MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS FOR CHINESE STUDENTS' SATISFACTION AND WILLINGNESS TO STUDY MANAGEMENT MAJORS IN THAI UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract
This study explored the factors influencing Chinese students' satisfaction with their management studies and their intention to pursue further studies at Thai universities. Drawing on a variety of theoretical perspectives, including expectancy-confirmation theory, self-determination theory, push-pull theory, intercultural adaptation theory, and social support theory, the study constructed a comprehensive framework that integrates external factors (perception of safety, university reputation, social support, infrastructure, and economic factors) with internal factors (academic preparation, language proficiency, and cultural adaptability). The framework used student satisfaction as a mediating variable and student intention to pursue further studies as the outcome variable.

The results showed that internal factors, particularly academic preparation, language proficiency, and cultural adaptability, had a greater impact on student satisfaction than external factors. Among the external factors, only infrastructure and economic factors significantly influenced student satisfaction, while perception of safety, university reputation, and social support had no significant impact. Furthermore, student satisfaction strongly predicted students' intention to continue and recommend their university, highlighting its key mediating role. Interview data further confirmed that while students valued affordability and adequate facilities, their overall satisfaction was primarily determined by academic preparation, language proficiency, and cultural adaptability.

This study provides new empirical evidence on the dynamics of student satisfaction and intention in international higher education, offering theoretical advancements and practical guidance for universities committed to enhancing the learning experience of Chinese students in Thailand.

Keywords: Satisfaction, Learning Motivation, Learning Intention, Structural Equation Modeling, Cross-cultural Adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

Thailand has developed as an important destination for foreign higher education in Asia. According to figures issued by the Secretariat of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) on November 23, 2023, Thailand has 36,060 overseas students, with mainland China accounting for 60% (21,906) of the total. This makes Chinese students the largest international student group in Thai higher education. Notably, 70% of Chinese students attend private universities, like Chulalongkorn, Dhurakij Pundit, Assumption, Shinawatra, and Rangsit University, with the other 30% attending state institutions.

Thailand's appeal to Chinese students is largely due to three key factors: (1) geographical and cultural proximity, which makes adaptation and travel easier; (2) economic affordability, as tuition and living costs are lower than in Western countries; and (3) job opportunities arising from regional economic cooperation initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Private universities have improved their position by

offering flexible admissions, diverse international curriculum, and vigorous abroad recruitment efforts.

Despite rising Chinese enrolment, challenges persist in terms of learning experience, satisfaction, and retention. Many Chinese students report low satisfaction, cultural adjustment issues, and insufficient institutional assistance, all contributing to low retention and engagement rates.

A survey of the available literature identifies four significant research gaps:

- External variables - Few studies have looked at how Thailand-specific external factors including safety, reputation, infrastructure, and economic concerns influence Chinese students' contentment.
- Internal variables - Few research have examined how language competency, cultural adaptation, and academic readiness affect educational results.
- Comprehensive analysis - There is a paucity of integrated research that examines how external and internal factors interact to influence student happiness and willingness.
- Comparative viewpoint - There are few studies comparing Chinese students at public and private Thai institutions.

This study aims to examine the external and internal factors influencing Chinese students' satisfaction and educational experiences in management programs at Thai universities and provide recommendations to enhance educational quality and student support.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study integrates on previous research on foreign education, student motivation, and cross-cultural adaptation to create a complete framework for analyzing Chinese students' happiness and willingness to study management at Thai institutions. The study aims to contribute to both theory and practice by investigating the interrelationships between external factors (such as safety, reputation, and economic considerations) and internal factors (such as academic preparation, language proficiency, and cultural adaptability), providing new perspectives on how multidimensional influences shape student experiences and enhance Thai higher education's competitiveness in the global market.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Factors Affecting Chinese Students' Satisfaction and Educational Experiences in Thailand

