

A Study on Factors Influencing Chinese University Students' Intentions to Study Abroad in South-East Asia Based on Cognitive Behavioural Theory

Xiang LinPeng¹, Rosman Bin Karim^{2*}

¹ Graduate School of Management, Management and Science University Shab Alam, Malaysia; xianglinpeng.7@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0003-1082-8995

² Faculty of Business Management and Professional Studies, Management and Science University, Jalan Olabraga, Section 13, 40100 Shab Alam, Selangor, Malaysia; rosman_karim@msu.edu.my; ORCID:0009-0003-0106-8891

*Corresponding Author: rosman_karim@msu.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of advancing globalisation and the deepening Belt and Road Initiative, the South-East Asia region has emerged as a favoured destination for Chinese university students seeking study tours, owing to its unique geographical advantages and high educational value for money. Malaysia, with its rich cultural resources and relatively low cost of studying abroad, has attracted a large number of Chinese students to pursue their studies there. Beneath the rising trend of students expressing an intention to study abroad, the issues exposed in their decision-making processes have become increasingly prominent. Blind conformity, cognitive biases, and tendencies towards irrational consumption are growing more severe. Many students are easily swayed by fragmented information on social media or peer pressure without first conducting an objective assessment of the quality of education in different areas. This study, adopting a psychological cognitive perspective, identifies and guides university students' rational intention to study abroad, presenting itself as a subject requiring urgent and in-depth research within the internationalisation process of higher education. This study, grounded in the Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) framework, examines the factors influencing Chinese university students' intention to study abroad in South-East Asia and the mechanisms underlying this intention. The study employed a combined qualitative and quantitative methodology, utilising questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to meticulously analyse the cognitive logic underlying students' study tour consumption decisions. Findings reveal that Social Thoughts, Cognitions, Self-Emotions, Feelings, and Family Behaviors/actions exert a significant positive influence on Consumption Propensity. Social Thoughts, Cognitions, and Self-Emotions, as well as Feelings, also exert a significant positive influence on Personal Initiative. Family Behaviours Actions did not demonstrate a significant impact on Personal Initiative. Personal Initiative exhibits a mediating effect between Social Thoughts and Cognitions, Self-Emotions and Feelings, Family Behaviours and Actions, and Consumption Propensity. This study proposes that international exchange departments within higher education institutions should enhance students' information screening capabilities through advisory services. It actively advocates for the establishment of a supportive network comprising professional university guidance, rational family decision-making, and standardised social information provision. This approach aims to reduce blind consumption arising from information asymmetry, thereby promoting the healthy and sustainable development of the study tour market.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioral Theory, University student, South-East Asia, Intention to study abroad

INTRODUCTION

With the continuous deepening of economic globalisation and the marked strengthening of internationalisation trends in education, cross-cultural exchange activities within the higher education sector have become increasingly frequent and profound. Against this backdrop, studying abroad has become a crucial strategic pathway for China to cultivate versatile talents with an international outlook and enhance the nation's soft power. China, with its vast student population and growing demand for overseas study, has consistently ranked as the world's largest sender of international students for several consecutive years (Yang, 2022). Large numbers of outstanding students have journeyed abroad, where they not only provide a solid talent pool and rich intellectual support for the nation's future development, but also play a crucial role as 'unofficial ambassadors' in acquiring advanced knowledge and technology, gaining deep insights into cultural differences between East and West, and mastering international norms. This trend in overseas study holds profound and positive significance in broadening the international outlook of citizens, strengthening national cohesion, and responding to global talent competition.

Against this macro backdrop, among numerous overseas study destinations, the Southeast Asian region has gradually emerged as the primary choice for Chinese university students undertaking study tours. This shift is driven by a combination of factors, including geographical proximity, exchange rate fluctuations, differences in consumer habits, ease of adapting to local lifestyles, and the region's continuously improving educational standards. South-East Asia's unique locational advantages and cultural characteristics have made it particularly appealing for such educational travel. Among these, Malaysia's performance stands out particularly, making it one of the top choices for many Chinese students (Xue & Singh, 2025). In recent years, the number of Chinese university students pursuing studies in Malaysia has shown a sustained upward trend. This phenomenon is mainly attributable to the Malaysian government's proactive promotion and substantial support for international education initiatives. The Malaysian government has introduced a series of preferential policies aimed at attracting Chinese university students. In particular, many Chinese students opt to pursue further studies at renowned private universities in Malaysia, such as Taylor's University and INTI University College, or choose to enrol at international university campuses, such as Monash University Malaysia. By participating in the Dual Degree Programme, you can obtain a degree qualification from developed countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia in a more cost-effective manner. Concurrently, the Malaysian government has streamlined the visa application process, moderately relaxed restrictions on part-time work for international students, and provided extensive English-language teaching environments (Fujimoto-Kaneko, 2021). These policy initiatives have significantly lowered the barriers and costs for Chinese students pursuing overseas education, enhanced their study experience, and established Malaysia as a beautiful destination for international students.

