FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTENTIONS TO STUDY IN THAILAND BASED ON THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the determinants of Chinese students' behavioral intention to study in Thailand, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). In recent years, Thailand has become an important study-abroad destination for Chinese students because of its lower tuition fees, geographic proximity, and cultural similarity compared with traditional destinations in Europe and America. However, existing research has paid insufficient attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying this intention.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: This study is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). It models how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavioral intention. The study introduces study motivation as a mediator and includes gender and family income as moderators. This research analyzed 1,246 valid questionnaires using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Findings: Attitude ($\beta = 0.161$, $p < 0.001$), subjective norms ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$) all had significant positive effects on behavioral intention. Study motivation partially mediated these relationships, with indirect effects accounting for 22.63% to 28.72% of the total effects. Multi-group analysis further showed that gender did not significantly moderate the structural paths, whereas family income produced significant group differences in some relationships ($\Delta\chi^2 = 14.322$, $p = 0.026$).

Originality/Value: This study verifies the applicability of TPB in transnational education and reveals the psychological mechanism underlying Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. It suggests that Thai universities should strengthen recruitment strategies by improving cultural adaptation support, scholarship mechanisms, and career-oriented programs to enhance attractiveness and increase international student conversion rates.

Keywords: Chinese International Students, Behavioral Intention, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Study Motivation, Transnational Education

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Introduction

In recent years, Thailand is gradually becoming an important study abroad destination for Chinese students. The main reasons are Thailand's relatively low tuition fees, geographical proximity to China, high cultural similarity, and advantages in educational cooperation under the ASEAN integration strategy. Compared to traditional study abroad countries in Europe and America, Thailand has become increasingly visible as an alternative study destination because of its relative affordability and regional accessibility (ICEF Monitor, 2024).

However, an important gap remains in the existing literature. Research on international student mobility has largely emphasized macro-level push-pull factors, national policy, and destination competitiveness, while paying less attention to the individual-level psychological mechanisms underlying students' decisions. Although the Theory of Planned Behavior has been widely used to explain educational choices, few studies have applied this framework specifically to Chinese university students' intention to study in Thailand. Limited research has examined whether attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence such intention through study motivation, or whether these relationships vary across demographic conditions such as gender and family income. Therefore, this study addresses a context-specific and theoretical gap by applying TPB to the Thailand destination context and by extending the model through the inclusion of a mediating and moderating mechanism.

Objectives

On this basis, this study introduces "study motivation" as a mediating variable. It also uses demographic characteristics such as "gender" and "family income" as moderating variables. This can further enhance the explanatory power of the model. The research objectives are:

1) To test whether attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly affect Chinese students' behavioral intention to study in Thailand;

2) To explore the mediating role of study motivation therein;

3) To analyze the moderating effects of gender and family income on the main path relationships.

Literature Review

International Student Mobility

International student mobility is an important phenomenon in the globalization of higher education. The complexity of its driving factors is increasingly prominent. The traditional "push-pull" model emphasizes the impact of macro factors like economic conditions, educational opportunities, and cultural affinity on student choices (Guan et al., 2023). However, it is still insufficient in explaining decision-making mechanisms at the individual student level. Although traditional study destinations like the US, UK, and Australia still dominate, new regional education hubs like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are attracting more and more international students. They rely on their advantages in tuition

fees, cultural proximity, and strategic position within the ASEAN integration strategy (Yodpet et al., 2023). However, although the number of Chinese students studying in Thailand is growing, systematic research on their study abroad decisions is still insufficient.

Chinese Students' Study Abroad Decisions

China is the world's largest source country for international students. Its students' study abroad intentions are influenced by academic reputation, career prospects, economic costs, family expectations, and cultural factors (Zhai & Cao, 2025). Past research has mostly focused on Chinese students flowing to European and American countries. Attention to the Southeast Asia region is relatively less. For example, research on Malaysia shows that Chinese students' motivation to study abroad mainly stems from cost affordability and cultural accessibility. In the Thai context, although relevant empirical observations exist, there is still a lack of systematic analysis based on empirical evidence. This is especially true for the latest research on the motivation and behavioral intention of Chinese students studying in Thailand in the past five years (Guan et al., 2023).

Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was proposed by Ajzen (1991). It is a core theory for explaining individual behavioral intentions. The theory holds that attitude, subjective norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) jointly determine behavioral intention. Behavioral intention ultimately predicts actual behavior (Champahom et al., 2023). In educational research, TPB has been widely used to analyze behaviors such as course selection, technology adoption, entrepreneurial intention, and studying abroad (Aliedan et al., 2022). Related research shows that TPB variables have strong predictive power for student choices. Combining mediating or moderating variables like motivation and demographic characteristics can further enhance the model's explanatory power (Yang et al., 2024). Yang et al. (2024) applied TPB to analyze Chinese students' study abroad intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that student background characteristics had an important influence. Recent studies have discussed Chinese students' destination choice and study experiences in Thailand, but these findings have not been sufficiently integrated into a TPB-based explanation of intention to study in Thailand (Lertpusit et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework & Hypotheses

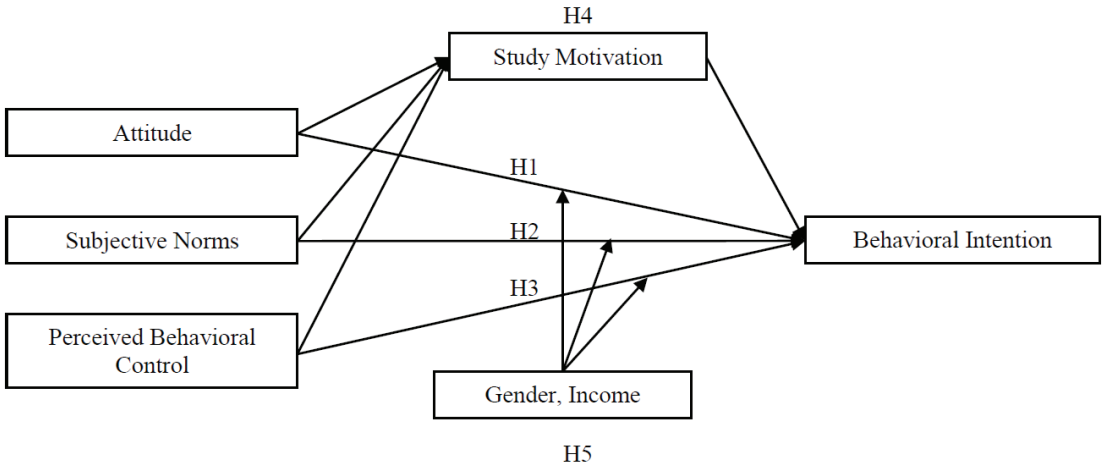


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

This study uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as its theoretical foundation. It analyzes the psychological mechanism of Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. TPB holds that attitude, subjective norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) jointly determine an individual's behavioral intention. This then predicts actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The core elements of the TPB model and their application in study intention research are as follows:

Attitude refers to an individual's overall evaluation of the behavior of studying in Thailand. It stems from personal beliefs about the consequences of the behavior and value judgments (Zhang et al., 2024). When students believe that studying in Thailand can provide quality education, rich cultural experiences, and economic affordability, they form a positive attitude. This thereby strengthens behavioral intention. In the Thai context, attitude may be shaped by affordability, cultural familiarity, and expected intercultural and language gains (Xue et al., 2024).

Subjective norm reflects social influence. It reflects the degree of support or expectation from important others such as family, friends, and teachers regarding the student's decision to study abroad (Zhang et al., 2023). If family and social circles encourage international education, students are more likely to develop a strong intention to study abroad. For Chinese students, subjective norms are often related to family expectations, peer influence, social views of cost, safety, and educational return (Guo, 2025).