This study uses different theoretical perspectives to understand the elements that influence Chinese students' contentment and willingness to study at Thai institutions. Berry's Acculturation Model (1997) and the U-Curve Cultural Adaptation Model (Lysgaard, 1955) demonstrate how cultural adaptation and adjustment stages influence students' psychological well-being and satisfaction. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of language ability in academic participation and social integration. Tinto's Student Integration Model (1993) and Biggs' 3P Learning Process Model (2003) emphasize the significance of academic and social integration, participatory teaching, and learning settings in determining beneficial educational results. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Social Support Network Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) describe how meeting psychological needs and providing emotional and social support improves student motivation and satisfaction. Meanwhile, the Push-Pull Theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) describes the external variables that influence Chinese students' decisions to study in Thailand, such as cost, safety, and reputation. Furthermore, Gardner's Socio-educational Model (1985) and the SERVQUAL Framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988) emphasize the importance of motivation and service quality in shaping students' experiences, whereas Bean and Metzner's

Model (1985) emphasize the impact of psychological and environmental factors on learning intentions. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural, academic, psychological, and environmental factors influence foreign students' happiness and educational experiences.

2.2 Review of Key Constructs

Previous research has emphasized the importance of several aspects in determining international students' happiness and behavioral goals in higher education. **Reliability** has been highlighted as a critical factor of institutional excellence, indicating the consistency and reliability of educational systems, service delivery, and administrative support. Reliable academic operations, such as solid online platforms, prompt course administration, and open communication, help to build student trust and satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Channuwong et al., 2025; Abdullah, 2006). Similarly, research has demonstrated that **physical and psychological safety** improves students' comfort and involvement in multicultural contexts. Secure learning settings, inclusive policies, and strong social support networks enhance belonging and emotional well-being, which leads to increased satisfaction and better academic performance (Glass et al., 2015; Li & Zizzi, 2018).

Satisfaction serves as a major mediating factor, connecting students' judgements of academic quality, service excellence, and institutional support. Prior research has shown that high satisfaction among international students results in good behavioral outcomes such as ongoing study intention, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty to the school (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016). In addition, **adaptability**—which includes academic preparation, language skills, and cultural adjustment—is crucial in molding students' learning experiences overseas. According to research, adaptable students manage better with academic expectations, overcome linguistic hurdles, and integrate culturally, resulting in greater happiness and academic achievement (Ward et al., 2001; Chen & Chiu, 2020).

Finally, **randomness or environmental unpredictability**, such as unforeseen technological glitches or legislative changes, has emerged as a significant contextual element impacting educational outcomes. Although such unpredictability might have a detrimental influence on satisfaction, institutions that maintain high dependability and encourage student flexibility can reduce the effects (Kuo et al., 2014). Integrating these findings, the current study proposes a model in which dependability, safety, and flexibility positively influence student satisfaction, which in turn influences behavioral intents such as continuing study and referral. This paradigm represents a comprehensive knowledge of how institutional and human variables interact to shape the learning experience of Chinese students in Thailand.

Based on the Factors Affecting Chinese Students' Satisfaction and Educational Experiences in Thailand (Figure 1).
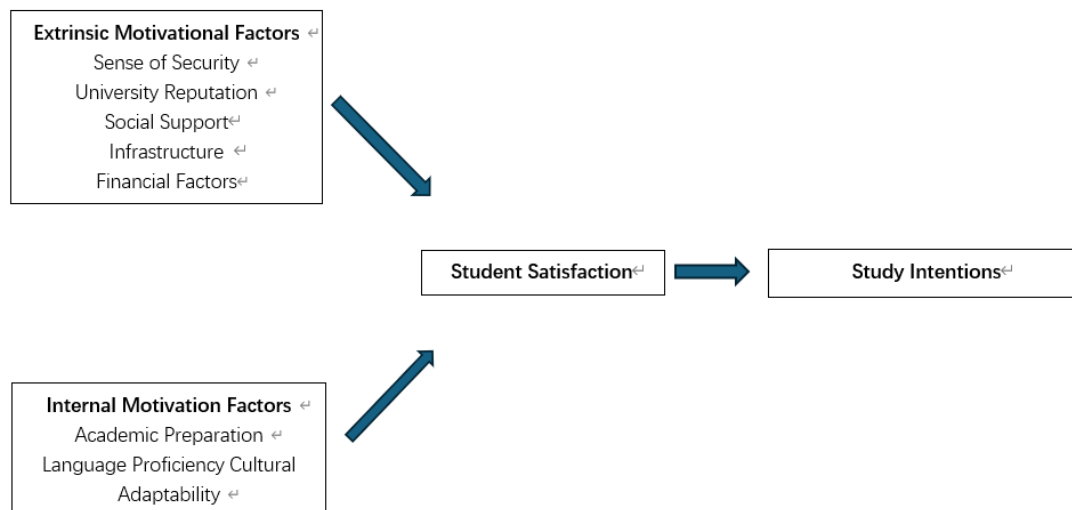
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methodologies approach, including quantitative and qualitative methods, to investigate the learning experiences and satisfaction of Chinese foreign students studying management in Thailand. The quantitative phase employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to investigate the correlations between important factors such as motivation, service quality, satisfaction, and learning intention. The qualitative phase supplemented these findings with semi-structured interviews, which provided further insights into cultural adaptability and academic engagement.

Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

The target group consisted of Chinese undergraduate, master's, and doctorate students enrolled in management-related programs (such as Business Administration, Marketing, Human Resources, and International Business) in Thai higher education institutions. This group was chosen for its expanding relevance as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as its diversified learning and adaptation experiences. Participants were selected from three representative universities—Srinakharinwirot University (public), Shinawatra University (private), and Assumption University (private)—to capture institutional variation in academic and support systems. Data collection was conducted through a combination of online and offline methods. Online channels included Questionnaire Star, Google Forms, and social media channels such as WeChat and QQ groups; offline methods supplemented this with paper questionnaires distributed within universities. The quantitative phase yielded 400 valid responses, satisfying SEM's suggested sample size criteria (Hair et al., 2010). To improve triangulation and contextual knowledge, about 20 students (the top and bottom 20% of satisfaction scores) and five administrators were interviewed. Interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing or WeChat voice calls, and each lasted approximately 15 to 25 minutes. With informed consent from the interviewees, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for subsequent coding and analysis. Participant information was kept anonymous to ensure privacy.

Research Instrument/Questionnaire

The questionnaire has four questions that were aimed to capture Chinese management students' motivations, contentment, and learning aspirations at Thai institutions. All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

The first phase gathered demographic data (gender, age, educational level, institution type, and study length in Thailand) to enable group comparisons and control for background effects, which is consistent with Ibrahim et al.'s (2023) results on cross-cultural learning affects.

The second section assessed external motivational factors on five dimensions: sense of security (Phonthanukitithaworn et al., 2022), university reputation (Chien & Kot, 2011), social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), infrastructure (Parasuraman et al., 1988), and economic factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The third portion examined internal motivating variables such as academic preparation, language competency, and cultural adaptation, focusing on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory and Berry's (1997) intercultural adaptation model.

The fourth segment evaluated student satisfaction and learning intents using Expectancy-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980). Satisfaction included curriculum design, teaching techniques, and support services (Songsathaphorn et al., 2014), whereas learning intention looked at future study, employment, and referral behaviors (Kuo & Wong, 2019; Yang, 2022).

4. RESULTS

4.1 In-Depth Interview Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Chinese students studying management in Thailand to explore their motivations, challenges, satisfaction, and learning intentions. Using Thomas and Magilvy's (2011) three-stage content analysis (preparation, organization, debriefing), the interviews were systematically coded and analyzed.

External factors showed mixed influence: financial cost was the main motivation for choosing Thailand but had limited effect on satisfaction; school reputation emerged as a key barrier to satisfaction and willingness to recommend; social support and infrastructure played minor or supplementary roles.

Internal factors were critical: academic preparation and language proficiency strongly affected learning smoothness and satisfaction, while cultural adaptation positively influenced the overall experience through psychological integration.

Satisfaction acted as a core mediator between motivational factors and study intention. Positive experiences with teaching, adaptation, and support increased willingness to recommend and continue studies, whereas academic challenges, graduation difficulties, or accreditation issues reduced satisfaction and study intention.