Beyond the traditional long-term study abroad model, short-term cross-cultural learning experiences, exemplified by study tours, are increasingly favoured by a growing number of Chinese university students. Currently, the interest of Chinese university students in study tours to Southeast Asia is showing a marked increase (Lee et al., 2025). This growth stems not only from students' keen desire to explore foreign cultures, but also encompasses multiple considerations: enhancing language proficiency, broadening international perspectives, experiencing diverse educational models, and accumulating valuable experience for future academic advancement or employment. During their study tours, some students opt to participate in summer language and cultural immersion programmes, travelling to Singapore to enhance their spoken English skills or to gain an in-depth experience of Thailand's traditional culture (Maesaro & Wijirahayu, 2025). Meanwhile, other students may opt to participate in volunteer programmes in Cambodia, gaining deeper insights into local society through practical experience and enhancing their cross-cultural communication skills. These short-term study tours not only satisfy students' curiosity about exploring foreign cultures, but also enable them to achieve significant improvements in language proficiency, effectively broaden their international outlook, and undertake early exploration of future career paths—all within relatively safe and economical conditions. South-East Asia has emerged as a key destination for Chinese university students intending to study abroad, owing to its relatively low costs of education and living, rich cultural diversity, and convenient geographical location (Karki, 2025). However, despite the burgeoning and promising study-abroad market in South-East Asia, academia has yet to establish a systematic and comprehensive research framework concerning the underlying psychological mechanisms and key factors influencing Chinese university students' intentions to study abroad in South-East Asia.

Given the aforementioned research context and practical requirements, this study intends to incorporate Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) as its core theoretical framework (Hassan Kariri & Alzubaidel, 2024). The core objective of this research lies in conducting an in-depth analysis of how university students' diverse cognitive evaluations and belief systems – encompassing social thoughts and cognitions, self-emotions and feelings, as well as family behaviours and actions – during the decision-making process for study-abroad programmes in South-East Asia, collectively shape their propensity to consume such programmes. This is achieved by influencing their intrinsic personal initiative, a key emotional driver, and by combining this with positive behavioural expectations

regarding the outcomes of the study-abroad experience. This study will focus on constructing a comprehensive theoretical model encompassing three dimensions: the cognitive level (Social Thoughts Cognitions, Self Emotions Feelings, Family Behaviours Actions), the emotional level (Personal Initiative), and the behavioural level (Consumption Propensity). During the empirical analysis phase, the study will employ AMOS software—a specialised structural equation modelling tool—to conduct in-depth processing and analysis of the collected data. Through this series of research endeavours, the study aims to systematically investigate the intricate influence mechanisms and specific causal pathways among the three categories of variables: cognition, emotion, and behaviour. This will precisely reveal the core factors and their interrelationships that shape Chinese university students' intentions to study abroad in Southeast Asia. Finally, this study aims to provide robust theoretical underpinnings for the scientific planning of international exchange programmes within higher education institutions, thereby assisting universities in designing international exchange initiatives that better meet the needs of university students. Concurrently, it provides practical guidance for the innovative design of study tour products, driving the development of more targeted and appealing offerings within the study tour market. Through these endeavors, this research will better meet the personalized development needs of Chinese university students, further propelling the internationalization of Chinese higher education toward a healthy and orderly trajectory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts of Cognitive Behavioural Theory