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) is an individual's perception of the feasibility of performing a specific behavior. It includes self-assessment of financial ability, language proficiency, application difficulty, etc. (Champahom et al., 2023). Perceived behavioral control may depend on cost, admission access, scholarships, language demands, and institutional support (Poedloknimit & Punnanan, 2025; Xue et al., 2024). When students feel they have sufficient resources and abilities, their intention to study abroad increases significantly. Thailand's relatively low cost of living and tuition may enhance Chinese students' perceived behavioral control regarding studying in Thailand. It makes them perceive studying abroad as achievable.

This study introduces "Study Motivation" as a mediating variable. Motivation represents the internal drive for students to pursue learning, career, or cultural goals (Bodycott, 2009). A positive attitude and social support can enhance motivation. Motivation is then further translated into specific behavioral intention.

Gender and family income are set as moderating variables. Different groups may show different patterns in attitude formation and behavioral decision-making. Students with better economic conditions may pay more attention to education quality. Students with limited economic conditions may pay more attention to cost factors.

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior model, this study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: Chinese students' attitude towards "studying in Thailand" has a significant positive impact on their behavioral intention.

H2: Chinese students' perceived subjective norms have a significant positive impact on their behavioral intention.

H3: Chinese students' Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) has a significant positive impact on their behavioral intention.

H4: Study motivation plays a mediating role between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention.

H5: Demographic variables such as gender and family income have a moderating effect on the relationships between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study uses quantitative research methods. It collects primary data through questionnaire surveys. This is to test the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. The theoretical model includes three independent variables: Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). Study Motivation is the mediating variable. Gender and family income are the moderating variables. Behavioral Intention is the dependent variable. All variable relationships are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This reveals the significance and directionality of each path.

2. Research Subjects and Sample

The research subjects are Chinese university students planning to study in Thailand and Chinese students currently studying at Thai universities. Convenience sampling combined with the snowball method was used for sample collection. Questionnaire distribution channels included online survey platforms (Questionnaire Star, Google Form) and alumni networks. To ensure sample representativeness and data reliability, 1,320 questionnaires were collected. After removing invalid samples, 1,246 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 94.39%. The high valid rate was because the questionnaire was distributed mainly to relevant student groups, so most respondents matched the study requirements. This sample size meets the requirements for SEM analysis.

3. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected respondents' background information, including gender, current year of study, and family income level. These variables were included to describe the sample and to provide contextual information for interpreting differences in study intention. The second part measured the TPB-related constructs. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1 Scale Sources

Variable	Source	Measurement Description
Attitude	Ajzen (1991); Li and Bray (2007)	Evaluates students' overall attitude towards studying in Thailand, including perceptions of education quality, learning experience, and cultural adaptability.
Subjective Norms	Fishbein and Ajzen (2010)	Measures the influence and social pressure perceived from important others like family, friends, and teachers on students' intention to study in Thailand.
Perceived Behavioral Control	Ajzen (2002)	Assesses students' self-efficacy and sense of control regarding financial ability, language proficiency, and study abroad preparation.
Study Motivation	Bodycott (2009)	Reflects students' intrinsic motivation for studying abroad, including career development, academic improvement, and cultural experience needs.
Behavioral Intention	Fishbein and Ajzen (2010); Venkatesh et al. (2003)	Measures the strength of students' willingness and action tendency to choose to study in Thailand in the future.

4. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire link was distributed to Chinese university students who were planning to study in Thailand and to Chinese students already studying at Thai universities. Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used to reach respondents through online survey platforms and alumni networks. After the questionnaires were returned, incomplete responses and clearly invalid cases were removed before formal analysis.

The valid data were then analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. The analysis proceeded in five steps. First, descriptive statistics were used to present the background characteristics of the respondents. Second, reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Third, validity was examined through the KMO test, Bartlett's test of sphericity, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. Fourth, Structural Equation Modeling was applied to test the proposed relationships among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, study motivation, and behavioral intention. Fifth, the Bootstrap method was used to test mediation, and multi-group SEM was used to examine the moderating effects of gender and family income.

