

## Research Article

# THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE INTENTION TO STUDY IN THE MAINLAND OF CHINA OF BANGKOK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Received: February 3, 2022

Revised: March 31, 2022

Accepted: April 11, 2022

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## Abstract

China, as a growing power, has been attracting a large number of international students to study abroad in China, especially students from Thailand. However, since 2019, COVID-19 has presented a big challenge to international higher education. There are lots of factors that affect the intention of Thai high school students that study Chinese to study abroad in China. But, the impact of COVID-19 on these factors is still unknown. In this research, the main objective was to investigate the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the intention of Bangkok High School students to study in the Mainland of China. The researcher conducted quantitative research on this topic and used a questionnaire to collect the data. The data were statistically analyzed by using percentage, mean, standard deviation, sample t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and stepwise multiple regression analysis, through descriptive statistics and standard deviation, sample t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and stepwise multiple regression analysis, the research found that:

1. The perspective towards China is the biggest factor affecting Bangkok students' intention to study in China.
2. Financial support and admission policy have a positive impact on the intention of Bangkok high school students to study in China.
3. Online learning in this study, has shown a negative impact on students' intention to study in China.

**Keywords:** Impact of the COVID-19; Intention to Study Abroad; Study Abroad in China

## Introduction

The COVID-19 has become a global pandemic since 2019. In the past two years, due to the worldwide spread, COVID-19 not only caused a health crisis. UN (2020) announced that the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting the core of societies and economies. Almost all OECD countries and emerging-market economies introduced restrictions on the movement of people to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures include border closures, visa restrictions, quarantine requirements, and flight suspensions. (Mourougane & Gonzales, 2021).

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic is significant in international higher education, especially student mobility (Altbach & de Wits, 2020; Mok, 2020). “Due to the travel restrictions and campus closure, many students changed or cancelled their plan of studying abroad.” (Mok et al., 2021) “78% of prospective students surveyed in October 2020 plan to begin studying in the next two years, indicating a strong desire to study despite the coronavirus pandemic.” (Pang, 2020)

However, the ongoing challenges related to the pandemic make it a far more nuanced topic. Gilchrist (2021) found that the international students were not fully enjoying their student experience given the current environment, in terms of an online-only learning experience, financial concerns, ongoing restrictions that continue to limit the college experience, students hoping to study abroad have had to reconsider their priorities. Due to the increasing importance of Chinese, China is becoming more and more attractive to international students. According to statistics, in 2018, a total of 492,185 foreign students from 196 countries and regions studied in China (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2019), China has become the largest international students study destination in Asia (People’s Daily Overseas Edition, 2019).

In Thailand, a large number of international students go to study in China every year, according to The Ministry of Education of China (2019), in 2018, there were 28,608 Thai students who studied in China, ranking second among all countries. In the high schools of Thailand, there are a large number of students studying Chinese. We can predict that more and more Thai students will go to study in China in the future.

Chinese universities and many studies abroad programs also hope to attract more international students to study in China. For Thailand, Thai students have different educational conditions and cultural backgrounds, and their intention to study in the Mainland of China is affected by many factors when considering studying in China. Scholarships, the attraction of China’s development, cultural adaptation, support, and admission service have been considered as some main factors that affect the international students’ intention to study in China. However, the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on these factors is still unknown.

Since the covid-19 pandemic, a large number of international students have been stranded in Thailand due to the epidemic and travel restrictions. The pandemic has added many obstacles to exchanges between countries. This adds more uncertainty to the factors that affect the decision to study abroad.

But there are not many related studies that have been conducted. Investigating the factors that affect Thai students' willingness to study in China is significant for the development of Thai students' study in China.

#### Research objectives

1. To investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the intention of Bangkok High School students to study in the Mainland of China.
2. To investigate the impact of personal background on the intention of Bangkok High School students to study in the Mainland of China during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Research significances

1. For Chinese universities, they can refer to the research results and adjust strategies for attracting Thai students in the face of the long-term impact of the Covid-19 epidemic.

2. For Thai schools that want to promote students to study in China, they can refer to the relevant results.

## Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

### Literature Review

To identify the factors that affect the students' attention to study abroad, the researcher reviewed related reaches and articles.