Implications suggest that universities should enhance academic support, language services, and accreditation transparency, combining cost advantages with educational quality to foster long-term student satisfaction and retention.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The sample of Chinese students studying management in Thailand is predominantly female (95.5%), with a majority aged 23–25 years (56.8%), indicating a young adult population. Most participants are highly educated, with 62.0% pursuing a master's degree and 35.5% at the doctoral level. Respondents were almost evenly distributed across public (51.8%) and private universities (48.3%), and the majority (52.5%) had less than one year of study experience in Thailand.

Respondents generally expressed moderate agreement across factors (M = 3.38–3.62, SD = 1.00–1.26). Language proficiency had the highest mean (M = 3.62), followed by academic preparation (M = 3.59), reflecting confidence in language abilities and readiness for study. Social support and sense of security were moderately high (M = 3.46–3.60), while infrastructure scored lowest (M = 3.38–3.42), indicating room for improvement. Satisfaction and study intention were moderate (M = 3.45–3.58), suggesting generally positive but not strong perceptions. Overall, the findings highlight strengths in personal preparedness and language skills, with infrastructure as a relative weakness.

4.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

In the reliability analysis: the internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's α. All dimensions exhibited strong reliability, with α values ranging from 0.828 to 0.905, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2020). This indicates that the measurement instrument is highly consistent and suitable for subsequent analyses.

Measurement Model Validity: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the adequacy of the measurement model, which comprises five main dimensions: extrinsic motivational factors (Sense of Security, University Reputation, Social Support, Infrastructure, Financial Factors), intrinsic motivational factors (Academic Preparation, Language Proficiency, Cultural Adaptability), Student Satisfaction, and Student Intention. The overall model fit was excellent (χ^2/df = 1.022, RMSEA = 0.007, GFI = 0.937, NFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.999, RFI = 0.936, IFI = 0.999, CFI = 0.999), indicating that the model adequately represents the data.

Convergent Validity: all items demonstrated standardized factor loadings above 0.50 (p < 0.001), AVE values ranged from 0.62 to 0.71, and Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.83 to 0.88, confirming satisfactory convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity: using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square roots of AVE for all constructs (0.79–0.85) exceeded the highest correlations with other constructs (0.20–0.69), confirming that all latent variables are empirically and conceptually distinct.

This indicates that all latent variables are distinct and measure unique concepts, confirming that the measurement model is robust and suitable for subsequent SEM analysis as shown in table1.

Table 1. Construct Correlation Matrix, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	SS	UR	SO	IF	FF	AP	LP	CA	SA	SI
SS	0.81									
UR	0.34	0.81								
SO	0.33	0.26	0.79							
IF	0.36	0.34	0.27	0.82						
FF	0.20	0.21	0.28	0.19	0.85					
AP	0.69	0.29	0.34	0.30	0.29	0.83				
LP	0.35	0.58	0.55	0.28	0.28	0.33	0.83			
CA	0.45	0.28	0.40	0.52	0.52	0.43	0.40	0.82		
SA	0.45	0.36	0.42	0.38	0.43	0.54	0.50	0.53	0.82	
SI	0.43	0.41	0.38	0.31	0.33	0.44	0.38	0.42	0.59	0.82

Note: SS = Sense of Security, UR = University Reputation, SO = Social Support, IF = Infrastructure, FF = Financial Factors, AP = Academic Preparation, LP = Language Proficiency, CA = Cultural Adaptability, SA = Student Satisfaction, SI = Student Intention

4.4 Structural Equation Modelling

SEM, an advanced multivariate technique, was used to analyze complex causal relationships among observed and latent variables. The structural model results indicate the relationships between the independent variables and student satisfaction, as well as the effect of student satisfaction on student intention. Among the nine hypothesized paths, four were not supported: Sense of Security → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.001$, C.R. = 0.016), University Reputation → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.046$, C.R. = 0.768), and Social Support → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.085$, C.R. = 1.424), indicating these factors do not significantly influence student satisfaction in the model. In contrast, five paths were supported: Infrastructure → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.129$, C.R. = 2.158, $p < 0.05$), Financial Factors → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.110$, C.R. = 1.980, $p < 0.05$), Academic Preparation → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.314$, C.R. = 4.436, $p < 0.001$), Language Proficiency → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.194$, C.R. = 2.751, $p < 0.01$), and Cultural Adaptability → Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.150$, C.R. = 2.043, $p < 0.05$). Finally, the path from Student Satisfaction → Student Intention was strongly supported ($\beta = 0.618$, C.R. = 11.436, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that student satisfaction is a key predictor of student intention. Overall, the findings indicate that while certain personal and institutional factors significantly affect student satisfaction, other factors such as sense of security, university reputation, and social support are not significant determinants in this context.

