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The impact of perceived values on Chinese international students' decisions to study at a Thai higher education institution

Pak Thaldumrong[a,*], Shuai Zhao[b]

[a] *Chinese Graduate School, Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Nonthaburi 11120, Thailand*
[b] *Lingxian Study Abroad Consulting Service (Shaanxi) Co., Ltd., China*

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Abstract

In the ASEAN region, the number of Chinese International Students (CISs), especially in Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, has been steadily increasing. In 2023, there were more than 17,000 CISs studying in Thailand. What are their perceived values (PVs), and how do these PVs influence CISs' the choice of studying at Thai higher education institutions (THEIs) as their destination for studying abroad? Based on these questions, this study uses Panyapiwat Institute of Management (PIM) as an example to deeply analyze the impact of PVs of CIS and their relationship with study decisions (SDs). Based on existing literatures, this research primarily establishes a conceptual model by analyzing the PVs of CISs towards PIM and their SDs. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey of CISs at graduate-level CISs at PIM. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze and validate hypotheses. The key research finding is that all five dimensions of PVs (i.e. institution reputation, living conditions, admission procedures, education system, employment opportunities) have a positive impact on CISs' SDs.

Introduction

Research Background

With the rapid growth of Chinese economy, issues related to students' international education have been receiving increasing attention. According to statistics, China has become the largest exporter of international students in the world. In 2017, the number of Chinese students studying abroad for degree programs reached 608,400 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). The most popular destinations for CISs include the US, Australia, the UK, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Germany, France, Russia, and New Zealand. Among these countries, the US, with 350,734 CISs, is the largest international education destination. (IIE Center for Academic Mobility, 2018).

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: paktha@pim.ac.th (Thaldumrong, P.).

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Apart from Western developed countries like the UK and the US, Thailand, serving as the "gateway" to ASEAN, is also highly favored by foreign students. The overall number of international students in Thailand increased from 16,657 in 2018 to 18,767 in 2019 and 20,497 in 2020, indicating a growing trend (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2020). According to a report by ICEF Monitor (2018), approximately 8,500 CISs were enrolled in THEIs in 2017. Thailand, being one of the most important destinations for CISs in Southeast Asia, has been widely promoted for its advantages in recent years. However, the understanding of its competitive advantages and the PVs of factors related to studying in THEIs such as PIM still lacks clear conclusions. Moreover, the relationship between these PVs and actual SDs and recommendations is not well-defined. An analysis of existing research reveals that the main factors influencing CISs' choice to study in Thailand can be categorized into five aspects: political, economic, social, cultural, and individual factors (Ye, 2020). However, there is limited clarity on the PVs of specific factors, especially those related internally to educational institutions for their self-improvement purposes. Do CISs perceive these factors differently, and have these perceptions changed over time with the evolution of education and the increasing number of international students? Therefore, there are still many issues related to these PVs that need exploration and resolution, especially regarding their relationship with actual SD.

Based on the aforementioned issues, this research proposes the following specific research questions: (1) What are the factors related to PIM itself that may influence CISs' SDs?; and (2) What is the relationship between these PVs and SDs toward PIM?