The Essence of Cognitive Behavioural Theory

Cognitive Behavioural Theory is not a singular theory, but rather a comprehensive theoretical framework integrating multiple schools of psychology, with its development traceable to the 1950s (Marici, 2025). The origins of CBT rest primarily upon two theoretical pillars. Firstly, behaviourism: early behaviourist researchers focused on observable behaviour, positing that behaviour is formed through learning (such as classical conditioning and operant conditioning), and that researchers could alter behaviour through means such as reinforcement and punishment. However, pure behaviourism has limitations when explaining complex human psychological phenomena (Schlinger, 2021). Secondly, Cognitive Psychology emerged during the mid-20th century's 'cognitive revolution', prompting researchers within the discipline to refocus attention on internal mental processes such as thought, memory, perception, and problem-solving. Scholars in cognitive psychology emphasise the central role of an individual's processing and interpretation of information in shaping psychological experience (Jacomuzzi et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, two pivotal figures pioneered the integration of cognitive perspectives into behavioural interventions, thereby laying the foundations for CBT. In the early 1960s, Aaron T. Beck, working as a psychoanalyst, observed during his treatment of patients with depression that their thought patterns exhibited systematic negative biases (Walia & Gupta, 2025). Beck posited that these irrational cognitive patterns were the root cause of patients' emotional distress and maladaptive behaviours, leading him to develop Cognitive Therapy (CT) (Beck, 2019). At almost the same time, Albert Ellis proposed Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) (Priyadarshini & Jose, 2025). Ellis posits that emotional distress primarily stems from irrational beliefs. Through his ABCDE model (Activating Event, Belief, Consequence, Dispute, Effective New Belief), he systematically challenges and corrects these irrational beliefs (Bernard & Terjesen, 2020). Over time, these two approaches, along with other interventions grounded in cognitive and behavioral principles, gradually converged to form what we now recognize as Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT). Cognitive Behavioural Theory continually incorporates new research findings, developing numerous branches and techniques such as Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). It has become one of the most widely applied and strongly evidence-supported therapies within contemporary psychotherapy.

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), as an integrative psychological theory, operates on the core assumption that cognition, emotion and behaviour are interconnected and mutually influence one another (David & Szentagotai, 2006). The application logic of CBT is clearly articulated within the 'cognition-emotion-behaviour' cyclical interaction model (Faustino, 2022). This framework elucidates the dynamic causal chain linking these three elements, providing a foundational structure for understanding and intervening in human psychology and behaviour. Cognition, as the starting point and core of this chain, is regarded by CBT theory as the decisive factor in determining subsequent emotions and behaviours. These cognitive processes may manifest as automatically generated deep-seated core beliefs, or as specific perceptions of the self, others, or the world (Cowdrey et al., 2017). Emotion arises following cognition; an individual's cognitive evaluation directly triggers corresponding emotional experiences. For instance, perceiving an event as a threat elicits anxiety, viewing it as a loss provokes sadness, and interpreting it as an insult incites anger. Emotion is the direct product of cognition (Frijda, 1993). Behaviour is

jointly driven by emotions and cognition. Negative emotions and irrational cognitions often lead to maladaptive behavioral patterns, whereas positive emotions and rational cognitions tend to foster constructive and adaptive behaviors (Palmieri et al., 2022). Moreover, behavioural outcomes subsequently influence an individual's cognition and emotions, thereby establishing a persistent cycle.

The Application of Cognitive Behavioural Theory

The application logic of Cognitive Behavioural Theory is clearly reflected in its cyclical interactive model of “cognition-emotion-behaviour” (Xiang et al., 2021). It reveals the dynamic causal chain linking these three elements, providing a foundational framework for understanding and intervening in human psychology and behaviour. Cognition is the starting point and core of the entire chain (Zheng et al., 2022). CBT posits that an individual's cognitive evaluation of an event or situation is pivotal in determining their subsequent emotions and behaviour. These cognitions may be automatic, deep-seated core beliefs, or they may constitute specific perceptions of oneself, others, or the world. Emotion is the emotional response that follows immediately after cognition (Zanger et al., 2022). An individual's cognitive evaluation directly triggers corresponding emotional experiences. If one perceives an event as threatening, they may feel anxious; if perceived as a loss, they may feel sad; if perceived as an insult, they may feel angry. Emotions are the direct product of cognition. Behaviour is jointly driven by emotions and cognition (Liu et al., 2022). Negative emotions and irrational cognitions frequently lead to maladaptive behavioural patterns. Conversely, positive emotions and rational cognitions tend to foster constructive and adaptive behaviours. The outcomes of these behaviours then reciprocally influence an individual's cognition and emotions, forming a persistent cycle.

