



JOURNAL OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AND LEARNING (JTEL)

ISSN: 2837-4398 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 (2023)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

The Factors Influencing Chinese Students to Study in Thailand During Covid-19 Pandemic

Yijian Huang^{1*}

Article Information

Received: May 07, 2023

Accepted: July 08, 2023

Published: July 13, 2023

Keywords

COVID-19, Chinese Graduate Student, International Student, Rational Choice Theory, Study in Thailand

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out the factors which caused Chinese graduate students to study in Thailand during COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing 131 valid questionnaires obtained from current master's degree students at Stamford International University in Thailand, the results revealed that most of the students were undergraduates from non-first class institutions, worked in universities, and majored in arts. The factors for Chinese students to choose Thailand, from the highest scores to the lowest, were time factor, international relationship, learning pressure and cultural inducement. Moreover, young teachers put much weight on learning pressure and cultural inducements. This study accordingly made two suggestions: 1. increasing the ways of further education for young teachers majored in arts; and 2. China may consider offering winter and summer master's degree programs for in-service teachers.

INTRODUCTION

During 2020-2022, when COVID-19 epidemic was raging, universities in Southeast Asia were targeting the Chinese graduate student markets with lower tuition fees, induced by overseas-study service agents touting "foreign degrees without going abroad". Among them, Thai universities have benefited from the Agreement between the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Thailand on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications and Degrees (2010), which made Thailand rapidly becoming a major overseas-study country for Chinese graduate students. In addition, many universities in Thailand employed Chinese faculty as part-time teachers for online classes, which naturally attracted many students who were only seeking a master degree but lacked English ability.

When considering the purpose of studying abroad, a survey conducted by Wang and Low (2019) found that the most important factor was "receiving a foreign educational approach" and the top three factors influencing students to study abroad were "social security and public order", "economic development" and "school ranking". Li's (2019) study on the Guizhou University of Finance and Economics also found that the most important purpose of students choosing to study abroad was "to receive a different culture and education from China". In addition, the top three concerns of students to study abroad were "language communication difficulties", "social security" and "pressure of learning". Thus, the common concern of students was "social security", while the common goal was "to receive a different education style".

In recent years, international relation has also become a consideration for students to choose a country for

overseas-study. The THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) incident of South Korea in 2017 and the insult to China from Australia in 2020 resulted in a significant decrease of Chinese student number in South Korea and Australia. This was because international students were concerned about their personal safety. It simultaneously indicated that "international relationships" has been categorized as a "security issue" by international students. As a result of the epidemic, most of the subjects taken by Chinese graduate students studying in Thailand were taught online by part-time teachers recruited from China. Such online courses had nothing to do with foreign educational methods. Besides, students were all registered as international students but need not go to the destination country, therefore, they were not troubled by social security. Hence result, it is worth exploring further whether there were other factors except the friendly relationship between China and Thailand. Accordingly, this research aimed to analyze the factors that influenced Chinese graduate students choose to study in Thailand in 2020-2022.

Related Theories

Student transfer was long-term neglected in the transfer literature, not only limited empirically, but also poorly theorized (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Most of the research on overseas-study students used the following theories as its infrastructure: Push-Pull Theory, Dependency Theory, Rational Choice Theory, and The Theory of World System.

Lee (1966) developed the Push-Pull Theory of Migration based on Ravenstein's (1885) law of migration, which referred to four factors that influence the decision to migrate and the process of migration. These include: factors associated with the area of origin, factors

¹ Yang-En University, Fujian, China

* Corresponding author's e-mail: huangyijianbkk@163.com

associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors.

Based on the theory proposed by Lee (1966), scholars applied the theory of population migration to education. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) used the model of push-pull theory to explore the factors affecting overseas-study students and found that the push factors of international students include: better curriculum in the destination countries than in the local areas, difficulty in accessing local schools, courses not available in the local areas, and willingness to migrate; the pull factors include: quality of education, accreditation of the curriculum, reputation of the schools, monetary factors such as tuition and living costs, local environmental factors such as climate, and local social connections. The pull factors might include: quality of education, accreditation of the programs, reputation of the schools, monetary factors such as tuition and living costs, local environmental factors such as climate, local social ties such as having friends and relatives living or studying abroad, etc.

The second is dependency theory, which was originally used to address issues related to development regions. This theory has been applied to education when comparing the development of different educational systems between international countries (Pan & Zhang, 2019). And it emphasized that the interaction of economy and trade would affect the educational culture and international student exchange (Zhang, 2017).