From the literature review, the researcher found that the intention to study abroad is affected by many factors:

- 1) Family factor (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Padlee et al., 2010; Biney & Cheng, 2021),
- 2) Financial factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Lee, 2014; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Padlee et al., 2010; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017),
- 3) Cultural adaptation (Lee, 2014; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen, 2008; Ahmad et al., 2017),
- 4) Safety and personal wellbeing (Biney & Cheng, 2021; Binsard & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen, 2008; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

In recent years, China has become an emerging region for studying abroad. More and more students go to study in China to learn Chinese or Chinese culture. For students who consider studying abroad in China, they focus on the following factors:

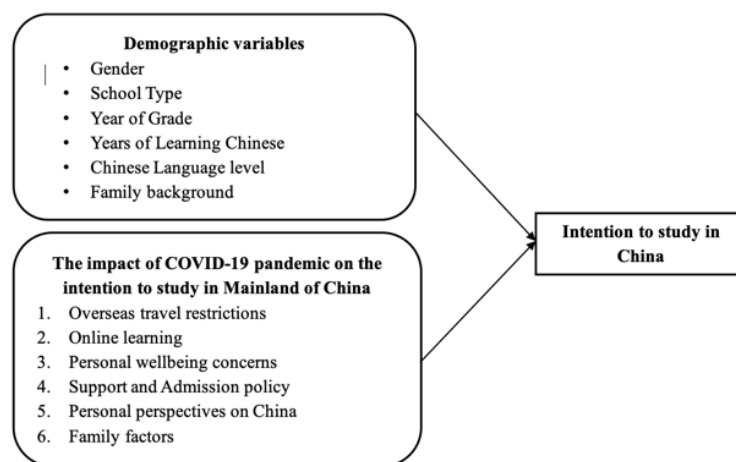
- 1) Scholarships (Wang, 2020; Liu, 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Acheampong et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2019; Jiani, 2017; Biney & Cheng 2021),
- 2) The attraction of China (Yin and Liu, 2021; Liu, 2019; Jiang, Yuen, and Horta, 2020; Wu, Zhai, Wall, and Li, 2019; Jiani, 2017),
- 3) Language barriers (Liu, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019),
- 4) Cultural adaptation (Wang, 2020; Liu, 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Acheampong et al., 2019),
- 5) Family factors (Biney & Cheng, 2021),
- 6) Support and admission service (Jiang et al., 2020; Yasmin et al., 2021).

The covid-19 pandemic makes the factors that impact the studying abroad intention even more complicated. Although the survey shows that students still want to study abroad (Boivin, 2020), researchers and articles have added 4 factors that significantly affected international students' intention to study abroad:

- 1) International travel restrictions (Fernandes, 2021; Boivin, 2020; Yıldırım et al., 2021; Altbach & de Wit, 2020),
- 2) The financial crisis caused by the pandemic (Recio & Colella, 2020; Ard, 2021; Altbach & de Wit, 2020),
- 3) Personal well-being concerns (Recio & Colella, 2020; Ard, 2021),
- 4) Online learning (Recio & Colella, 2020; Liu & Shirley, 2021; Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Yin & Liu, 2021).

This study focuses on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the intention to study in China. Therefore, based on the literature review, the researchers selected the factors related to the Covid-19 pandemic and redefined and combined them. The following six factors are derived:

1. Overseas travel restrictions
2. Online learning
3. Personal wellbeing concerns
4. Support and Admission policy
5. Personal perspectives on China
6. Family factors



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

### Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 (H1). The students with different gender, school type, grade year, years of learning the Chinese language, Chinese language level, and students' family backgrounds have different levels of intention to study in the Mainland of China.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). The overseas travel restriction, online learning, personal wellbeing concerns, support and admission policy personal perspective on China, and family factors during the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on the intention to study in the Mainland of China.

### Definition of terms

1. Overseas travel restriction refers to the restriction policies and isolation measures restricting the entry of international students to the destination country.

2. Online learning refers to the degree education of Chinese universities provided through online teaching.

3. Personal wellbeing concerns refers to the mental health and physical health of the international students during the pandemic, especially the risk of covid-19 infection during overseas travel to the destination country or social activities in the destination country.

4. Support and Admission policy refers to the support provided by the Chinese universities to the international students

5. Personal perspectives on China refers to students' perspectives on China's development and national image.

6. Family Factors refers to the family financial crisis caused by covid-19, family's concerns about their children's wellbeing.

## Research Methodology

### Research Method

The research method that is applied in this research is quantitative research. To collect the statistical data, a questionnaire survey was distributed to the participants.

### Population and Sample

The population of this research is high school students that study Chinese in Bangkok. As the exact number of the population was unknown, the researcher estimates the population size by estimation formula to determine the appropriate sample size for data collection.

