value. However, they were unable to fulfill career advancement in the hospitality industry according to the following analysis, so they decided to leave and change their careers in the end.

Based on the expectancy theory (Mullins 1995), employees are more likely to leave an organization if a contradiction existed between their expected and actual value (Cheng and Brown 1998). Obviously, most of the above respondents felt undervalued after comparing themselves either with other colleagues or employees in other industries due to limited salary increments within the industry. Hence, the unbalanced situation between those post-90s hoteliers and the reality of the industry significantly contributed to their exit decisions, because their actual compensations were inconsistent with their expectations in terms of work value they provided to the industry.

Rather than caring about low salary level in the industry, a third of the interviewees reflected their feelings of unfairness when talked about salary concern. Specifically, they indicated their effort was not proportional to their return such as completing extra tasks without additional wages and scarifying normal day-offs without any compensation. Besides, some respondents also mentioned internal promotion salary is limited to a certain percentage because of relevant HR policies, whereas the salary of external candidates including expatriates in the same level was always higher than that of internal employees. Furthermore, a few respondents who received the master degree abroad expected more from their desired careers as they invested a lot, but the reality of China's hospitality industry is to earn the same salary as their coworkers who gained only low academic qualifications such as high school degree, which indeed disappointed them to keep staying in the industry:

"Sometimes external candidates are more likely to earn 10%-15% higher salary than me if we were in a similar position, especially for those expatriates who can earn much more than us but do the less work". (Interviewee 5)

"There is a salary cap for internal promotions, but there is no such requirement for external hires. If external candidates have a high salary before joining a new hotel, they are able to earn 5-10%

more than the internal employee. But internally promoted employees, who are more loyal, are paid less than external employees because of salary increase limit, while both of them do the same work". (Interviewee 8)

"I think what you put in is out of proportion to what you get back in this industry". (Interviewee 1) (Interviewee 8) (Interviewee 10) (Interviewee 12) (Interviewee 13)

"In China, most hoteliers' educational background is low, and even some people did not graduate from high school. There are many differences in quality and level between those who graduated from overseas colleges and those with lower academic backgrounds. Then, when their salary is higher than yours in the same position, I cannot accept it as I spent several hundred thousand dollars studying abroad". (Interviewee 1) (Interviewee 8) (Interviewee 12)

"I left because I have been taking responsibility for others sometimes, which does not mean that every time it happens, it will become my job, so I think it's not fair to me, Besides, I don't have to go back to work on my days off after I changed my career". (Interviewee 15)

The above examples from respondents mentioned the core of salary concern was based on their unrealized career expectations, which highlight wage differences (Casado-díaz and Simon 2016) between employees in the same level, especially for middle management staff who experienced pay inequality in China's hospitality industry as a pretty common phenomenon. Specifically, pay inequality involves the salary gap between local employees and expatriates and between those well-educated employees and lower academic colleagues, which intensified their leaving intentions in the end. As the spoiled generation who have been over-protected after they were born, the long-standing situation of what they gained was not proportional to what they paid in China's hospitality industry posed a potential risk to maintain younger talents as they were unable to tolerate these unfair conditions mentioned above.

Moreover, Alice and Gamor (2021 p.2) state that "relevant evidence suggests that perceived unfairness of the disparity in compensation" can cause exiting decisions (Leung et al. 2011). Therefore, those post-90s participants showed their top considerations regarding salary increment space and wages differences rather than the basic salary itself. Specifically, they cared about whether the future of China's hospitality industry is positive enough to invest themselves in because the employee salary did not show apparent growth during the past five years when the living expense has been rising rapidly, while other industries such as the internet and media industries have experienced substantial salary increases in China. Meanwhile, many hoteliers who were passionate about working in the industry changed their careers into another professional mainly due to inequality between their input and output from tangible aspects such as limited salary increment and intangible aspects such as unfair feelings of wage differences, which supported Casado-díaz and Simon's (2016) finding regarding salary differences in the hospitality industry. Hence, the second sub-research question regarding what effects salary concern has on Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the industry was analyzed in the above perspectives.

