

## Exploring the Impact of Studying Abroad on Chinese Students in Thailand: Academic, Cultural, and Personal Experiences

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### Abstract

This study examines the motivations of 38 Chinese students studying abroad in Thailand, focusing on personal, academic, and professional goals. A Likert-scale questionnaire and follow-up interviews were used to identify the main reasons for studying in Thailand, including cultural immersion, language acquisition, personal development, and career advancement. The findings suggest that students are motivated by the opportunity to gain new experiences, improve English proficiency, and develop a global perspective. Financial considerations also play a role in the decision, as students perceive Thailand as an affordable destination offering quality education in English. Furthermore, students value the chance to gain independence and build international networks that may benefit their careers. The study concludes that studying abroad is a strategic decision for Chinese students, with long-term effects on both personal and professional growth. Further research is needed to examine the long-term outcomes of studying abroad and to compare the motivations of students from different cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Chinese nationals, international education, cultural immersion, cross-cultural communication, study abroad, challenges, academic growth.

### Introduction

The trend of Chinese students studying abroad has become more common in today's globalised world. An increasing number of Chinese students choose to pursue higher education in foreign countries to experience different cultures, improve language skills, and expand academic and professional opportunities. This reflects the growing importance of international education as students seek a more diverse academic experience.

A primary reason for Chinese students studying abroad is the opportunity to access higher-quality education not always available in China. Many foreign universities are recognised for academic excellence and advanced research facilities. These institutions offer students the chance to learn from experienced professors and take part in research. Studying abroad provides an academic environment that supports independent and creative thinking, which encourages intellectual growth and future career prospects (Mazzarol, 2022; Wintre, 2015).

Studying abroad supports both academic and personal development. Living independently in a foreign country requires students to adapt to new environments, face unfamiliar situations, and become more self-reliant. These experiences help develop confidence, adaptability, and problem-solving skills, preparing students for success in a competitive world. The international experience, together with improved language skills and

cultural understanding, also increases employment opportunities, as employers value these qualities (Nurindra, 2022).

However, studying abroad presents several difficulties for Chinese students, including language issues, cultural differences, homesickness, and financial pressure. Adapting to a new academic system, learning new social norms, and dealing with isolation can be demanding. The cost of studying abroad is also a concern for many students, who often rely on scholarships, grants, or loans to fund education. Even with these difficulties, many students remain committed to their goals, recognising that the long-term academic, personal, and professional benefits of studying abroad outweigh the problems.

Chinese students studying abroad are part of a growing global trend in education. These students aim to broaden perspectives, gain experience, and prepare for an interconnected and competitive future. Studying in foreign countries provides access to high-quality academic programmes, supports cultural understanding, helps build useful skills, and improves career prospects. Although the difficulties of studying abroad are significant, the outcomes of international education offer long-term benefits.

### **Problem Statement**

The increasing number of Chinese nationals pursuing education in international programs, particularly in Thailand, has raised questions about the factors influencing their decision to study abroad and the challenges they face during their academic journey. Although there is considerable research on the benefits of studying abroad, few studies focus on the specific experiences and motivations of Chinese students in a Southeast Asian context, such as Thailand. Furthermore, the impact of studying in a multicultural and diverse environment on their academic, personal, and professional development has not been fully explored. Understanding these motivations and challenges is crucial for higher education institutions to better support international students, ensuring that they have a positive and successful experience abroad.

### **Significance of the Research**

This research is significant as it provides valuable information on the experiences of Chinese students in Thailand's international academic programmes. It examines the motivations for studying abroad, such as academic goals, language practice, cultural immersion, and career advancement. The study identifies the factors influencing Chinese students' decisions to study in a foreign country. It also explores the difficulties students face, including cultural adjustment, language difficulties, and financial pressures, and examines the role of institutional support in easing these issues. The findings can help develop tailored programmes and services to improve the academic and social integration of international students, enhance their study-abroad experience, and promote global citizenship. This research is also useful for policymakers, educators, and institutions in other countries seeking to attract and support international students.

### **Objectives of the Research**

- 1) To identify the key motivational factors influencing Chinese students' decision to pursue higher education abroad, specifically in Thailand.
- 2) To examine students' personal, academic, and professional goals associated with studying in an international setting.
- 3) To explore students' expectations regarding cultural experiences, language acquisition, and social integration during their studies abroad.
- 4) To assess the perceived value of an international degree in enhancing future employment and career opportunities among Chinese students.

5) To understand the role of financial considerations in destination selection and overall decision-making related to studying abroad.

6) To gain qualitative insights into students' perceptions of independence, global perspective, and personal development as outcomes of international education.