Research Objectives and Significant

The primary objectives are to identify the factors, investigate students' perceptions of those factors (i.e., PVs), and examine the relationship between these PVs and their SDs. From the THEI marketing perspective, understanding the factors influencing CISs' decisions could significantly assist in market development. Insights derived from this study can aid marketing professionals in targeting the segment, developing marketing plans including promotion strategies, pricing strategy, unique selling points, and key information to attract targeted segment. Additionally, it can provide valuable guidance to course design, development, and management, enabling the academic personnel to understand how to create products/services based on consumer needs and align them with student's values. This approach can steer products/services in a more responsive and competitive direction and manage the policies that better respond to the CISs. This study differs from previous studies in that it aims to assist marketing professionals in market planning, academic program developers in supporting course design and development, and managements in supporting teaching and learning (such as libraries) and non-academic service (such as cafeterias and dormitories). Therefore, the focus of this study is on the PVs specifically related to institution reputation, living conditions, administration process, education systems, and employment opportunities that the institution itself can optimize or improve rather than external factors highlighted in previous researches (such as the economy performance of the country or social order). Moreover, considering the aims of the study, it does not emphasize individual student' factors such as subjective desires (Wei & Chen, 2017), personal academic qualifications (Wei & Chen, 2017; Fan, 2019), overseas experiences (Wei & Chen, 2017), social factors like family background (Wei & Chen, 2017; Fan, 2019), family financial support (Pimpa, 2003; Fan, 2019), family expectations (Pimpa, 2003; Fan, 2019), social circles (Wei & Chen, 2017; Fan, 2019), and macro-environmental factors such as the political environment, economic conditions, immigration policies of the destination country, cultural factors including culture, subculture, religion, social class, etc. (Wei & Chen, 2017; Marjanović & Križman Pavlović, 2018; Wang & Crawford, 2020).

Although there is abundant research on perceived factors related to studying abroad, specific empirical research regarding the PV of CIS studying in Thailand, specifically at PIM, is still limited. Therefore, this study comprehensively investigates the PVs of CISs in Thailand. The study aims to fill the current research gap on the relationship between PV and consumer decision-making regarding CISs' choice of study at PIM. A deep understanding of students as consumers can provide valuable insights for developing marketing strategies for THEIs, which are crucial for their sustainable development. Moreover, this study is instrumental in enhancing the overall evaluation of customer value models focusing on CISs in THEIs.

Literature Review

In early research, the focus of value was primarily on personal values, mainly related to job satisfaction,

emotions, and behaviors in the workplace (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Personal values are manifestations of corporate culture and are related to company performance. Examples of values include hedonism, altruism, and honesty. Over time, the concept of value extended to the consumer level, becoming known as customer perceived value (PV).

PV refers to customers' self-assessment of products or services, particularly in comparison to competitors' offerings, such as quality or price, in terms of their perception of value or attractiveness. Research on PV revolves around the relationship between perceived quality and perceived price (Dodds & Monroe, 1985). Zeithaml (1988) delved into the study of PV and defined it as the overall assessment of product utility made by customers after balancing the perceived benefits of the product against the costs incurred. Customer benefits and costs vary from person to person. This concept aligns with Ledden et al.'s (2007) idea, stating that PV results from the cognitive balance between gains (Get) and sacrifices or costs (Give).

Differing from earlier research, Sheth (1991) extended and deepened the concept of PV, categorizing it into five specific aspects: Functional Value, Epistemic Value, Social Value, Conditional Value, and Emotional Value. This definition went beyond the concepts of quality and price. Similarly, Almquist et al. (2016) built a pyramid of value elements based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, expanding PV to include broader aspects: Functional Value, Emotional Value, Life-Changing Value, and Social Impact Value. Functional Value includes time-saving, simplification, money-making, risk reduction, organization, integration, connection, effort reduction, hassle avoidance, cost reduction, high quality, variety, sensory appeal, and informative value. Emotional value comprises wellness, therapeutic value, fun/entertainment, attractiveness, access provision, anxiety reduction, self-reward, nostalgia, design/aesthetics, and badge value. Life-changing value involves providing hope, self-actualization, motivation, heirloom, and affiliation/belonging. At the highest level, Social impact value includes self-transcendence, which involves helping others or society more broadly.

From the above description, it is evident that the evolution from simple personal values to the numerous dimensions of PV reflects a broader perspective adopted by researchers. Consumers' gains go beyond mere quality, and their sacrifices or costs extend beyond monetary aspects. For example, emotional value (Sheth, 1991; Almquist et al., 2016) includes health value, therapeutic value, and entertainment value.