The reliability level specified by the researcher was Z-score = 1.96 and the confidence level at 95% with an error less than 5%, and 0.5 standard deviation. After calculating the sample size, the minimum sample group should be composed of 384.16 samples or 385 approximately.

$$\text{Necessary Sample Size} = (Z\text{-score})^2 - \text{StdDev} * (1 - \text{StdDev}) / (\text{margin of error})^2$$

(Mensah, 2014)

The schools of the samples in this research refers to private schools, public schools, full Chinese schools, and international schools. The researcher used the convenience sampling method.

### Data Collection

To gain access to target participants, the researcher contacted teachers who teach Chinese in high schools in Bangkok and joined the social media groups of Bangkok High School students that study Chinese, such as Line and Facebook. The researcher introduced the purpose and content of the questionnaire, then distributed the questionnaire.

### Research Instruments

#### 1. Questionnaire

The data collection instrument in this research is a questionnaire. Through literature review, the researcher identified several factors that affect students' intentions to study in China during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 2. Item-Objective Congruence

The questionnaire was evaluated by experts using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) form. The final questionnaire was developed based on the experts' feedback and evaluation.

### 3. Cronbach's Alpha

To test the reliability of the quantitative data, the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to test all the variables, the Cronbach's Alpha score of this research instrument is 0.75.

#### Data Analysis Methods

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics in terms of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used for data analysis.

To test the hypothesis, the researcher used an independent sample t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and stepwise multiple regression analysis.

To describe the interpretation of mean scores, the researcher used the interpretation of mean scores form in Table 1.

**Table 1** Interpretation of Mean Scores

Interval	Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low (Totally Disagree)
1.81 – 2.60	Low (Disagree)
2.61 – 3.40	Medium (Partially Agree)
3.41 – 4.20	High (Agree)
4.21 – 5.00	Very High (Totally Agree)

#### Data Analysis Results

##### 1. Frequency test

**Table 2** Frequency and percentage of different demographic data

Demographic data		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	16	7.8
	Female	183	89.7
	other	5	2.5
School type	Private School	25	12.3
	Public School	155	76.0
	International School	10	4.9
	Full Chinese School	14	6.9
Grade	M.4	67	32.8
	M.5	33	16.2
	M.6	104	51.0
Years of learning Chinese	1-3 years	145	71.1
	4-6 years	24	11.8
	7-9 years	18	8.8

Demographic data		Frequency	Percent
Chinese language level	More than 9 years	17	8.3
	HSK 1	72	35.3
	HSK 2	18	8.8
	HSK 3	54	26.5
	HSK 4	37	18.1
	HSK 5	19	9.3
	HSK 6	4	2.0
Family background	Chinese-Thai family	81	39.7
	Thai	123	60.3
Total		204	100.0

The questionnaire was distributed to high school students in Bangkok who are learning Chinese, and a total of 204 valid responses were received.

From table 3, in terms of gender, the data shows that 89.7% of the participants are female students, 7.8% are male students and 2.5% are other gender students.

In terms of school type, the data shows that 76% of participants come from public schools, followed by normal private school students, accounting for 12.3%. There are also 6.9% of participants from Chinese schools and 4.9% of participants from international schools.

In terms of the current grade of the students, the data shows that 51% of the participants are currently in the third grade of high school, 32.8% of the students are in the first grade of high school, 16.2% of the students from the second grade of high school.

In terms of years of learning Chinese, the data shows that 71.1% of the students learned Chinese for 1-3 years, 11.8% of the students learned Chinese for 4-6 years, 8.8% of the students learned Chinese for 7-9 years, 8.3 % of the students learned Chinese for more than 9 years.

In terms of Chinese language level, the data shows 35.3% of the students with HSK level 1, 26.5% of the students with HSK level 3, 18.1% of the students with HSK level 4, 9.3% of the students with HSK level 5, 8.8% of the students with HSK level 2, 2% of the students with HSK level 6.

In terms of family background, the data shows that 60.3% of the students come from Thai families and 39.7% of the students come from Chinese-Thai families.

**Table 3** Intention to study during covid-19 frequency test

Intention to study during covid-19		Frequency	Percent
Did you want to study in China before the COVID-19 pandemic?	Yes	119	58.3
	No	25	12.3
	Not sure	60	29.4
Did the Covid-19 pandemic affect your intention to study in China?	Yes	117	57.4
	No	62	30.4
	Not sure	25	12.3
Do you want to study in China After Covid-19?	Yes	109	53.4
	No	30	14.7
	Not sure	65	31.9
When will you feel comfortable studying in China?	When campuses are open and face-to-face teaching has resumed	46	22.5
	When there are few coronavirus cases in China	10	4.9
	As long as you are legally allowed to travel to China	83	40.7
	When social distancing requirements have lifted in China	4	2.0
	You will not consider studying in China before the pandemic ends	56	27.5
	Others	5	2.5
Total		204	100.0

The data in Table 3 shows that Covid-19 has had an impact on 57.4% of students' intention to study in China, 58.3% of the students would like to study in China before the Covid-19 pandemic, the number changed to 53.4% when they were asked: "Do you want to study in China After Covid-19?". Despite the Covid-19 epidemic, 40.7% of the participants will go to study in China as long as China opens its borders. 27.5% of the participants will consider studying in China only after the Covid-19 epidemic is completely over, while, 22.5% of the students felt comfortable studying in China when campuses are open and face-to-face teaching has resumed.