## Literature Review

Pursuing education abroad provides students with the opportunity to experience new cultures, expand perspectives, and develop skills that support both academic and professional growth. One benefit of international education is the chance to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Contact with locals and international peers introduces students to different customs and ways of life, broadening their worldview. This cultural experience supports intellectual and emotional development. Cultural immersion is a central aspect of studying abroad. Students encounter new traditions, values, and social norms, which can lead to personal change. This exposure helps reduce stereotypes and assumptions about other cultures. Engaging with local customs and learning the language improves cross-cultural communication, which is valuable in a globalised society. This setting also provides students with real-life opportunities to practise language skills, improving both fluency and cultural understanding (Fong, 2020; Genkova et al., 2021; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Wang, 2022).

For students studying foreign languages, immersion in a country where the language is spoken greatly improves proficiency. Living in a foreign country offers daily opportunities to converse with native speakers, improving speaking and listening abilities. These interactions allow students to learn language nuances, slang, and colloquial expressions that are not typically taught in traditional classrooms. This exposure increases fluency, vocabulary, and confidence (Ngoc & Huong, 2021; Samira & Karfa, 2024). Ingram (2005) examined a study abroad program in Avignon, France, and found that students provided positive feedback. These programs help students meet language requirements and integrate interdisciplinary learning. The study emphasized the importance of international programs in improving language skills and supporting the internationalization of liberal arts education (Ingram, 2005).

Studying abroad also broadens students' understanding of global issues. Living in another country exposes students to new ideas, perspectives, and ways of thinking, helping them better understand international relations, economics, and culture. This global perspective promotes empathy and adaptability, qualities that are highly valued in the modern workforce (Tarrant et al., 2015). In addition, studying abroad creates valuable networking opportunities. Students can interact with peers and professionals from around the world, building relationships that can support their academic and career goals. These connections provide valuable knowledge about global job markets, cultural norms, and business practices, all of which are useful in a competitive job market. Friendships formed during this time also broaden students' understanding of global issues and encourage cultural awareness (Dewey et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2014).

Studying abroad also provides emotional and social benefits. Although living in another country can be demanding, forming friendships with individuals from varied backgrounds offers support and a sense of belonging. These connections help students manage homesickness and adjust to a new setting. The support from these relationships contributes to personal development and builds lasting connections beyond academic life. In addition, studying abroad helps students develop personal, professional, and life skills such as adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving. Employers often value these qualities, as

students who study abroad show the ability to function well in diverse contexts. Living in a foreign country also encourages self-reflection, allowing students to recognise personal strengths and weaknesses, build confidence, and become more independent. As students adapt to unfamiliar environments, they improve their problem-solving skills. Managing language differences, navigating new systems, and adjusting to cultural norms helps develop resilience and practical thinking. These experiences support confidence and competence, helping students prepare for future careers (Altinay et al., 2024; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2018; Cho & Morris, 2015; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Fong, 2020).

A significant benefit of studying abroad is the development of employability. In the global job market, employers seek candidates with international experience and a global perspective. Studying abroad shows that students are adaptable and capable of navigating different cultural contexts. These qualities are important for roles that involve cross-cultural communication, international collaboration, or an understanding of global economic trends. Studying abroad also enhances cross-cultural communication skills, which are highly valued by employers (Genkova & Kruse, 2020; Duke, 2023).

The exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives that comes with studying abroad increases students' empathy and promotes a more inclusive worldview. This understanding of diversity enhances students' personal lives and academic experiences. As students gain new skills, form international connections, and explore different ways of thinking, they become more competitive in the global job market. Employers value the cross-cultural competencies, language skills, and global awareness that students gain through studying abroad (Kuimova, 2017).

Studying abroad also supports both academic and personal development. Students are exposed to different educational systems, which helps them develop critical thinking and a wider academic outlook. Access to specialised courses or research opportunities not offered at home institutions adds further value to their studies. Cultural immersion contributes to intellectual and emotional growth, improving communication, problem-solving, awareness of cultural differences, and academic performance. These experiences enhance employment prospects after graduation (Cardwell, 2020; Jæger & Gram, 2015; Mazzarol, 2022; Wintre, 2015).

Overall, pursuing education abroad offers an invaluable experience that allows students to develop a wide range of skills that enhance both their personal and professional lives. Immersing in a new culture, improving language abilities, gaining a global perspective, and building a professional network prepare students for success in a connected and competitive world. This experience deepens academic understanding and promotes personal growth, self-confidence, and employability, making it a transformative and rewarding opportunity (Altinay et al., 2024; Cardwell, 2020).

## **Methodology**

The study employed a quantitative research approach, which centres on the collection and analysis of numerical data to gain a deeper understanding of a specific subject. This method is commonly used in educational research and typically involves gathering data through surveys. The quantitative approach is valued for its ability to produce objective, reliable results, enabling researchers to draw general conclusions based on the data. However, one limitation of this method is its tendency to oversimplify complex phenomena by converting them into numerical values (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Krzaklewska (2008). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was .80 and therefore the questionnaire was deemed reliable for data collection.