The third is rational choice theory, which took an economic efficiency perspective. It indicated that individuals would think about the possible cost if it can meet their expectations (Cheng, 2017). Likewise, individuals make rational thoughts and decide whether to study abroad after calculating the cost in terms of the benefits, resources, and constraints (Petzold & Moog, 2018).

The last is the world system theory, which suggested that the labor forces in the frontier and semi-frontier countries would move to the core countries to maintain the profits (Griffiths & Knezevic, 2010). When applying this theory to higher education, it is said the frontier and semi-frontier countries would send international students

to the core countries or developed countries so that these students can contribute their home countries after they graduate and return (Zhang, 2017).

Since both dependency theory and world system theory take the core countries as the direction of overseas-study, however, both theories are not applicable for the geopolitical relationship between China and Thailand. In addition, the “Implementation Plan for the Reform of Education Graduate Students and Government-Funded Teacher Training Program Students Exempted from Bar Exams of Primary and Secondary School Teachers’ Qualifications” issued by the Ministry of Education of China clearly stated that education graduate students can directly apply for teacher certificates without taking the teacher certification exam. Therefore, the factors in the push-pull theory cannot be fully applied to education graduate students either.

Accordingly, based on rational choice theory, this study developed a survey scale on “Main factors which cause Chinese graduate students to study in Thailand” and conducted a survey on Chinese master’s degree students of educational administration program at Stamford International University, Thailand.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The quantitative data of this study was collected by two stages. In the first stage, questionnaires were distributed to master’s students who enrolled in November 2020 and July 2021. The questions are based on Wang and Low’s (2020) scale, which includes 3 questions on “time cost”, 3 questions on “learning efficiency”, 3 questions on “international relations”, and 3 questions on “cultural incentives”. A total of 12 questions were measured using the Likert five point scoring method. There were 73 pre test questionnaires collected, and after inspection, 65 valid questionnaires were left. Among them, there is one question for “learning pressure” and one question for “international relations”, with low commonality. However, considering the completeness of the construct, they were retained, and a scale of 12 questions was formed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Items of the scale

| SN. | Item | Correlation | Cronbach's α | Commonality |
|---|--|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Time Cost ($\alpha= 0.788$) | | | | |
| 1 | Attendance requirement is short | .835** | 0.718 | 0.695 |
| 2 | Available for working students | .853** | 0.691 | 0.723 |
| 3 | Study does not interfere with work | .826** | 0.726 | 0.688 |
| Learning Pressure ($\alpha= 0.657$) | | | | |
| 4 | Less stressful courses | .718** | 0.558 | 0.686 |
| 5 | Thesis requirement is less than in China | .746** | 0.537 | 0.705 |
| 6 | Less English proficiency requirement | .644** | 0.625 | 0.500 |
| International Relationships ($\alpha= 0.776$) | | | | |
| 7 | Chinese and Thai cultures are similar | .881** | 0.585 | 0.796 |
| 8 | There are many Chinese in Thailand | .851** | 0.662 | 0.736 |
| 9 | Thailand is friendly to China | .759** | 0.820 | 0.546 |

| Cultural Inducement ($\alpha = 0.860$) | | | | |
|--|--|--------|-------|-------|
| 10 | I want to learn Thai | .904** | 0.773 | 0.822 |
| 11 | I like Thai culture | .902** | 0.763 | 0.834 |
| 12 | I like the religious culture of Thailand | .852** | 0.875 | 0.702 |

In the second stage, the QR code of the scale was distributed to master's students enrolled in January 2022 and March 2022. A total 135 questionnaires were collected and 131 of them were valid for analysis, with a validity rate of 97% of the collected questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The data obtained from the valid questionnaires were

tested with descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test and ANOVA.

Background Information of the Participants

The backgrounds of the participants included five categories: gender, undergraduate school attributes, age, current institution of employment, and undergraduate major, and the distribution results are shown in Table 2.