4.3. Organizational Factors

4.3.1. Supervisory Support

The interviewees were asked if supervisor support was an essential factor to be concerned about when they exited the hospitality industry, thirteen out of the fifteen participants considered supportive leaders were major roles who directly influenced their decisions to stay in the hospitality industry. Specifically, they felt supportive managers were not only someone who could help them for career advancement but role models who would indirectly affect them to be a more valuable person. According to Ibrahim, Sun and Karatepe (2018), supervisory support is a significant factor that stimulates employees' personal ability to perform better at

work, while self-efficacy as an essential individual competence refers to one's belief to behave positively. Hence, adequate supervisor support from leaders is more likely to build higher self-efficacy in employees and lower their tendency to exit (Shahpouri, Namdari and Abedi 2016). Especially for the Chinese post-90s generation, positive supervisor support has played a determining role in improving individuals' working performances and assisting them to boost personal confidence at work.

However, two-thirds of respondents admitted their leaders could not provide efficient supervisorial support, and they were unlikely to be recognized by their leaders since most leaders have not played a role in encouraging them. According to Pygmalion leadership, employees' self-efficacy could be maximized when they are able to receive the positive encouragement and appreciation of a leader based on sharing the experience with his or her team members (Yu et al. 2020). On the contrary, interviewees decided to exit the industry as the above expectation was impossible to achieve, which indicated that absent supervisory support might generate lower self-efficacy, which probably resulted in a greater risk of changing their careers completely.

What's worse, they believed some managers could not even be considered good leaders because they lacked the power to communicate with their subordinates actively and effectively. In effect, it is a common phenomenon in China's hospitality industry as many senior practitioners such as directors who received education were relatively low, especially compared with some post-90s hoteliers who have received advanced education abroad. Therefore, it was more likely to cause a huge communication gap between them in terms of value conflicts and generational differences, which affected their confidence to stay longer in the hospitality industry as below:

"I still remember that once my manager accused me in public because of what she thought was a mistake. Honestly speaking, empathy ability is very important, especially for those engaged in the service industry, whereas my manager did not have. Hence, most of the time I found it was difficult to find an appropriate way to ease such feelings, and I decided to leave".
(Interviewee 5)

"When a customer complained today, my supervisor did not support me but scolded me with the customer, which disappointed me a lot. Therefore, I chose to leave as I did not receive enough support, and I did not recognize the way my supervisor handled those situations." (Interviewee 5) (Interviewee 12)

"In fact, the leader is the main reason for me to leave as she always promises things that cannot be fulfilled such as possible promotion for you and so on, so I feel there is no motivation to work for". (Interviewee 8)

"I will stay if my manager tried to recommend me to get promoted or intend to help me grow by supporting my work". (Interviewee 9)

"My boss did not give me good career guidance or any emotional support as she only cared about results, especially I always have too much pressure from customers every day, so I felt my psychological health was completely ignored, which made me want to leave". (Interviewee 11)

"Do you expect a subordinate to have a positive career future when your managers only care if they can keep their jobs or not? As for me, I will not move forward if my managers are fearful of taking challenges". (Interviewee 13)

Some the above interviewees expressed their disappointments and frustrations when they could not be supported by their leaders, especially those managers who could not be role models of their staff. In effect, Sloan (2012) states the support from supervisors is more likely

to improve working conditions by relieving stress, which further lowers employees' intentions of exiting from an organization. In contrast, absent supervisor support could lead to a hostile working environment for employees, such as unrelieved mental pressure. Consequently, the respondents' self-efficacy mentioned above might be affected adversely, which affects their belief to stay longer in the industry. Therefore, behaviors from those supervisors played an essential part in affecting subordinates' voluntary turnover decisions (Afzal et al. 2019) because it is generally concerned that supervisors are mentors and role models of their employees who are knowledgeable enough to provide positive guidance and professional suggestions in the long run.

Specifically, employees are possible to be obsessed with negative situations such as unhealthy mental state including self-doubt and excessive anxiety when supervisors are not powerful or active enough to support their subordinates. As a result, those accumulated conflicts that cannot be solved over time might adversely affect the self-efficacy of employees who will be less likely to work effectively and passionately. As for those interviewees, the above unfavorable situations were difficult to recover in a short time even though they left the industry as it may take at least 90 days (Malerba 2016) to rebuild their self-confidence. Hence, most interviewees left the industry because of absent supervisory support, especially for those post-90 hoteliers as they were unable to get it from their direct leaders, which supported the findings of Shahpouri, Namdari and Abedi (2016) and Ibrahim, Sun and Karatepe (2018) in their researches that positive supervisory support as one of the essential factors could affect younger hoteliers' exit decisions.