In general, consumers have specific demands related to a product or service, and they evaluate these demands based on their perceptions, comparing them with their sacrifices or costs within their cognitive range. This evaluation represents consumers' PV of the demand. Similarly, consumers compare specific demands for a product or service with other related products or services. Their expectations and experiences lead to a comparison within their cognitive range, forming their perceived value. For instance, perceived service quality is consumers' comparison of their expectations of a brand's service quality with their actual experienced of the service (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality is consumers' perception of a brand's product quality excellence over another brand's quality, even if researchers use the term perceived factors or factors without explicitly referring to value. As this study is approached from the perspective of perception, it will interchangeably discuss perceived factors and perceived value, the two perception variables.

In the past decade, PV has become a significant focus in the marketing field, as it is considered a key driver of customer satisfaction (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997; Demirgüneş, 2015; Panda et al., 2019; Pizzinatto & Aparicio-Ley, 2019) and intention (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987; Zeithaml, 1988) in the context of products and services. Moreover, establishing excellent consumer value is seen as an important strategic direction and a crucial method for organizations to gain and maintain a competitive advantage (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997).

In academic research, PV has been studied as both an independent and dependent variable. Apart from its relationship with satisfaction and intention, researchers have explored its connections with other variables such as sensory risk (Demirgüneş, 2015), willingness to pay a premium (Demirgüneş, 2015), loyalty (Alves, 2010; Webb & Jagun, 1997; Xu et al., 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Pizzinatto & Aparicio-Ley, 2019), service quality (Webb & Jagun, 1997), purchasing green products (De Medeiros et al., 2016), and reputation (Pizzinatto & Aparicio-Ley, 2019).

Focusing on value in education and understanding how students evaluate and derive value from their educational experiences seems highly relevant. Understanding value from the customer's perspective can provide valuable insights for management, aiding in resource allocation and the design of academic programs that better meet student needs (Seymour, 1992). The concepts of perceived factors or PV have found various applications in educational research. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) associated value judgments with

knowledge acquisition, the image conveyed by HEIs, emotional value, and social value. Owlia and Aspinwall (1998) used a perception scale to investigate the influencing factors of service quality in higher engineering education, including teaching resources, competence, attitudes, and content. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) found that factors affect the university service. Oldfield and Baron (2000) identified three dimensions of HE service quality: factors related to student learning, acceptable factors students hope for but are not essential, and functional factors satisfying work needs. Additionally, students' PV is influenced by personal values, which, in turn, affect their satisfaction (Ledden et al., 2007). Research results indicate that students' satisfaction is influenced by their perceived dimensions of gains and sacrifices (Ledden et al., 2007). Students' satisfaction is further linked to loyalty (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Alves, 2010), a prerequisite for loyalty (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Alves, 2010).

Ledden et al. (2007) applied Sheth's (1991) PV framework in the field of education, categorizing it into "Get" (acquisition) and "Give" (sacrifice) dimensions. "Get" factors include functional values such as expectations of employment or career advancement through chosen courses, knowledge acquisition, social connections established during studies, the quality of learning materials, and emotional satisfaction. Building on Sheth's framework, Ledden et al. (2007) and Alves (2010) introduced "Image" as an additional dimension, referring to the image conveyed by HEI. In addition to the "Get" and "Give" dimensions, Ledden et al. (2007) introduced Rokeach's (1968) "Personal Values," encompassing Terminal Values (e.g., life goals, freedom, security) and Instrumental Values (e.g., aspirations, responsibility, honesty). They proposed that students' values are influenced by personal values, ultimately affecting their satisfaction. The study results indicated that students' PVs in both "Get" and "Give" dimensions significantly influence their satisfaction (Ledden et al., 2007). Satisfaction, in turn, is a prerequisite for loyalty (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Alves, 2010). Regression models have shown that subjective desires, academic conditions, family background, peer influence, overseas education quality, and international experiences all have a significant positive impact on students' willingness to study abroad (Wei & Chen, 2017).