The participants consisted of 38 Chinese nationals enrolled in an international program at a university in Thailand. Data collection was carried out using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which assessed various motivations for studying abroad. These included seeking new experiences, practicing foreign languages, learning a new culture, meeting new people, living abroad, having fun, enhancing employment prospects, improving knowledge, gaining independence, obtaining a degree, and the cost of education. Additionally, interview questions were incorporated to supplement and provide further context to the questionnaire responses.

## Results and Discussion

The following section provides the results from the questionnaire and interview and discusses their relevance and draws conclusions. A total of 38 respondents completed the survey. Table 1 provides an overview of agreement levels across twelve motivation statements.

**Table 1.** Agreement percentages for study-abroad motivation statements (N = 38).

Statement	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
I chose to study abroad to gain new experiences.	0	5.3	7.9	86.8
Studying abroad provides me with an opportunity to practice a foreign language.	0	2.6	13.2	84.2
I am interested in learning about a new culture by studying abroad.	0	0	31.6	68.4
Meeting new people from diverse backgrounds is an important reason for me to study abroad.	5.3	10.5	28.9	55.3
Living abroad offers me a unique opportunity to experience life in another country.	0	0	15.8	84.2
I am looking forward to having fun and exploring new places while studying abroad.	0	5.3	26.3	68.4
Studying abroad will enhance my employment prospects in the future.	0	0	21.1	78.9
I believe that studying abroad will help me improve my knowledge and skills in my field of study.	0	2.6	7.9	89.5
Studying abroad will help me become more independent.	0	2.6	21.1	76.3
Obtaining an international degree is an important goal for me.	0	5.3	13.2	81.6
The cost of education abroad is an important factor in my decision to study abroad.	0	7.9	23.7	68.4
I believe that studying abroad will help me develop a global perspective on important issues.	0	2.6	10.5	86.8

The results of the Likert-scale questionnaire reveal that Chinese students studying in an International Business Management program in Thailand are highly motivated by a blend of personal, academic, cultural, and professional factors. One of the most prominent findings is the importance of personal enrichment and the desire for new experiences. An overwhelming 94.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that gaining new experiences was a key reason for studying abroad, while 100% agreed that living abroad offers a unique opportunity to experience life in another country. Additionally, 94.7% expressed that they were looking forward to having fun and exploring new places. These results indicate that students are deeply motivated by the chance to step outside their familiar environments, broaden their perspectives, and enjoy the personal growth that comes with immersion in a different society.

Language development is another significant motivator. A combined 97.4% of students were in agreement that studying abroad would help them practice a foreign language, most likely English, which is commonly used in Thai international programs. This shows that students view language acquisition as a practical and essential skill for future success. Improved communication abilities are not only valued for academic purposes but also as a tool for international career advancement and global engagement.

Academically, students demonstrate a clear focus on long-term benefits. A total of 97.4% agreed or strongly agreed that studying abroad would help them improve their knowledge and skills in their field of study. Even more strikingly, 100% believed that the experience would enhance their employment prospects, and 94.8% indicated that obtaining an international degree was an important goal. These findings suggest that students perceive international education as a strategic investment that can give them a competitive advantage in both domestic and global job markets. The decision to study abroad is not simply about earning a degree overseas, but about gaining exposure to international business practices, developing cross-cultural competencies, and building a resume that will stand out.

Cultural exploration and the opportunity to build global networks also rank high among the students' motivations. All respondents expressed an interest in learning about a new culture, and 84.2% agreed or strongly agreed that meeting people from diverse backgrounds was an important reason for studying abroad. These responses reflect a desire not only for academic knowledge but also for interpersonal development and cultural fluency. Students recognize the value of building relationships across national and cultural boundaries, which is particularly relevant in the field of international business.

Personal development through increased independence emerged as another key theme. A combined 97.4% of students agreed or strongly agreed that studying abroad would help them become more independent. Living and studying in a foreign country presents daily challenges, from managing finances to navigating new social and academic environments, all of which contribute to students' growth in maturity and self-reliance. This aspect of independence is clearly viewed as a vital component of the overall international education experience.

Cost, while not the most dominant factor, still plays a notable role in decision-making. A total of 92.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the cost of education abroad was an important consideration. Thailand's affordability compared to Western countries likely influenced these students' choice of destination, offering a balance between high-quality education and manageable expenses. This financial practicality, combined with the country's cultural richness and accessibility, makes Thailand an appealing option.

Finally, a global outlook was also a significant motivator. Nearly all students—97.3%—believed that studying abroad would help them develop a global perspective on important issues. This reflects their intention to become globally aware citizens who are prepared to

work in multicultural environments and address challenges from a more informed, international viewpoint. Developing a global mind-set is especially relevant for students of international business, who will need to understand and navigate complex global systems and cultural nuances throughout their careers.