According to the analysis, we could see that the participants

Table 2: Table of descriptive statistical analysis of participants

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | (1) Female | 90 | 68.7 |
| | (2) Male | 41 | 31.3 |
| Undergraduate school attributes | (1) First-class | 14 | 10.7 |
| | (2) Non-first-class | 117 | 89.3 |
| Age | (1) 21-25 years old | 32 | 24.4 |
| | (2) 26-30 years old | 31 | 23.7 |
| | (3) 31-35 years old | 41 | 31.3 |
| | (4) 36-40 years old | 15 | 11.5 |
| | (5) Over 41 years old | 12 | 9.2 |
| Currently working for | (1) College/University | 75 | 57.3 |
| | (2) Secondary School | 21 | 16.0 |
| | (3) K-6 | 14 | 10.7 |
| | (4) Others | 21 | 16.0 |
| Bachelor's degree major in | (1) Education | 26 | 19.8 |
| | (2) Business | 17 | 13.0 |
| | (3) Social Sciences | 14 | 10.7 |
| | (4) Arts | 37 | 28.2 |
| | (5) Sciences | 9 | 6.9 |
| | (6) Others | 28 | 21.4 |

in the survey have the following characteristics (1) the majority of the participants were females. It is probably that the participants were from educational administration, and more women than men study education; (2) most students graduated from non-first class colleges. This is probably because undergraduates from first class chose to attend national graduate entrance exams in China; (3) the number of young teachers under the age of 35 accounts for about 60% of the total, presumably because young teachers were under pressure to earn their titles and had more courage to receive overseas education; (4) most students were working at higher education institutions, that highlights the needs for students to meet academic qualifications; (5) the largest number of students were majored in arts in their undergraduate, which indicated that undergraduates in arts are likely to have fewer

accesses to further their education in China.

Item Analysis

The mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scores for each item are shown in Table 3 below.

It was found that the scores of the factors from the highest to the lowest for Chinese graduate students choosing to study in Thailand were time factor ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.707$), international relationships ($M=3.77$, $SD=0.762$), learning pressure ($M=3.31$, $SD=0.733$), and cultural inducements ($M=2.92$, $SD=0.982$). The absolute values of skewness were less than 2 and the absolute values of kurtosis were less than 7, which indicated that the data distribution could be considered as normally distributed.

In addition, whether the variables have well structural

Table 3: Scores distribution of each item

| SN. | Item | M | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | CR | AVE |
|-----|--|------|-------|----------|----------|------|------|
| | Time Cost | 4.36 | 0.707 | -1.868 | 6.227 | .745 | .493 |
| 1 | Attendance requirement is short | 4.25 | 0.844 | -1.209 | 1.922 | | |
| 2 | Available for working students | 4.44 | 0.870 | -2.209 | 5.839 | | |
| 3 | Study does not interfere with work | 4.38 | 0.818 | -1.583 | 3.281 | .626 | .361 |
| | Learning Pressure | 3.31 | 0.733 | -0.100 | 0.278 | | |
| 4 | Less stressful courses | 3.51 | 0.964 | -0.295 | -0.029 | | |
| 5 | Thesis requirement is less than in China | 2.89 | 1.020 | 0.012 | -0.250 | .739 | .491 |
| 6 | Less English proficiency requirement | 3.70 | 0.966 | -0.460 | 0.183 | | |
| | International Relationships | 3.77 | 0.762 | -0.629 | 0.751 | | |
| 7 | Chinese and Thai cultures are similar | 3.63 | 0.923 | -0.556 | 0.506 | .830 | .622 |
| 8 | There are many Chinese in Thailand | 3.73 | 0.935 | -0.702 | 0.674 | | |
| 9 | Thailand is friendly to China | 3.94 | 0.892 | -0.539 | 0.204 | | |
| | Cultural Inducement | 2.92 | 0.982 | 0.065 | 0.046 | | |
| 10 | I want to learn Thai | 2.76 | 1.149 | 0.075 | -0.619 | | |
| 11 | I like Thai culture | 3.15 | 1.031 | -0.125 | 0.104 | | |
| 12 | I like the religious culture of Thailand | 2.86 | 1.149 | 0.088 | -0.424 | | |

validity is determined by Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity. Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity are determined by the values of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), respectively. CR is the internal consistency of the variables, and a higher CR value means that the items are more likely to measure the variable, and the basic requirement of CR value for a qualified questionnaire is .5 (Hair, 1998). AVE is the extent to which the variable is explained by the items, i.e., the higher the AVE, the more the variance is explained by the items, and the basic requirement for a qualified questionnaire of AVE value is .36 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, all CR values of variables were higher than .5 and the AVE was above .36, so the structural validity of the questionnaire met the basic requirements.