## 2. Mean test

**Table 4** Factors that affect the intention to study in China during the Covid-19 pandemic

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Overseas travel restrictions	4.11	0.60	High
Online learning willingness	2.58	0.99	Low
Wellbeing concerns	3.70	0.73	High
Financial support and admission policy	4.24	0.70	Very High
Perspective towards China	4.18	0.64	High
Family factor impact	3.42	0.72	High
Intention to study in China	4.11	0.94	High

Through the descriptive test, the data shows that overseas travel restrictions have a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.11$ ), the participants' recognition of online courses is at a low level ( $\bar{X} = 2.58$ ). The concerns about the wellbeing of the participants are at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 3.70$ ). Participants' desire to obtain admission support and scholarship support from China's university is very high ( $\bar{X} = 4.24$ ). Participants maintain a very good perspective and attitude towards China, and the attraction of China is high ( $\bar{X} = 4.18$ ). The family factors' impact in this research refers to factors that may decrease the students' intention to study in China, the worries and financial crisis caused by the Covid-19, it was shown on a high level ( $\bar{X} = 3.42$ ). Despite these factors, the willingness of participants to study in China remained at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.11$ ).

## 3. T-Test

**Table 5** Intention to study in China with different family background

	Independent Samples Test				t	Sig
	Chinese – Thai family		Thai family			
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
Intention to study in China	4.16	0.98	4.08	0.91	.577	.565

Through T-Test, although participants from Chinese - Thai families are slightly more willing to study in China than other Thai families, the participants' family background has no significant impact on their willingness to study in China.

## 4. One way – ANOVA test

**Table 6** Intention to study in China between different demographic groups

Demographic	Intention to study in China	
	F	Sig
1. Gender	2.200	.113
2. School type	8.405	.000*
3. Current grade	14.224	.000*
4. Years of learning Chinese	1.000	.394
5. Chinese language level	7.954	.000*

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

From table 6, it was found that:

1. Gender doesn't have a significant impact on student's intention to study in China.

2. The school type has a significant impact on student's intention to study in China. The researcher has applied the LSD method to compare pairs of variables, it was found that the private school students' intention to study in China is significantly higher than in international schools. The public-school students' intention is significantly lower than the full Chinese school. The intention to study in China of international school students is significantly lower than the full Chinese school.

3. The participants' current grades have a significant impact on their intentions to study in China. The researcher has applied the LSD method to compare pairs of variables, it was found that participants in the third grade of high school have the highest intention to study abroad, and are significantly higher than those of the participants in the first and second grades of high school.

4. Years of learning Chinese don't have a significant impact on the participants' intention to study in China. Participants from different year groups all show high intention to study in China.

5. The Chinese language level significantly affects the students' intentions to study in China. The researcher has applied the LSD method to compare pairs of variables, it was found participants at HSK level 1 had significantly lower intentions to study abroad than HSK 3, HSK 4, HSK 5 level participants.

## 5. Correlations test

**Table 7** Correlations between different factors that affect the intention to study in China

Factors	Overseas travel restrictions	Online learning willingness	Wellbeing concerns	Financial support and admission policy	Perspective towards China	Family factor impact
Intention to study in China	.053	-.185**	-.038	.482**	.631**	-.433**

From table 7, correlations test results show that there is a positive relationship between students' perspective toward China, financial support and admission support, and intention to study in China with statistically significant at  $p < .01$  and the correlation coefficient at 0.631 and 0.482 respectively.

There is a negative relationship between family factor, online learning, and intention to study in China with a statistical significance of  $p < .01$  and the correlation coefficient of -0.433 and -0.185.