Taking a broader and more systematic approach, Marjanović and Križman Pavlović (2018) conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify 114 influencing factors for studying abroad. They categorized these factors into seven groups: (1) Market mix factors (e.g., product, price, promotion, and distribution); (2) Macroeconomic environment factors (e.g., economic, technological, political, and cultural); (3) Situational factors (e.g., general situation, purchase tasks, social environment, physical environment, time effects, and previous status); (4) Psychological factors (e.g., motivation, perception, learning, memory, values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions); (5) Personal factors (e.g., demographic characteristics, age and life stage, involvement, economic conditions, ethnicity, lifestyle, personality, self-concept, and occupation); (6) Social factors (e.g., reference groups, family, social roles, and status); and (7) Cultural factors (e.g., culture, subculture, religion, and social class). Similarly, Fan (2019) investigated the factors influencing vocational college students' intention to study abroad, identifying five main factors: (1) students' personal factors, such as economic ability, language proficiency, adaptability, interpersonal skills, and academic abilities; (2) family attitudes and support, particularly economic support; (3) school and peer encouragement factors such as educational guidance and promotional services; (4) encouragement policies from the students' home country for studying abroad; and (5) study abroad conditions including majors, duration, tuition fees, scholarships, reputation, location, and school-specific factors.

Hypotheses and Research Model

Reputation is the public's perception of an institution based on its long-term image, behavior, capabilities, achievements, and the value it ultimately provides (Plewa et al., 2016; Kaushal et al., 2023). HEI reputation can encompass various aspects such as brand image, quality of graduates, alumni perception, employers' views, graduate employment rates, societal or international evaluations, social contributions, expert opinions in specific academic fields, research accomplishments, assessments, innovation, institutional culture/beliefs/values, adaptability to external changes, student-centered policies, internationalization, and rankings, among others. This means that HEIs can construct their reputation through different dimensions.

In the business realm, reputation plays a significant role in shaping decisions for consumers, investors, and job seekers. It is considered an intangible yet crucial asset for companies (Ponzi et al., 2011). Reputation serves as an intermediary variable between university brand and student satisfaction (Panda et al., 2019). A positive reputation can differentiate a HEI, stimulate potential students, enhance student satisfaction, and ultimately

lead to positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty (Panda et al., 2019). Moreover, reputation is the foremost factor influencing perceived service value in HEIs (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997). It also affects the attitudes of prospective and enrolled students as it influences their willingness to pay tuition fees, continue studying at the institution, and recommend it (Pizzinatto & Aparicio-Ley, 2019). In the context of international education, the overall perceived reputation, internationalization, and societal acceptance of a foreign HEI in a student's home country are crucial concerns.

International students' satisfaction is influenced by various factors. Apart from perceptions of scholarships and teaching quality, experiences related to living and support services are essential (Collins et al., 2021). The ability to integrate into the host country's society and live peacefully and harmoniously is one of the factors influencing CISs' choice of study destination (Chung et al., 2009). Campus weather, scenery, living conditions, transportation, food, and the local community are some of the "pull" factors mentioned by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), motivating students to choose a particular study destination. Cen (2020) also found that international students in China value campus environment, facilities, and accommodation conditions.

When applying for study abroad, students consider factors such as the ease of application and overall perception of the admission procedure. The students' overall perception of the admission procedure is closely related to their satisfaction levels, which in turn affects their loyalty behavior (Pizzinatto & Aparicio-Ley, 2019).

The education system is fundamental to teaching quality, and the university's teaching mechanism is based on the level of teaching and management, including teaching quality, course offerings, faculty qualifications, and academic standards (Arrieta & Avolio, 2020). It is crucial for international students and is a significant perceptual factor. A HEI's image in this regard helps students believe that their future is well-prepared for (Alves, 2010). Research has also demonstrated that HEI's image influences students' perceived value. HE service quality is influenced by the application process (Arrieta & Avolio, 2020).