In this study, the application logic of the ‘cognitive-emotional-behavioural’ framework is articulated as follows. The researcher defined the independent variable (cognitive dimension) as the cognition of university students during the study-abroad decision-making process. This cognitive dimension was further subdivided into Social Thoughts and Cognitions, Self-Emotions and Feelings, and Family Behaviours and Actions. Collectively, these cognitive components constitute university students' overall evaluation and belief system regarding study-abroad programmes in South-East Asia. The mediating variable (emotional level) was defined as university students' Personal Initiative. The cognitive components (Social Thoughts Cognitions, Self Emotions Feelings, Family Behaviors Actions) influence students' behaviour by affecting their intrinsic positive emotional drive—Personal Initiative. In practice, positive Emotions and Feelings enhance students' self-confidence and willingness to participate actively. The dependent variable (behavioural dimension) ultimately manifests as these cognitive and emotional factors jointly shaping Chinese university students' Consumption Propensity towards study tours in South-East Asia. Driven by cognition and emotion, students develop behavioural tendencies regarding whether to select and actually commit resources to undertake such study tours. Through this logical framework, this study will examine how cognition influences emotion in university students' decision-making regarding study tours, and how these factors jointly determine their propensity for study tour consumption. This provides theoretical foundations and practical guidance for understanding and guiding university students' study tour behaviour.

Hypothesis Development

The Relationship Between Social Thoughts and Cognitions and Consumption Propensity and Personal Initiative

A substantial body of historical research literature demonstrates a positive correlation between social thoughts and cognitions and consumption propensity. Social Thoughts and Cognitions, as the comprehensive reflection of an individual's perception of their social environment, industry trends, and personal social positioning, constitute the core elements driving profound transformations in Consumption Propensity. According to Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), an individual's behavioural intentions are not only influenced by external circumstances but are more significantly determined by their processing and cognition of social information. Existing research, through studies of programmers at H Software Park, has found that specific occupational cognitive patterns reshape individuals' behavioural intentions (Bae & Choi, 2025). The same logic applies to the current cohort of university students. Against the backdrop of “academic inflation” and “employment competition”, university students commonly experience career anxieties akin to those of programmers (Atiq & Loui, 2022). When university students become aware of the fierce competition within the domestic job market, their social cognition drives a propensity towards 'self-investment' behaviour (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). Study tours to South-East Asia are recognised as a means of enhancing 'global competence' and 'differentiated competitive advantage' (Chong et al., 2021). This cognitive process—from societal pressures to career anxieties, culminating in the aspiration to “enhance oneself”—significantly heightens university students' propensity to participate in study tours to South-East Asia (Paranjape, 2013). Research on university students indicates that by restructuring social thoughts and cognitions, one can enhance their sense of social value, thereby increasing their propensity to consume (Jiang et al., 2022). In university student study tours, social thoughts and cognitions likewise serve as a “value evaluator”

(Nicholson, 2017). For a considerable period, some students have harboured a prejudiced perception of South-East Asia as “underdeveloped” or offering “low-end tourism”. This irrational belief has suppressed their intention to study abroad (Prieger & Hampsher-Monk, 2023). However, as the Belt and Road Initiative deepens and awareness of regional economic integration grows, university students have re-evaluated the social value of study tours. Their cognitive approach has shifted from mere entertainment to strategic social observation and the recognition of emerging market opportunities. Research indicates that when students recognise South-East Asia's pivotal role in the future global economy and perceive it as a crucial arena for personal social engagement and broadening their international outlook, their initiative in participating in study tours and their propensity to spend are significantly enhanced (Yague & Berents, 2025). For university students, a study tour to South-East Asia represents not merely a geographical displacement across borders, but a profound process of reshaping social thought and cognition (Manteaw et al., 2025). Should university students perceive study tours as an act of escapism, their motivation may prove unstable. However, through cognitive guidance that helps them recognise study tours as a positive endeavour for building cross-cultural social capital and enhancing social adaptability, this shift in perception will effectively alleviate their anxieties about the future (Xu & Ho, 2024). Just as university students recognise the importance of social interaction for their wellbeing, thereby increasing their propensity to consume, so too will they develop a stronger purchasing intent and decision-making confidence upon realising the positive value of study tours to South-East Asia for their personal socialisation process and physical and mental health development.