The results from the questionnaire clearly show that Chinese students studying in Thailand are driven by a well-rounded set of motivations. They are not only seeking academic credentials but also looking to grow personally, culturally, linguistically, and professionally. The Thai educational setting, offering affordability, cultural richness, and academic relevance, aligns well with these multifaceted goals. Institutions that recognize and support these motivations will continue to attract and empower international students who are eager to engage with the world.

The interview results reveal a consistent set of motivations and expectations among Chinese students studying international business management in Thailand. Students chose Thailand primarily for its affordability, safety, and the availability of quality English-language education. Its cultural proximity to China and position within the rapidly developing Southeast Asian business environment also played a role in their decision.

When students spoke about gaining new experiences, they referred to cultural immersion, personal development, and the opportunity to learn beyond traditional academic settings. For them, studying abroad means stepping out of their comfort zones, facing challenges independently, and growing as individuals.

Language acquisition was seen as highly important, with most students eager to improve their English proficiency through daily interaction with both local Thais and fellow international students. This was closely tied to their excitement about cultural exchange and many looked forward to experiencing Thai traditions, festivals, and daily life. While some anticipated challenges in cultural adjustment, they expressed openness and curiosity.

Students also hoped to build diverse social and professional networks, including friendships with international peers and connections with industry professionals. These relationships were seen as valuable assets for both personal development and future career opportunities. Independence was another key theme, with many acknowledging that living abroad would help them develop essential life skills such as time management, budgeting, and emotional resilience.

Career advancement emerged as a strong underlying motivation. Students believed that international education would make them more competitive in the job market, particularly in global business settings. Although cost was an important consideration, it was not the primary driver; most students felt that Thailand offered good value for money, and they approached the financial aspect with careful planning and family support.

Students were also mindful of the challenges they might face, including language barriers, homesickness, and adapting to new customs. However, they expressed confidence in their ability to manage these through openness, support networks, and time. Lastly, they anticipated that studying abroad would expand their worldview and make them more globally aware. They expected to return home with a broader, more culturally sensitive perspective that would influence both their personal lives and professional paths.

Pursuing education in another country offers students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, acquire important life skills, and broaden their academic perspectives. This experience challenges students to step outside of their comfort zones and exposes them to new languages, customs, and ways of thinking. As a result, students develop a more global outlook and improve their ability to communicate across cultures.

Enrolling in a foreign institution also grants access to academic programs and courses that may not be available in the home country. This is particularly beneficial for students who seek to expand their academic knowledge and explore new fields of study. Additionally,

time spent abroad can enhance students' competitiveness in the job market, as employers value the international experience, adaptability, and skills gained while studying in another country.

Studying abroad also presents difficulties. Students may have trouble adjusting to a new culture, language, and educational system. To navigate these issues, students should seek support from the host institution, professors, and peers. Another concern is the financial cost, which may include expenses for accommodation, travel, and visas. Careful planning and budgeting are necessary to maximize the international study experience.

The benefits of studying in a foreign country outweigh the obstacles. This experience can be transformative, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world. It also helps students build independence, resilience, and adaptability. Furthermore, studying abroad often leads to lasting friendships and memorable experiences that continue to impact students long after they return home. Overall, studying internationally offers a valuable opportunity for personal and academic growth, encouraging students to expand their horizons and push themselves in meaningful ways.

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

This study highlights the multifaceted motivations of Chinese students pursuing higher education in Thailand. The findings from both the Likert-scale questionnaire and follow-up interviews reveal that students are strongly driven by the desire for personal growth, international exposure, academic advancement, and enhanced career opportunities. Cultural immersion, language development, and gaining a global perspective were also identified as important aspirations. Thailand's affordability, safety, and reputation for providing English-medium education make it an attractive destination for these students.

In addition to academic goals, students place significant value on the social and personal aspects of studying abroad. Their expectations go beyond the classroom to include building international networks, becoming more independent, and developing resilience through real-world experiences. While financial considerations do influence their decision-making, students generally view the cost of studying in Thailand as manageable, especially when weighed against the long-term benefits. Overall, the study illustrates that studying abroad is a strategic and holistic endeavour for Chinese students, one that aligns closely with their academic, professional, and personal ambitions.

To build on these findings, future research could explore the long-term outcomes of studying abroad for Chinese students, such as how their international education impacts career progression, entrepreneurial activity, or global mobility after graduation. Comparative studies involving students from other countries or regions could also offer deeper insights into whether motivations and experiences differ by cultural background.

Additionally, research could examine how well students' expectations match their actual experiences during their time abroad, particularly in areas like academic satisfaction, language improvement, and social integration. Another useful avenue would be to assess the role of institutional support systems in shaping students' adaptation, well-being, and academic success. These directions could contribute to more targeted policy-making and support services for international students in Thailand and beyond.

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