Results

1. Descriptive Statistics

A total of 1,320 questionnaires were returned. After data screening, 1,246 valid responses were retained, representing a valid response rate of 94.39%. In terms of respondent background, 57.87% were male and 42.13% were female. Most respondents were in the freshman and sophomore years, indicating that the sample was mainly composed of students at an early stage of university study. In terms of family

income, the largest group came from middle-income families (RMB 200,000-500,000), accounting for 56.34%. These background characteristics provide a basic profile of the sample and help contextualize the interpretation of the findings.

Table 2 Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 1246)

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	721	57.87
	Female	525	42.13
Grade	Freshman	386	30.98
	Sophomore	486	39.00
	Junior	261	20.95
	Senior	113	9.07
Income	< 200,000 RMB	297	23.84
	200,000-500,000 RMB	702	56.34
	> 500,000 RMB	247	19.82

2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Before formal analysis, reliability and validity tests were conducted on the questionnaire scales. The analysis results are shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's α values for Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, Behavioral Intention, and Study Motivation were 0.827, 0.829, 0.814, 0.819, and 0.883, respectively. The Cronbach's α values for all variables were greater than 0.8. This indicates that the scales have good internal consistency. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.905. Bartlett's test of sphericity had a chi-square value of 12,234.65 (df = 231, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The five factors extracted by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) cumulatively explained 64.788% of the variance. This indicates a stable scale structure.

Table 3 Reliability and Validity Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	KMO	Cumulative Variance Explained (%)
Attitude (AT)	4	0.827		
Subjective Norms (SN)	4	0.829		
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	4	0.814	0.905	64.788
Behavioral Intention (BI)	4	0.819		
Study Motivation (SM)	6	0.883		

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) further verified the model's fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.749$, RMSEA = 0.037, CFI = 0.971, TLI = 0.967. All indicators met the recommended standards. This indicates

that the measurement model is reliable and valid. The results in Table 4 show that the Composite Reliability (CR) for all variables was greater than 0.8. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all variables exceeded 0.5. The square root of each variable's AVE was higher than the correlation coefficients between variables. This indicates that the model has good discriminant validity.

Table 4 Composite Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity

Variable	CR	AVE	AT	SN	PBC	BI	SM
AT	0.828	0.546	0.739				
SN	0.829	0.549	0.382	0.741			
PBC	0.815	0.524	0.365	0.420	0.724		
BI	0.819	0.531	0.397	0.372	0.384	0.729	
SM	0.892	0.581	0.293	0.335	0.333	0.351	0.762

Diagonal values are the square root of AVE.

3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationships between the variables. The correlation analysis results in Table 5 show that Attitude (AT), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Study Motivation (SM), and Behavioral Intention (BI) were all significantly positively correlated ($p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient between AT and BI was the highest ($r = 0.442$). PBC and BI were next ($r = 0.428$). The correlation coefficient between SN and BI was 0.398.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis Results

Variable	AT	SN	PBC	BI	SM
Attitude	1				
Subjective Norms	.410**	1			
Perceived Behavioral Control	.407**	.449**	1		
Behavioral Intention	.442**	.398**	.428**	1	
Study Motivation	.339**	.377**	.391**	.410**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Hypothesis Testing

Based on the calculation results of the structural equation model, the hypothetical paths under the TPB framework were verified. The overall model fit indices indicated a good fit between the model and the sample data: $\chi^2/df = 2.684$, CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.958, RMSEA = 0.039. These all met common standards ($\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). This indicates that the model has a good fit.

