KOTA KINABLU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been the top choice among students from China who are pursuing tertiary qualification in Malaysia since 2003, according to UMS chief representative in China, Helen Liu.

UMS has the highest number of students from China among public tertiary institutions in the country, Liu told reporters during the registration for the 19th intake of international students at the university yesterday.

On average, about 120 students from China enrol at UMS annually, she said.

Liu opined that the university's popularity among students from China owes much to a high employability rate among its graduates. She said most of the UMS graduates now have good and high paying jobs in cities in China.

Besides, UMS is the first Malaysian university to enter the China market and its qualifications are recognised by the government of China, she said. There are six other public higher learning institutions in Malaysia that have gained recognition from China.

Meanwhile, Dr Paul Porodong, who was representing UMS deputy vice chancellor, said the university is aiming to be an international education hub in the region. "We are willing to play this part," he said, adding that the university wants to have more international students enrolling for its programmes.

Porodong said among the programmes favoured by students from China are international business and financial studies.

"Some of them will be transferred to our campus in Labuan after the six months stint in the English programme. Again, they have to do well in that before they can start," he said.

Two China students interviewed revealed that it is Sabah's beautiful nature, long beaches and UMS' location by the South China Sea that attracted them. "Where I come from, there is no sea," said Wang Xiao Ying, 22, who hails from the Shandong Province. She is especially glad that there are a lot of Chinese people in Sabah as this will help her adapt easily, in terms of culture.

"I don't think the culture will be that different," she said. Wang said she was however shocked when she found Sabah's weather to be very hot. "It is very, very hot but is very beautiful, with so many trees," she said.

Wang said she is an English major from the University of Technology, Beijing and she is pursuing a master's degree in English at UMS. After completing the programme, she hopes to embark on a teaching career in China.

Yu Zixun, 20, who is also from Shandong Province expressed his excitement to be here, saying UMS is a beautiful university.

He said he chose to study in Malaysia instead of the UK because of the lower cost. He said his parents are supportive of his choice, and he aspires to be a human resource manager after completing the Human Resource Economics programme.