Meanwhile, the interviewees were asked if the supervisory relationship could also affect their exit decisions as positive supervisor support reflects a strong supervisory relationship (Karpenko and Gidycz 2012). Most of the respondents emphasized their concerns about the significance of the supervisory relationship with superiors, which overwhelmingly determined their career advancement in the industry that ultimately influenced their leaving decisions. Specifically, 9 out of 15 respondents reflected that close supervisory relationships positively affected the speed of getting promotions. In contrast, individual working ability played a less significant role in achieving chances of career advancement if the supervisory relationship was disadvantaged between subordinates and superiors, which disappointed them at some point because their personal efforts at work seemed to be less meaningful, according to the below comments:

"For example, whether you can be promoted or not depends on your direct manager's cognition of the relationship between you two. If your boss recognizes you, then perhaps your ability does not meet the so-called requirement; he still can promote you within a short period. However, you may not get promoted even though you have reached the requirements of promotion because your relationship is not close enough". (Interviewee 9)

"In many cases, promotion often depends on how your boss thinks about you. It is a personal behavior, and they are more inclined to choose the one they think is better rather than judging who should be promoted based on the actual performance of this person". (Interviewee 10)

"I think a personal relationship with the superior is significant when working in a hotel. If you have a negative relationship with your boss or no personal relationship, I think you will not survive. For me, I left because the leader who recognized me resigned earlier than me, which I lost the chance to be promoted." (Interviewee 11)

"I think the domestic environment is like that; you cannot get promotion purely by personal efforts; it still needs your manager's direct help. However, I do not want to build any private with my supervisors when I do not like the way he or she manages the team." (Interviewee 12)

From the above interviewees' statements, the key of their promotions was based more on positive supervisory relationships with supervisors than personal efforts. In other words, they needed to spend more time managing and maintaining the relationship with supervisors even though they were capable enough to get the higher title based on their own operational capability. Once they could not keep a closer relationship with their supervisors, they were less likely to be supported for obtaining potential promotion opportunities. Hence, it showed that younger respondents were difficult to get promoted or recognized if they were not fond of building up social relations with their supervisors, which might negatively affect their motivation to remain within China's hospitality industry.

Unlike the previous generations who are keen on building social relations, most Chinese post-90s choose to avoid it as they are a generation that enjoys more personal spaces rather than building extra relationships with their supervisors in private. Although some younger talents were willing to manage the personal relationship with their leaders, they faced the risk that those superiors may leave first before they could promote their subordinates due to the high turnover phenomenon of this industry. In consequence, younger hoteliers exited the industry when they discovered that a close supervisory relationship was more important than personal efforts at work, especially when they met some managers they did not appreciate. Therefore, the third sub-research question regarding what effects supervisory support has on Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the industry was addressed in the above two aspects.

4.3.2. Organizational Support

Apart from the above factors, the vast majority of interviewees believed insufficient organizational support limited their career development in the hospitality industry, which caused their final decisions to change their career into another field even though they used to work as hoteliers for several years. Table 1 presented 2 participants who were still employed as entry-level employees after the five-year working in this industry, while almost half of the participants were unable to advance their careers after 2 or 3 years. Specifically, two-thirds of respondents claimed they encountered promotion dilemmas such as slow promotion path, unclear promotion mechanism, and uneasy personnel transfer between departments, which wore out their patience as below notes:

"Because I see that I need to be in the hospitality industry for five or six years before I can be promoted even if I am talented. Or if I want to be a supervisor, it will take at least two or three years. As for me, I do not think I have many ten or twenty years to waste here, so I decided to leave". (Interviewee 1)

"Promotion in this industry is relatively slow as there is no complete promotion system based on your performance. Unlike in foreign countries, employees can be promoted after completing some training and passing certain assessments, so I chose to leave". (Interviewee 4)

"But now there is an underlying problem if you want to transfer between departments in the industry. Specifically, the second-tier department is relatively stable, so you can only wait for such an opportunity to appear, whereas you never know when it will happen". (Interviewee 5)

"I feel like a promotion is an unknown thing as I do not know what time I can be promoted, so I have no motivation to work hard. Besides, no individual is allowed to take the initiative to recommend themselves for promotion through relevant channels as there is no standard of promotion to refer to. Therefore, promotion in the hospitality industry is challenging". (Interviewee 7)