It can accurately reflect the psychological mechanism of Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. From the path estimation results in Table 6, Attitude (AT), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) all showed significant positive effects on Behavioral Intention (BI). H1, H2, and H3 were all supported. Among them, PBC had the highest standardized path coefficient ($\beta = 0.258$). This indicates that students' perception of their own financial ability, language proficiency, and application convenience is a key factor enhancing their intention to study in Thailand. Next were Subjective Norms ($\beta = 0.213$). This shows that the opinions and support of family, peers, and teachers play a significant role in students' cross-border study decisions. Although the influence of Attitude ($\beta = 0.161$) was relatively weak, it was still significant. This indicates that a positive national image, education quality, and cultural attractiveness can effectively promote students' study abroad intention.

Table 6 Path Analysis Results

Hypotheses	Path	Std. Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	*P*	Result
H1	Attitude → Behavioral Intention	0.161	0.038	4.328	***	Supported
H2	Subjective Norms → Behavioral Intention	0.213	0.039	5.410	***	Supported
H3	Perceived Behavioral Control → Behavioral Intention	0.258	0.040	6.428	***	Supported

Remarks: ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

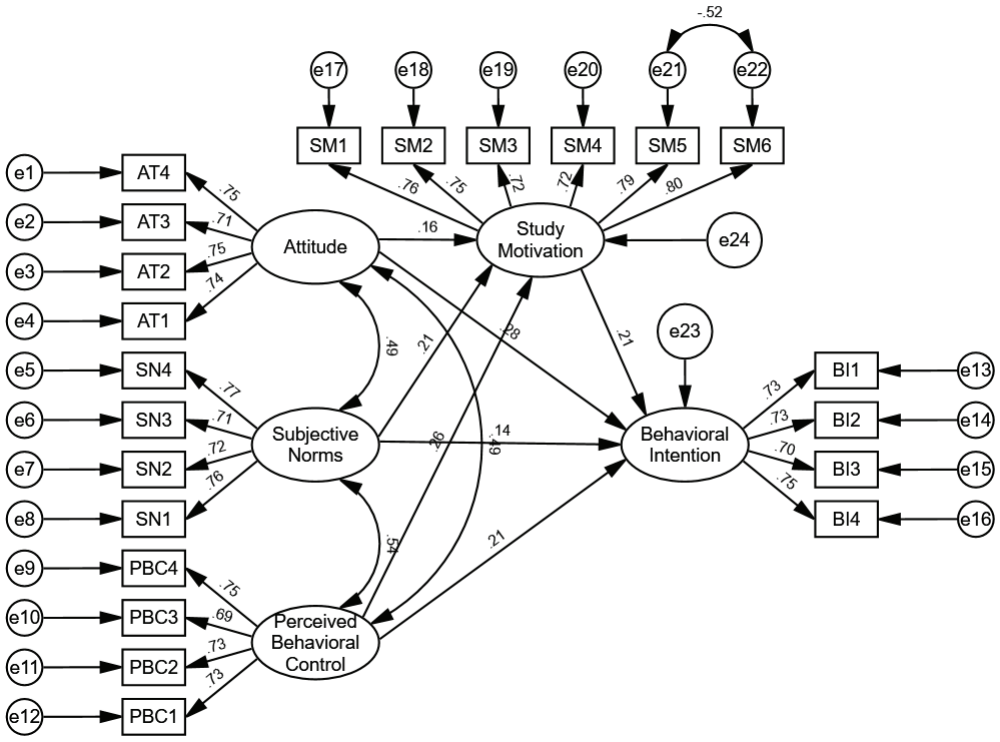


Figure 2 SEM Path Model of Chinese Students' Intention to Study in Thailand

5. Mediating Effect Test

This study further examined the mediating role of Study Motivation (SM) between Attitude (AT), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), and Behavioral Intention (BI). To improve the robustness of the analysis results, the Bootstrap method was used for repeated sampling (n = 2,000). The 95% Confidence Interval (CI) was used to test whether the mediating effect was significant. When the confidence interval does not include zero, it indicates a significant mediating effect.