Cen (2020) indicated that part of the motivation for international students to apply to study in China is the economic interaction between China and the students' home country. This implies that they consider future employment opportunities, as more economic interaction leads to more job or entrepreneurial opportunities. This puts them at an advantage, as they have a local network, a better understanding of the host country, and international experience that non-international students lack. Studying abroad enhances students' employability (Zhu & Reeves, 2019). The decision to recommend and repurchase are the two most important dimensions of customer loyalty (Jin & Su, 2009); therefore, SD lies mainly on these dimensions. Based on these considerations, this study proposes the following hypotheses and research model (Figure 1) comprising of perceived reputation, quality of living conditions, ease of admission procedures, education system and employment opportunity as independent variables; and SD as dependent variable.

H1: Perceived institution reputation (IR) positively influences CISs' SDs.

H2: Perceived quality of living conditions (LC) positively influences CISs' SDs.

H3: Perceived ease of admission procedures (AP) positively influences CISs' SDs.

H4: Perceived education system (ES) positively influences CISs' SDs.

H5: Perceived employment opportunity (EO) positively influences CISs' SDs.

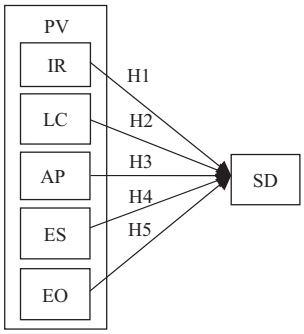

Figure 1 Research model

Methodology

In this empirical study, the researcher primarily employed a quantitative research method. Specifically, primary data were collected through a questionnaire. The initial instrument was developed from an existing, well-established one. However, some modifications needed to be made to tailor them to the specific survey research participants (i.e., CISs studying in Thailand). These modifications were based on existing literature and in-depth interview data obtained from instrument reviewers to ensure that the intrument met the research requirements of this study. The final dimensions and their corresponding items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 PVs and items

	When evaluating and choosing a degree program to study abroad at PIM, you would consider the following……..
IR	Reputation
	Recognition of its degrees (in China or other countries)
	Internationalization level
LC	Daily living conditions in Thailand (e.g., food, accommodation, support for foreign students, social order)
	Cost of studying in Thailand (in comparison to China or other countries)
	Cultural adaptability required in Thailand
AP	Application process (e.g., entrance exams, interviews, recommendation methods)
	Admission requirements (e.g., past grades, specific subjects, English proficiency proof)
	Acceptance rate
ES	Language of instruction (whether the courses are taught in Chinese, English, etc.)
	Duration of the courses (time required to complete the program in comparison to China or other countries)
	Education system (e.g., curriculum, teaching methods)
	Graduation rate
	Material and technological facilities for learning (e.g., libraries, databases, internet services, classroom environment, laboratories)
	Mechanisms for research activities (e.g., opportunities to participate in seminars, academic conferences)
EO	Economic development and employment opportunities in Thailand
	Practical opportunities (e.g., working or interning during the study period)
	Legality and policies of employment for foreigners in Thailand
SD	If you were to reconsider studying abroad, would you still choose PIM?
	If given the opportunity for further education, would you choose to continue studying at PIM?
	Would you recommend PIM to your relatives and friends for their overseas studies?

This instrument primarily measures two aspects: (1) the PVs of CISs; and (2) their SDs. All items are rated on a five-point Likert Scale: PVs: Not at all important (1), Unimportant (2), Neutral (3), Important (4), Extremely Important (5); and for SDs: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5).

The final questionnaire was created as an electronic form. Prior to the actual full survey, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants. The data collected from the pilot test were used to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Based on the results of the pilot test, the final version of the questionnaire was determined.