## 6. Regression test

**Table 8** Coefficients between different factors

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.427	0.434		3.289	.001
Perspective towards China	0.635	0.082	0.434	7.752	.000
Family factor	-0.372	0.066	-0.288	-5.613	.000
Financial support and admission policy	0.383	0.072	0.285	5.319	.000
Online learning	-0.123	0.046	-0.130	-2.652	.009
R = 0.748      R <sup>2</sup> =0.560      Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.551      SE=0.631					

Through the Regression test, the result  $[Y = 1.427 + 0.635(\text{Perspective towards China}) - 0.372(\text{Family factor}) + 0.383(\text{Financial support and admission policy}) - 0.123(\text{Online learning})]$  shows that when other factors stay the same, the participant's attitude towards China or China's attractiveness increases by 1, the participant's intention to study abroad will increase by 0.635; if China's financial support and overseas study policy support

increase by 1, the participant's intention to study abroad will increase by 0.383. On the contrary, when other factors stay the same if the family factors impact increased by 1, the participant's intention to study in China will decrease by 0.372; for each increase of 1 in online learning, the participant's intention to study in China will decrease by 0.123.

The family factor questions that were tested in the questionnaire were the negative influence on student's intention to study in China, for example, the family concerns about their Child's safety and the financial crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. That's the reason why it shows negative relations with students' intention to study in China.

Overall, the factors that affect the intention of high school students that study Chinese in Bangkok, Thailand can affect the participants' intention to study in China at a degree of 56%.

## Discussion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the willingness of students from Bangkok, Thailand to study in China is still high, and more than half of the students hope to study in China after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although Covid-19 has affected the willingness of most students to study in China, it has not changed their decision to study in China.

Students are very concerned about the financial support and admission policy. This is the most concerning factor when students consider studying in China. We can conclude that Students hope to get more scholarship support, the students hope the universities in China can simplify the scholarship and study application process.

Although online learning solves the problem of cross-border travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, this allows students to complete the study without leaving their home country, students do not recognize online learning, reflecting the students' desire to go to China for onsite learning. This is a very valid concern because although they might be able to learn the language online the understanding of the Chinese culture can only really be gained adequately by living and studying in China.

The perspective towards China is the biggest factor affecting Bangkok students' intention to study in China. The image of Chinese in high school students studying Chinese in Bangkok is positive, the rapid development of China is very attractive to them. Their understanding and awareness of China are getting better, and their positive perspective towards China and the good image of China strengthened their intention to study in China. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) pointed out that the more students know and understand the destination country, the more likely they are to choose this country to be the study abroad destination country. Kinnell (1989) added that a student's decision to study abroad is influenced by the reputation and image of the country of destination.

Financial support and admission policy has a positive impact on the intention of Bangkok high school students to study in China. If students can get more scholarship support or support for admission applications, their intention to study in China will increase. The study showed that the factors influencing student choice to study in China include quality of learning environment and staff, scholarships, and the cost of living. (Ahmad &

Shah, 2018). Due to the covid-19 pandemic, many families of the international students faced financial pressure, Kim et al.'s (2020) finding that COVID- 19 has had a “strong” or “extremely strong” impact on 30% of students' ability to afford school. Students have an even stronger demand for scholarships.

Online learning in this study, has shown a negative impact on student's intention to study in China. As online courses continue to increase, students' intention to study in China will decrease. This is supported by Altbach and de Wit (2020), online learning has been modestly successful only for continuing education, most of the international students will continue to prefer the experience of studying in another country.

## Recommendation

Covid-19 has made studying abroad in China difficult. The impact of COVID-19 on the intentions of international students to study in China is unknown, especially with strict policies on entry into China. For Chinese universities that hope to recruit more Thai students, they can refer to the results of this study to adjust their admissions policies for international students, especially how to attract Thai students to study in China. The universities should 1. Provide students with more scholarship support and admission assistance, 2. Improve online teaching, and at the same time strive to achieve face-to-face teaching, 3. Adhere to the prevention and control of the covid-19 pandemic on campus, and provide a safe learning and living environment.

Promoting students that study Chinese in high school to study abroad in China is an important policy in Thailand, but COVID-19 has made the implementation of this policy difficult. Thai students have more concerns about whether to study in China. For Thai schools that want to promote students to study in China, they can refer to the research results in this study to suggest or help their students to evaluate the situations on studying abroad in China, they should 1. Improve the Chinese language level of students in the high school, 2. Strengthen the guidance for students in the third grade of high school.

## Recommendation for Further Study

This research tested the factors that affect the intention to study in the Mainland of China of Bangkok High School students, but according to the research results, some factors were missed in this study. For people or organizations who want to conduct further research on this topic, a qualitative study on the factors that affect the intention to study in China and find out the missing factors and find out effective prevention solutions will be recommended.

This research only collected the data from the Bangkok area, the factors that affect the intention of students to study abroad during the covid-19 pandemic are should be affected by multiple factors. Future studies can study the samples from different provinces and districts of Thailand, to figure out if the impact levels of different factors are different in different regions.

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