The analysis results in Table 7 show that Study Motivation played a partial mediating role in all three main paths. First, Attitude had a significant indirect effect on Behavioral Intention through Study Motivation (indirect effect = 0.098, 95% CI [0.070, 0.130], accounting for 22.63% of the total effect). This shows that students' positive attitude towards studying in Thailand not only directly enhances their study abroad intention but can also indirectly influence behavioral decisions by stimulating motivation for learning interest, cultural experience, and career development. Second, the indirect effect of Subjective Norms on Behavioral Intention through motivation was 0.112 (95% CI [0.085, 0.146]), accounting for 28.72% of the total effect. This indicates that social support and the opinions of important others can effectively strengthen an individual's study motivation, thereby enhancing their behavioral intention. Finally, the indirect effect of Perceived Behavioral Control was 0.113 (95% CI [0.080, 0.148]), accounting for 26.22% of the total effect. This shows that when students have a strong sense of resource control and confidence, they are more likely to form a stable study abroad decision intention driven by motivation.

Therefore, hypothesis H4 was supported.

Table 7 Mediating Effect Analysis Results

Hypotheses	Path		Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI	Effect Size	Result
H4	AT-SM-BI	Total Effect	0.433	0.025	0.384	0.482		Supported
		Direct Effect	0.335	0.025	0.286	0.385	77.37%	
		Indirect Effect	0.098	0.016	0.070	0.130	22.63%	
	SN-SM-BI	Total Effect	0.390	0.025	0.340	0.439		Supported
		Direct Effect	0.278	0.026	0.226	0.329	71.28%	
		Indirect Effect	0.112	0.026	0.085	0.146	28.72%	
	PBC-SM-BI	Total Effect	0.431	0.026	0.380	0.481		Supported
		Direct Effect	0.318	0.027	0.265	0.370	73.78%	
		Indirect Effect	0.113	0.017	0.080	0.148	26.22%	

6. Moderating Effect Analysis

To further examine the role of demographic variables in the TPB model, this study used multi-group SEM to test the moderating effects of gender and family income. The sample was divided by gender and by family income level, and path coefficients were compared across groups.

As shown in Table 8, the gender-group model showed good fit (χ^2 = 742.561, df = 399, CFI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.026), but the path differences were not significant ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 0.565, p = 0.904). This indicates that gender did not significantly moderate the relationships among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. In other words, male and female students showed similar psychological patterns in forming their intention to study in Thailand.

By contrast, the family income model showed significant group differences (χ^2 = 927.019, df = 600, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 14.322, p = 0.026), suggesting that income significantly moderated some TPB paths (see Table 9). For the path from attitude to behavioral intention, the middle-income group showed the strongest effect (β = 0.354***), while the low-income group (β = 0.146) and high-income group (β = 0.153) were lower. This suggests that positive attitudes were most easily translated into intention among students with moderate economic conditions.

For the path from perceived behavioral control to behavioral intention, the effect increased with income, from β = 0.329*** in the low-income group to β = 0.508*** in the high-income group. This suggests that students with stronger financial conditions relied more on self-efficacy and resource control when judging the feasibility of studying abroad. In contrast, the effect of subjective norms weakened as income increased, falling from β = 0.169*** to β = -0.001. This indicates that students from higher-income families were less influenced by family and social opinions.

Therefore, hypothesis H5 was partially supported.

Table 8 Multiple Group Analysis Model Comparison Results

Moderator	Groups	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	p	CFI	RMSEA	Result
Gender	Male/Female	742.561	399	0.565(3)	0.904	0.972	0.026	Not Supported
Household Income	Low/Medium/ High	927.019	600	14.322(6)	0.026	0.973	0.021	Supported

Table 9 Moderating Effects of Household Income on TPB Paths

Structural Path	Income1 (Low)	Income2 (Medium)	Income3 (High)	Moderation Pattern
Attitude → Behavioral Intention	0.146	0.354***	0.153	Inverted U-shape
Subjective Norms → Behavioral Intention	0.158	0.169***	-0.001	Decreasing
Perceived Behavioral Control → Behavioral Intention	0.329***	0.110*	0.508***	Increasing

Remarks: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Discussion

The findings support the usefulness of the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. Consistent with Ajzen (1991), attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all had significant positive effects on behavioral intention. This result also agrees with earlier research showing that positive evaluations, social support, and perceived ability increase students' intention to study abroad (Teah, 2019).