"Promotion in this industry does not have a very clear mechanism, which means it does not say when you can be promoted. Moreover, promotion in this industry is a subjective judgment without referring to certain objective evaluation standards". (Interviewee 9)

"Since I had not been promoted in two years, I chose to leave." (Interviewee 12)

According to Foong-ming (2008), employees' decisions to stay or quit depend on whether they receive organizational support at work. In other words, organizations are required to support their employees with necessary resources, valuable tools, and the appropriate working environment to ensure their sustainable career development. Specifically, younger hoteliers need to be supported by resource sharing between departments and explicit promotion approaches to develop their careers in the long run. Unlike previous generations, the patience of China post-90s was more limited because of their personalities of desiring the short-term results, whereas ambiguous promotion paths without objective promotion terms further stimulated their leaving intentions. There is no precise promotion mechanism to define the particular career advancement structure.

At the same time, it is widely accepted that employees' performance mainly depends on subjective evaluations in the industry because its service nature means appraisals are based on opinions from customers and superiors. Additionally, the universal situation in which switching positions between departments is difficult to achieve because the operational functions of each department are different, and external replacement is popularized in the industry caused an unfavorable consequence that Chinese younger hoteliers are losing confidence in developing their careers as the future seems unpromising. Therefore, the above issues indicated that insufficient organizational support in China's hospitality industry negatively affected younger hoteliers' exit decisions.

Meanwhile, some interviewees stated they were less likely to learn more invaluable skills and knowledge when they stayed longer in this industry as what they used to obtain based only on a particular function. Therefore, it limited the possibility to broaden their career paths from a macro-perspective and weakened their competitiveness in the labor market, so they felt they were not improving themselves when they worked in the hospitality industry. In other words, they found out repetitive tasks occupied most of the time, and they kept inputting their knowledge instead of learning new skills. For example:

"If you really want to learn something, there is a fixed mode and a fixed process to operate since the industry has been born for so long. Hence, you can learn only an operation process, but it will not give you a feeling of self-improvement as you are like a cog in a machine that keeps working over and over again". (Interviewee 2)

"As for me, lack of communication between departments resulted in the limited possibility of learning new skills as resources were not shared mutually, which made me frustrated as I felt there was no more chance to improve myself in terms of developing my career within other areas." (Interviewee 5)

"My career development is becoming narrower as the experience I accumulated over time were often single and repeated, so what I have learned will become more and more limited in a certain field, especially after I get promoted, which might have an adverse impact on my competitiveness in the future." (Interviewee 7)

From the above interviewees' statements, they were unable to achieve neither objective career success such as quick promotion (Wang 2013) nor subjective career success such as career satisfaction (Barnett and Bradley 2007). Hence, organizational support such as clear promotion path and personal growth for younger talents' career development in China's hospitality industry was not strong enough. In other words, those post-90s experienced uncertain job

advancement, limited learning space, an undesired career path as their unfulfilled career expectations, which have reflected insufficient organizational support in China's hospitality industry. Hence, those employees made an exit decision as the career advancement of being a hotelier was either too clear to pursue or too challenging to realize, which limited their possibilities of developing more challenging careers in the long run. As a result, they actively approached external career choices from other industries under the rapid development of globalization and informatization, which motivated them to change their careers completely as their particular personalities of fearless and confident were able to bring them brand-new perspectives towards career transition.

Additionally, some interviewees mentioned their worries as the repeated outbreaks of COVID-19 had posed an enormous risk to their future of staying in the hospitality industry. Instead of being affected by the uncertain recovery of the pandemic, those younger talents chose to exit voluntarily as they experienced unpaid leave and salary reduction in their workplaces. Consequently, their career development has been negatively affected as organizational support was unable to provide when the pandemic hit the industry. Nevertheless, they found interpersonal and communication skills (Akrivos et al. 2007) such as maintaining a social relationship with coworkers and customers effectively, resilience, and empathy were necessary career competencies for hoteliers who learned through organizational training programs, which reduced the cost and barrier of switching jobs to other people-related professions such as education and real estate. Thus, some of the interviewees appreciated those accumulated experiences that brought them positive effects in terms of changing careers smoothly and confidently:

"I left the industry because of the pandemic; I could not work during that time as there was no business in the hotel. Hence, I did not have any salary, and I do not want to waste time to be here as no one knows when the pandemic could end completely." (Interviewee 5) (Interviewee 6) (Interviewee 9)

"I think I learned the importance of empathy, which helped me better understand how to communicate effectively with guests and gain the trust of guests in my future work." (Interview 1) (Interviewee 5) (Interviewee 6)

"Such as the ability to communicate with people, and then resilience." (Interviewee 4) (Interviewee 13) (Interviewee 14)

Although limited career development was the primary factor that affected most interviewees to quit China's hospitality industry, those valuable skills they learned have assisted their subsequent career success. Hence, all respondents admitted they used to acquire worthy career competencies as hoteliers. In contrast, they left because they did not see the future of staying here could be promising, which supported the research of Kong, Cheung and Song (2011) as insufficient organizational support negatively affected employees' career advancement. In other words, they might stay longer in China's hospitality industry if career development is not limited to certain functions with presenting diverse learning opportunities, while the promotion path could be more objective with building concrete career advancement mechanism. Meanwhile, favorable supervisory relationships and positive salary increments may stop more Chinese post-90s from leaving the hospitality industry if correspondent HR practices can implement, which means it will be more likely to attract younger talents and decrease the voluntary employee turnover rate accordingly in China's hospitability industry. Hence, the fourth sub-research question regarding what effects organizational support has on Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the industry was highlighted in the above perspectives.

In summary, the Chinese post-90s are the generation that emphasizes the achievement of self-worth, which means they focus more on realizing self-control over their careers instead of following the crowd. Moreover, they present different perspectives from their predecessors who concerned the salary as the primary condition in choosing a career, and most people from the previous generations cared more about others' opinions before they decided to change a career. Unlike those senior employees who were less likely to take the initiative to pursue their career advancement, post-90s employees put career development first when they consider whether they should stay or leave an industry. Hence, younger Chinese hoteliers who exited the hospitality industry were directly related to futureless career development, which involved absent organizational and supervisory support as major factors that stimulated their exit decisions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

With the purpose of exploring why Chinese post-90s hoteliers' left the industry and changed their careers completely, 15 former Chinese post-90s hoteliers were interviewed in order to address significant factors that affected their exit decisions based on answering the above sub research questions. Specifically, the first sub-research question asked the effect of professional identity on Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions. It was found that social professional identity was the least important reason for Chinese post-90s hoteliers to exit the industry, which used to be considered one of the most vital factors affecting employees' leaving decisions based on Hung's (2013) findings. Conversely, younger talents' emphasis on self-cognition in terms of personal professional identity rather than the public attitude towards the industry, significantly more post-90s hoteliers viewed the hospitality industry as valuable as any other business. Therefore, negative professional identity as an inherent impression for the masses in China would no longer be a reason for post-90s to quit the industry, which showed different findings from some previous researches.

Meanwhile, the second sub-research question asked what effect the salary concern has on Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions, and it was found that salary concern as a job-related factor was a less significant factor for those post-90s hoteliers to affect their exit decisions as their financial security and stability could be guaranteed. In contrast, the actuality of salary inequality and limited space of salary increment in China's hospitality industry reflected the less competitive situation than other industries such as the Internet, real estate, and financial sectors. Hence, young talents exited the hospitality industry mainly because of wages unfairness between peer employees and industries, which led to unfulfilling their career expectations rather than low salary level itself.

Furthermore, the third and fourth sub-research questions asked what effect supervisory and organizational support have on Chinese post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions. The research findings suggested organizational factors such as insufficient supervisory and organizational support, which limited career development for younger talents as the leading factor affecting their exit decisions.

On the one hand, supervisors who lack empathy and leadership caused absent supervisory support, and individual working competence seemed less important than a personal relationship with superiors, which directly affected Chinese post-90s' career development in this industry. Hence, negative supervisory support further destroyed those post-90s' confidence to develop their self-efficacy accordingly, which supported existing findings such as Ibrahim, Sun and Karatepe's (2018) work. On the other hand, insufficient organizational support such as ambiguous promotion structure, internal transfer difficulties, and limited learning opportunities further slowed their career advancement. As a result, the future of staying longer in the industry became less attractive and cheerful, so younger hoteliers decided

to leave without enough patience, which supported the previous findings of Kong, Cheung and Song (2011) as organizational support enabled employees to develop a successful career.