Data Collection

The study design, sampling methods, and data collection procedures were conducted in a way that minimizes the chance of systematic relationships among samples and reduces the likelihood of dependencies over time. Specifically, the questionnaire was then distributed through Wenjuanxing, an online survey tool, to the entire population of graduate students at PIM via their individual WeChat or email account privately over a limited period of two weeks. Moreover, the researchers only use the first version of their submissions.

Data Analysis

Based on Soper's (2020) suggestion, with an anticipated effect size of 0.3 (medium), a desired statistical power of level of 0.8, 6 latent variables, 21 observed variables, and probability level of 0.05, the minimum sample size is 161. Therefore, a total of 225 valid responses were collected, accounting for 41 percent of response rate, from the entire population of 550 students meets the requirement. The participants consisted of approximately half (50.2%) from the age group of 31–40 years, with the rest from the age groups of 20–30 years (32.9%) and 41–50 years (16.9%). Among these participants, there were slightly more females (55.6%) than males (44.4%). Additionally, there were slightly more doctoral students (57.3%) than master's students (42.7%) as shown in Table 2.

When evaluating the PV of independent variables, they were rated as follows (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest): IS: 4.47 (highest), ES: 4.36, LC: 4.28, AP: 4.09, EO: 3.96 (lowest), and SD: 4.16 as shown in Table 3.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics: Age group, Gender, and Degree

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age group	20–30	74	32.9	32.9	32.9
	31–40	113	50.2	50.2	83.1
	41–50	38	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Male	100	44.4	44.4	44.4
	Female	125	55.6	55.6	100
	Total	225	100	100	
Degree	Master	96	42.7	42.7	42.7
	Ph.D.	129	57.3	57.3	100
	Total	225	100	100	

Table 3 Means of PVs

	Variables	Mean
Independent	IR	4.47
	ES	4.36
	LC	4.28
	AP	4.09
	EO	3.96
Dependent	SD	4.16

Reliability Analysis

By calculating the inter-item correlation, the correlation coefficients between each item are computed. When the calculated value of the corrected item-total correlation (CITC) is less than 0.5, the respective item should be deleted to improve Cronbach's α. From Table 4, the Cronbach's α values are all greater than 0.7, and the CITCs and AVEs. are all greater than 0.5. This indicates that the reliability of each dimension meets the requirements, and therefore, there is no need to delete any items.

Validity Analysis

According to Table 5, the correlation coefficients between IR, LC, AP, ES, EO, and SD are 0.366, 0.276, 0.447, 0.442, and 0.395, respectively. The significance p-values for all these correlations are less than 0.05 indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between IR, LC, AP, ES, EO, and SD.

Table 4 Correlation Coefficient and Reliability

Construct	Item	Mean	*SD*	Loading	Adjusted Loading	AVE	CITC	Cronbach's α
IR	A1	2.904	1.073	0.782	0.730	0.676	0.522	0.709
	A2	3.576	1.340	0.587	0.643		0.686	
	A3	3.040	1.048	0.660	0.654		0.624	
LC	B1	3.427	1.150	0.759	0.760	0.759	0.730	0.802
	B2	3.398	1.162	0.783	0.777		0.713	
	B3	3.247	1.184	0.734	0.739		0.748	
AP	C1	3.696	1.134	0.939	0.915	0.828	0.725	0.862
	C2	3.833	1.035	0.810	0.833		0.816	
	C3	3.342	1.084	0.732	0.735		0.864	
ES	D1	4.320	0.784	0.819	0.819	0.807	0.901	0.917
	D2	4.187	0.750	0.830	0.831		0.900	
	D3	4.251	0.782	0.875	0.871		0.894	
	D4	4.433	0.765	0.764	0.759		0.908	
	D5	4.133	0.795	0.760	0.767		0.908	
	D6	4.249	0.787	0.789	0.793		0.904	
EO	E1	3.564	1.097	0.732	0.738	0.813	0.839	0.851
	E2	3.371	1.067	0.825	0.832		0.779	
	E3	3.513	1.211	0.880	0.870		0.753	
SD	F1	3.858	0.733	0.853	0.877	0.843	0.804	0.873
	F2	3.862	0.739	0.813	0.842		0.818	
	F3	3.231	0.927	0.776	0.809		0.846	