Table 2. Standardized Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis No.	Structural Path	Standardized Regression Weight (β)	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	Result
H1	Sense of Security → Student Satisfaction	.001	.016	Not Accepted
H2	University Reputation → Student Satisfaction	.046	.768	Not Accepted
H3	Social Support → Student Satisfaction	.085	1.424	Not Accepted
H4	Infrastructure → Student Satisfaction	.129	2.158*	Accepted
H5	Financial Factors → Student Satisfaction	.110	1.980*	Accepted
H6	Academic Preparation → Student Satisfaction	.314	4.436***	Accepted

H7	Language Proficiency → Student Satisfaction	.194	2.751**	Accepted
H8	Cultural Adaptability → Student Satisfaction	.150	2.043*	Accepted
H9	Student Satisfaction → Student Intention	.618	11.436***	Accepted

Note: "*** = p<0.001, ** = p<0.01, * = p<0.05, Not Accepted = insignificant"

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study uses an integrated analysis of structural equation modelling (SEM) and in-depth interviews to comprehensively analyse the factors that relate learning satisfaction and learning intention among Chinese students in Thai institutions. The results have significant consequences for theory, factor analysis, and practical guidance. The talk below is structured around six major dimensions.

The Mediating Role of Satisfaction and Theoretical Confirmation of Rational Evaluation Logic

The study found a substantial correlation ($\beta = 0.618$, $p < 0.001$) between student happiness and learning intention, supporting Oliver's Expectation-Confirmation Theory. According to this idea, people compare their actual experiences to pre-existing expectations to determine their level of confirmation, which determines satisfaction and future behavioral intentions.

In this study, Chinese foreign students' happiness is based on a reasonable assessment of the cross-cultural learning experience, which includes teaching quality, learning resources, and cultural adaptability rather than abstract external labels. Qualitative findings support this viewpoint. For example, students observed:

"As long as the course schedule is reasonable and graduation is successful, I will recommend it to younger students."

Unmet expectations, on the other hand, might lower motivation to continue studies or promote the program, emphasizing the dual character of pleasure as both cognitive judgement and emotional affiliation. This research broadens the use of expectancy-confirmation theory in international higher education, emphasizing that in cross-cultural situations, satisfaction is affected more by specific, controllable "micro-experiences" than by macro-level institutional repute.

Differential Impact of External Motivational Factors: Infrastructure and Economic Conditions

SEM analysis indicated substantial differences between external motivating variables. Satisfaction was favorably impacted by infrastructure ($\beta = 0.129$, C.R. = 2.158, $p < 0.05$) and economic factors ($\beta = 0.110$, C.R. = 1.980, $p < 0.05$). However, sense of security, university prestige, and social support were not significant. These findings partially correlate with service quality theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and push-pull theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but emphasize the contextual distinctiveness of the Thai setting.

Interview data support these conclusions. Students emphasized facilities and tuition as essential factors in evaluating their learning experience:

"Outdated lab computer configurations affect my ability to complete assignments efficiently."
"Annual tuition in Thailand is about 30,000 RMB, which is significant for an average family."
In contrast, security, reputation, and social support were largely considered baseline conditions, indicating a diminishing marginal effect: once basic safety and institutional credibility are assured, students focus on tangible and improvable aspects of daily learning and living.

Centrality of Internal Motivational Factors: Academic Preparation and Adaptability
Academic preparedness ($\beta = 0.314$, C.R. = 4.436, $p < 0.001$), language competency ($\beta = 0.194$, C.R. = 2.751, $p < 0.01$), and cultural adaptation ($\beta = 0.150$, C.R. = 2.043, $p < 0.05$) are key internal motivating elements that influence satisfaction. This is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes competence and autonomy as sources of intrinsic motivation.