Since the findings of the research have highlighted the above factors which caused Chinese post-90s to exit the hospitality industry, HR professionals might be able to develop corresponding measures for maintaining them according to the below recommendations:

From the perspective of providing favorable conditions to advance their careers in the industry, hospitality organizations should build more objective promotion standards to evaluate employees' performance except for annual appraisals, which only link to the payment of bonuses. In other words, hoteliers might stay longer in the industry if they know precisely what specific conditions, they should meet for promotion rather than oral promises from the management team or subjective judgments from their direct supervisors who might consider the personal relationship with them as the promotion criterion instead of individual working ability. Besides, it is necessary to develop a particular platform for connecting operational departments such as the Front Office department and Food & Beverage department with secondary departments such as Finance department and Human Resources department, which might favor sharing resources mutually that could overcome the difficulty of internal promotion. In other words, post-90s talent will be less likely to consider external opportunities if their career development within the industry is hopeful and diverse enough to achieve.

As for the situation of absent supervisory support, relevant online and offline courses aim at enhancing supervisors' and managers' skills in terms of effective communication with subordinates should be promoted, especially for those leaders with a lower academic background than post-90s who have not had the chance to learn. Thus, the HR team should consider designing personalized workshops for senior employees as one of the feasible ways to influence the relationship between young hoteliers and their direct leaders positively because leaders' good impact as role models' power to employees usually affects their exit decisions positively. Therefore, they will be more likely to perform a higher level of self-efficacy at work, which will improve their work quality with more self-confidence and less working stress.

Furthermore, HR professionals in the hospitality industry need to pay extra attention to eliminating salary unfairness based on minimizing wages disparity between internal promotion and external recruitment, local employees and expatriates with the same level. Additionally, the salary increments between the entry and supervisory levels should be enlarged. While the annual increase in wages for each employee in this industry needs to catch up with price increases in Chinese society, or young hoteliers will be less likely to remain voluntarily. In other words, post-90s' talents will stay longer in the hospitality industry when their career expectations in terms of salary equality could be satisfied accordingly.

In general, the research was supposed to benefit current hospitality professionals for both HR and departmental leaders in China who expect to maintain their younger talents since the overall cost of training a professional hotelier has been relatively high. Hence, it is necessary to personalized HR practices and strategies for improving the situation of insufficient organizational support, absent supervisory support, and unfair salary distribution among post-90s hoteliers who exited the industry voluntarily due to limited career development, especially they left after they had learned all capable working skills and knowledge which have assisted them to adapt well in other industries. Besides, the phenomenon of high turnover in China's hospitality industry adversely affects service quality due to the shortage of loyal and experiential hoteliers. Thus, the above suggestions might lower the voluntary turnover rate of post-90s talents, which positively influences the overall performance of China's hospitality industry as a profitable return.

Since the research has been geographically limited to China due to the time-constrained situation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016), the above findings might not be applied

globally. Thus, it will be more representative of future researchers who are allowed to analyze worldwide samples by recording the constant change of those samples. Besides, the research focused on studying the generation of post-90s hoteliers' exit decisions and career change based on their particular characteristics, which might only represent a part of the generation because of the limited data of 15 interviewees. Hence, future research could extend the sample size into a more extensive database for developing more different views or opinions. Meanwhile, the findings of this research minimized the influence of interviewees' family environment, such as marital status and parental background, which might be a variable that significantly affects the results of the research, so it will be worth discussing in the following researches.

All interviewees were previous hoteliers who participated in the interview based on providing their retrospective experiences, which might result in memory bias such as difference between recall and reality that the future researchers could be aware of avoiding. Additionally, the language barrier between Chinese and English might exist even after applying certain translator tools, which "further pose a risk to loss of direct meaning through translation (Kakilla 2021 p.1)" that future researches could try to improve. Furthermore, as previous hoteliers, all interviewees were used to working in upper-class hotels, which might imply those interviewees' experiences only represent their mindsets of luxury hotel brands. Therefore, future researchers could expand hotel classifications into other levels such as budget hotels and midscale hotels because employees who work in different levels of a hotel might hold various perspectives in terms of their exit decisions and career change.

Acknowledgments

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