Table 5 Correlations analysis

	IR	LC	AP	ES	EO	SD
IR	1	.132**	.270**	.293**	.204**	.366**
LC	.132**	1	.232**	.276**	.114*	.276**
AP	.270**	.232**	1	.392**	.247**	.447**
ES	.293**	.276**	.392**	1	.324**	.442**
EO	.204**	.114*	.247**	.324**	1	.395**
SD	.366**	.276**	.447**	.442**	.395**	1

Hypotheses Testing

SEM is a statistical analysis tool that assesses whether the theoretical model proposed by researchers can be accepted based on sample data. A path diagram in structural equation modeling is presented below (Figure 2).

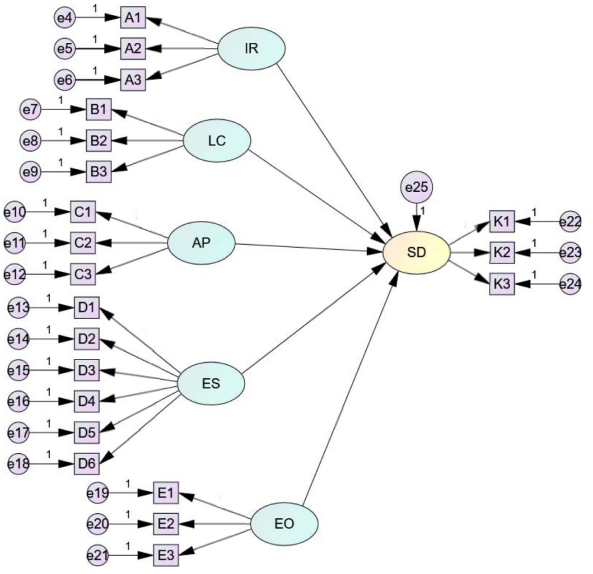

Figure 2 A path diagram in Structural Equation Modelling

In assessing the adequacy of a structural equation model, various fit indices are calculated. One of the commonly used indices is the χ^2/df ratio, where a value less than 3 is generally desired (Kline, 1998). Additionally, several other fit indices are considered, such as the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). For these indices, values greater than 0.9 are typically preferred, indicating a good fit of the model (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). Another important index is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), for which a value less than 0.1 suggests a good fit (MacCallum, et al., 1996). For this model (Figure 2), these fit indices (Table 6) are essential tools in evaluating the goodness of fit of a structural equation model, providing insights into how well the model aligns with the observed data.

From Table 7 below, it can be observed that the Standardized Path Coefficients from IR to SD (H1) is 0.187 (t = 3.217, p = .000), from LC to SD (H2) is 0.107 (t = 3.25, p = .003), from AP to SD (H3) is 0.133 (t = 2.967, p = .000), ES to SD (H4) is 0.199 (t = 3.397, p = .000), and from EO to SD (H5) is 0.194 (t = 2.866, p = .000). These indicate a significant positive impact of IR, LC, AP, ES and EO on SD. Therefore, hypotheses H1 to H5 are supported.

Table 6 Model fitting index and test value

Index	Comparative indices	Acceptable level	Index	Revised Index
p-value	.05	>.05	.000	.056
χ^2/df	<3	<3	3.154	2.008
GFI	0 –1	>0.9	0.880	0.930
AGFI	0 –1	>0.9	0.850	0.907
CFI	0 –1	>0.9	0.921	0.962
NFI	0 –1	>0.9	0.889	0.931
IFI	0 –1	>0.9	0.922	0.955
RMSEA	0 -0.08	<0.100	0.069	0.049

Table 7 Standardized Path Coefficient and t-values for the structural model

	Hypothesis	Estimate	*SE*	C.R.	p	SMC = R^2	Note
H4	SD <---ES	.199	.053	3.774	***(.000)	0.537	Accepted
H5	SD <---EO	.194	.039	4.999	***(.000)	0.638	Accepted
H1	SD <---IR	.187	.045	4.167	***(.000)	0.576	Accepted
H3	SD <---AP	.133	.031	4.223	***(.000)	0.588	Accepted
H2	SD <---LC	.107	.036	2.998	**.003	0.441	Accepted
Overall Model						0.5625	

Note: *** : accepted at α = .001, ** : accepted at α = .01.