Independent Sample T-Test

Gender and undergraduate school category were the only two background variables with two category attributes, so independent samples t-tests were used to analyze their effects on the research variables. The results indicated that there were no significant differences of time cost, learning pressure, international relationships, and cultural inducements.

Analysis of Variance

Age, current work organization, and undergraduate major in the questionnaire had more than three category attributes and therefore had to be tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). After confirming that the survey data passed Levene's homogeneity test, ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of age, current workplace, and undergraduate major on the research variables. The results showed significant differences in

age for learning pressure ($F(4, 126) = 3.356, p = .012$) and cultural inducements ($F(4, 126) = 3.914, p = .005$). It was also found that the source of the difference was from the teachers aged above 36 years old and aged less than 35. Besides, there were no significant differences in other components.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research illustrate that the most important factor for Chinese students to choose the destination country was the length of schooling in education system. Most participants were working students in the survey; therefore their major concern was time cost which is different from the full time students. This finding also pointed out that Chinese students prefer to study in friendly countries. These two findings were seldom mentioned in literature. Since the virus will not disappear, the industry of overseas study must seriously face the possibility of another pandemic in the future and value the findings of this research. Through the discussion, this study proposes the following conclusions and recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

First, arts teachers tend to study overseas. Graduates majoring in arts are with high willingness to further their education, however too few domestic schools offer them the opportunities for further education, which forced them to study overseas. Second, studying in Thailand reduces time cost. Time cost is the most important factor for Chinese graduate students studying in Thailand, because comparing to study in other countries, taking 1 year to obtain a master's degree is a more efficient investment. Last but not least, young people tend to study overseas. Younger people are more willing to

study overseas since they can access the international environment much faster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More Programs for Arts Teachers

Increasing the ways of further education for teachers majored in arts can avoid foreign exchange expenditure. Although teachers can broaden their visions by studying abroad, they also need to pay tuition fees to foreign universities. Therefore, it is recommended to moderately increase the access of graduate students in arts, and simultaneously encourage universities to offer related master's degree programs.

Semester Break Programs for In-service Teachers

Government can consider enrolling winter and summer master's degree students for in-service teachers. The number of teachers in China is huge; therefore, the classes of master's degree programs for in-service teachers can be offered in semester break. In addition, if the teaching location can be flexibly planned not limited to the campus, it can even help to rural revitalization.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was limited by the amount of the participants. For this topic, data obtained from a large number of individuals or group interviews may be more in-depth. Therefore, it is suggested that the interview method can be used to obtain data and the thematic analysis method can be used to analyze the data.

REFERENCES

- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error: Algebra and Statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, (18), 382-388. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3150980>
- Griffiths, T. G., Knezevic, L. (2010). Wallerstein's World-Systems Analysis in Comparative Education: A Case Study. *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, 40(4), 447-463.
- Hair, Jr. J. F. (1998). *Multivariate Data Analysis with Readings*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- King, R. and Ruiz-Gelices, E. (2003). International Student Migration and the European 'Year Abroad': Effects on European Identity and Subsequent Migration Behaviour. *International Journal of Population Geography*, (9), 229-252.
- Lee, E. S. (1996). A Theory of Migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57.
- Lv, M. Factor analysis of international students' choice of study destination countries. *Journal of World Education*, 29(14), 52-56.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). The 'Push-Pull' Factors Influencing International Student Selection of Education Destination. *International Journal of Educational Management*, (16), 82-90.
- Pan, J. H., & Zhang R. J. (2019). A preliminary study on the current situation and influencing factors of international students studying in Taiwan in the context of the New Southbound Policy. *Taiwan Education Review Monthly*, 8(2), 154-175.
- Petzold, K., & Moog, P. (2018). What Shapes the Intention to Study Abroad? An Experimental Approach. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education Research*, 75(1), 35-54.
- Wang, S. M., & Low, J. (2020). An analysis of the factors influencing students' intention to study abroad in "Belt and Road" countries: an example of students' study in Malaysia from Chinese universities of applied technology. *Journal of Liaoning Higher Education*, 22(02), 25-28.
- Zhang, F. Q. (2017). A study on the experiences and recommendations of students from Southeast Asian countries studying in Taiwan. *Journal of Taipei University*, 48(2), 1-27.
- Zheng, Y. J. (2017). A Review of the Response Approach of Educational Action Subjects under the University Entrance Examination System from Rational Choice Theory. *Taiwan Education Review Monthly*, 6(9), 248-254.