Students' qualitative input supports these findings:
"Having taken a basic statistics course before coming to Thailand allowed me to complete assignments smoothly and feel accomplished."
"Limited English reading skills reduce preparation efficiency, while learning Thai enables collaboration in group discussions."
"Adapting to Thai classroom culture improved my engagement and relationship with teachers."
These findings show that individual competences and flexibility are important predictors of cross-cultural educational satisfaction, emphasizing the need for student-centered preparation and support.

Implications
Theoretical implications
This study brings together many theoretical views to provide a thorough analytical framework. Expectancy-confirmation theory, self-determination theory, push-pull theory, cross-cultural adaptation theory, and social support theory were combined to create a holistic logic of "motivation-experience-satisfaction-intention".
The findings show that different types of motivating variables have diverse effects on student satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing theoretical applications rather than applying them mechanically across cultures. Notably, internal motivators—academic preparation, language competency, and cultural adaptation—had more explanatory power, with academic preparation being the most important. These findings contribute to the concept of "sense of competence" in self-determination theory by demonstrating that in cross-cultural education, students' intellectual background and flexibility are more important in constructing good educational experiences than external influences alone.

Practical Implications
The report provides policymakers and Thai institutions with practical ways to improve the competitiveness, retention, and happiness of foreign students. Enhancing academic and language skills through targeted training, courses, and cross-cultural activities; promoting cultural adaptation and psychological support via multicultural programs and counselling to reduce adjustment anxiety and foster belonging; improving the learning environment through the renovation of teaching facilities, dorms, digital platforms, and laboratories; increasing financial support through scholarships, funding channels, and maintaining competitive tuition and living costs; and boosting international competitiveness by creating unique courses, cross-border

internships, and alumni networks to improve institutional branding and attractiveness in regional and global education markets are some of the main recommendations.

Recommendations

- Optimize Learning Environment

Upgrade facilities, dormitories, labs, and digital platforms to enhance student experiences and meet discipline-specific needs.

- Strengthen Academic and Language Support

Offer targeted academic guidance, language courses, and cross-cultural workshops to improve classroom adaptation and participation.

- Enhance Financial Support

Maintain competitive tuition and living costs while expanding scholarships and funding opportunities.

- Promote Cultural Adaptation and Psychological Support

Provide multicultural activities and counseling, especially for new students, to ease adaptation and foster belonging.

- Improve Institutional Competitiveness

Use infrastructure, distinctive programs, internships, and alumni networks to boost regional and global attractiveness.

Limitations and Further Studies

Through multi-theoretical integration and empirical research, this study offers theoretical and practical insights on Chinese students' learning satisfaction and aim at Thai universities. There are still a few restrictions, though. First, the sample's generalizability across fields, institution types, and geographical areas is diminished since it is restricted to Chinese business and management students enrolled at certain institutions. Second, the cross-sectional form of the approach, which relies on self-report surveys and interviews, may introduce bias and is unable to capture dynamic changes in intention and satisfaction over time. Third, there is insufficient coverage of variables, leaving out elements that might influence satisfaction, such peer interaction, instructional style, and mental health. Third, there is insufficient coverage of variables, leaving out elements that might influence satisfaction, such peer interaction, instructional style, and mental health. Fourth, because various nations may place varying priorities on security, reputation, or cultural adaptation, the cultural context restricts application outside of Thailand. Ultimately, gaps were identified through theoretical integration: a number of external factors (security, reputation, and social support) were not significant, indicating the need for more research on mediating and marginal impacts.

To overcome these limitations, future studies should: (1) broaden the sample to include a variety of disciplines, nationalities, and institution types in order to improve generalizability; (2) use mixed and longitudinal methods to incorporate objective behavioral data and dynamically track changes in satisfaction and intention; (3) add more variables like teaching style, peer interaction, and mental health in order to create a more complete model; and (4) deepen theoretical analysis by investigating the moderating and mediating roles of variables like school reputation and social support.

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