Attitude was an important predictor, suggesting that Chinese students are more likely to choose Thailand when they perceive it as affordable, culturally familiar, and academically beneficial. This is consistent with Bodycott (2009), who emphasized the importance of value orientation in destination choice. Subjective norms also had a significant effect, indicating that study abroad decisions are still strongly shaped by family and social expectations in the Chinese context (Li & Bray, 2007). Perceived behavioral control was another strong predictor, which means that financial readiness, language confidence, and application convenience strengthen students' willingness to study in Thailand. This finding is in line with Chirkov et al. (2007). It also supports recent studies showing that destination affordability, cultural familiarity, family influence, and institutional support remain important in attracting Chinese students to Thailand (Lertpusit et al., 2025; Guo, 2025; Poedloknimit & Punnanan, 2025; Xue et al., 2024).

The results further showed that study motivation partially mediated the effects of the three TPB variables on behavioral intention, which suggests that positive perceptions and social support are more likely to translate into intention when students have clear learning goals and personal motivation. This finding is consistent with Heng (2018). In addition, gender did not significantly moderate the structural relationships, whereas family income did. This suggests that the basic psychological mechanism is similar across gender, but economic background still shapes how students evaluate and respond to study abroad opportunities. The income moderation result is also worth noting. The inverted U-shape pattern suggests that attitude had the strongest effect on behavioral intention among middle-income students. One possible These students are more likely to weigh both cost and expected return. By comparison, lower-income students may remain cautious because of financial pressure, while higher-income students may have more alternatives and may not rely on attitude alone when making decisions. This finding suggests that Thai universities may need different recruitment messages for students from different income groups.

Conclusions

1. Research Conclusions

This study, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), systematically explored the impact of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on Chinese students' intention to study in Thailand. It introduced study motivation as a mediating variable. Gender and family income were used as moderating variables. The results show that the TPB model can effectively explain the formation mechanism of students' study abroad intentions. Attitude, social norms, and resource perception all had

significant positive effects on behavioral intention. Study motivation played a partial mediating role between them and behavioral intention. Family income had a significant moderating effect on some paths. The research results reveal that Chinese students' study abroad decisions are not only based on cognitive judgments but are also comprehensively influenced by social culture and economic conditions.

2. Practical Suggestions

The findings also suggest several practical steps for Thai universities. First, recruitment should present clear and concrete information, including tuition fees, living costs, scholarship opportunities, visa procedures, and language support, so that students can better judge whether studying in Thailand is realistic and affordable. Second, since subjective norms were significant, universities should pay more attention to parents as well as students. This can be done through Chinese-language materials, parent-oriented online sessions, and alumni sharing on safety, degree recognition, and employment outcomes. Third, universities should strengthen application support, pre-departure guidance, and academic advising, as these services may reduce uncertainty and improve students' sense of control. Finally, recruitment strategies should be adjusted for different income groups. For example, middle-income students may respond more to value-for-money messages, lower-income students may need stronger financial support, and higher-income students may pay more attention to academic quality and career development.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has theoretical and practical contributions, it still has some limitations. The sample mainly consisted of Chinese students, lacking cross-cultural comparison. The data were cross-sectional surveys, unable to reveal dynamic changes. Although the sampling method combined online and offline, there was still regional concentration. In addition, the study did not distinguish respondents by intended level of study in Thailand, which may have provided a more nuanced understanding of differences in study intention.

Future research could expand the sample to other source countries and compare whether the same TPB relationships hold across different groups. Longitudinal designs may also help examine how intention develops into actual enrollment behavior. In addition, qualitative interviews could be added to better understand how students and their families interpret cost, opportunity, and educational value when considering Thailand as a study destination.

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