Results and Discussion

The research findings reveal that significant positive relationships exist between SD-ES, SD-EO, SD-IR, SD-AP, and SD-LC. Among them, SD-ES has the strongest relationship with the highest Standardized Path Coefficient of 0.199, followed by SD-EO at 0.194, SD-IR at 0.187, SD-AP at 0.133, and SD-LC at 0.107, which is the weakest relationship (Table 7). The Squared Multiple Correlation Coefficient (SMC) of the five independent variables (IR, LC, AP, ES, and EO) reveals that they collectively explain 56.25 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (SD), which is considered a large proportion of the variance explained.

From the PV perspective, CISs at PIM have the highest homogeneity of perception in IR, followed by ES, LC, and AP. EO receives the lowest rating. This trend aligns with more established patterns of CISs studying in Western countries, where the internationalization level and reputation of the destination country and HEI are crucial factors. In particular, the recognition of degrees upon returning to China significantly influences their perception of EO compared to other PVs. This lower rating might be because many of these graduate students, especially doctoral students, already have good job positions.

Students' positive perceptions lead them to choose PIM in Thailand as their study destination. After experiencing student life at PIM, they provide favorable ratings for SD, such as recommending relatives and friends to study at PIM, choosing PIM if they were to study abroad again, and continuing their education at PIM. The average rating falls between agreement and strong agreement (4.16). This indicates their overall satisfaction with the institution, aligning with their perceptions on IR, LC, AP, ES, and EO.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study analyzed the influencing factors of CISs' PV at THEIs and investigated the mechanisms influencing their SDs specifically at PIM. Academically, the study established a theoretical model and empirically verified it, enriching the academic research on the influencing factors of CISs' decisions to study at THEIs.

Practically, given the aims to assist marketing professionals, academic program developers, and management in service, teaching and learning support, the research findings also provide valuable insights for the teaching and practical activities of THEIs. Particularly, the study concludes that overall reputation —comprising HEI reputation, degree recognition, and internationalization level of the institution—is crucial for influencing CISs' study decisions as shown in the case of PIM. This is reflected in their willingness to choose PIM if they were to study abroad again and their recommendation of the institution to relatives and friends.

For the non-academic service aspect, LC plays a significant role in CISs' SDs. Factors such as social safety, food, accommodation, support for international students, cost of studying, and cultural adaptability are essential considerations. Better LC leads to more positive SD among CISs.

AP complexity influences CISs' SDs. Typically, CISs prefer institutions with a simple AP, low entrance exam difficulty, and high acceptance rates. This aligns with the general social tendency of choosing easier application processes. Similarity to the ES in the home country, particularly in terms of language of instruction (e.g. Chinese or English), course duration, curriculum, teaching methods, library facilities, databases, internet services, classroom environment, laboratories, and opportunities to participate in seminars and academic conferences, significantly attract international students. Having said that, a simple AP and aligned ES should not compromise the quality of teaching and learning, as it would harm the institution's reputation in the long run.

Economic development of the host country implies EO and career opportunities for alumni and CIS. Good EO holds a pivotal position in their decision-making process regarding SD. The institution may consider developing programs to help students secure employment upon their graduation to narrow this gap.

It is important to note that this empirical study is limited to PIM. To enhance the applicability and relevance of the findings, it is recommended to broaden the scope of the study to include a more diverse range of institutions and students.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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