H1: Social Thoughts and Cognitions Significantly Influence Consumption Propensity

H5: Social Thoughts and Cognitions significantly influence Personal Initiative.

The Relationship Between Self-Emotions and Feelings, Consumption Propensity, and Personal Initiative

Extensive historical research demonstrates a positive relationship between self-emotions and feelings and consumption propensity. Self-Emotions Feelings refers to an individual's awareness and evaluation of their own emotional needs, profoundly influencing the nature and intensity of consumption decisions (Tang et al., 2025). Research indicates that self-emotions and Feelings can not only unleash consumption potential by mitigating negative emotions, but may also transform into defensive Consumption Propensity under stress-driven conditions (Liu et al., 2021). Researchers exploring programmers' professional behaviors have found that intense industry competition induces a self-comparative cognitive pattern, leading individuals to engage in defensive behavioral investments to alleviate the fear of falling behind (Nanjappan et al., 2024). This finding holds significant implications for understanding the intention of university students in Southeast Asia to study abroad. Against the backdrop of mass higher education and the internationalization of the job market, university students universally face intense peer pressure (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). When university students view international experience as a benchmark for measuring their self-worth, they are prone to developing a sense of inferiority—the feeling that not studying abroad leaves them behind (Yue & Lu, 2022). At this point, the desire to study abroad in Southeast Asia stems not entirely from an intrinsic interest in foreign cultures but rather as a form of anxiety-driven consumption. This desire is essentially a defensive strategy adopted by university students to counter identity anxiety and maintain their relative standing within their peer group. Unlike the aforementioned anxiety-driven mechanisms, positive self-emotions and feelings can enhance sustained consumption propensity by boosting emotional efficacy. Research indicates that when individuals achieve emotional stability and reduce social anxiety through cognitive restructuring, they develop a more positive behavioral disposition (de Mooij et al., 2023). For university students, if their perception of study tours in Southeast Asia shifts from being forced into participation to viewing them as opportunities for personal growth and enhancing cross-cultural social skills, their self-emotional feelings will transition from negative anxiety to positive self-efficacy. Research indicates that when university students recognize study abroad programs as sources of psychological fulfillment and emotional pleasure, these positive emotional experiences significantly reduce their social anxiety in unfamiliar environments (Al Abiky, 2023). This improvement in emotional state not only enhances their willingness to participate in study tours for the first time, but also triggers a desire for subsequent continuous consumption behaviors—such as further education and overseas internships—through the feedback mechanism of emotional benefits. This creates a virtuous cycle of consumption propensity.

H2: Self-Emotions Feelings and Consumption Propensity have a significant impact.

H6: Self-Emotions and Feelings significantly influence Personal Initiative.

Family Behaviors Action in Relation to Consumption Propensity and Personal Initiative

Extensive historical research demonstrates a positive relationship between family behaviors and consumption propensity. Within the framework of Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), an individual's consumption propensity does not arise in isolation but is the result of the combined influence of family environment, interactive behaviors, and individual cognitive processing. Research indicates that interaction patterns among family members directly reshape individuals' cognitive evaluations, thereby influencing their consumption decisions (Shah & Asghar,

2023). Research has found that the “emotional supply” within families is a key variable driving consumption propensity (Khademi Gerashi & Fakhreddin, 2021). Just as the elderly's reliance on health supplements stems from salespeople filling emotional gaps within their families, university students' intention to study abroad is similarly influenced by family emotional support (Tung et al., 2021). When parents demonstrate concern and support for university students' personal growth and the expansion of their international perspective, university students develop a strong sense of security and belonging (Rehman et al., 2023). This positive emotional perception translates into a high evaluation of the study tour's value, thereby enhancing their propensity to consume study tours to Southeast Asia. At this point, study abroad is not merely an educational investment; it has become a symbolic vehicle for gaining emotional resonance and support within the family (Wang, 2024). Drawing on the rebellious psychology model in elderly consumption research, family members' interventions in consumption behavior often trigger cognitive biases in individuals. Research indicates that when children dismiss the health needs of the elderly in a blunt and dismissive manner, it can trigger a perception of diminished autonomy among the elderly (Heide, 2022). When university students make study abroad decisions, if parents base their stance solely on safety concerns or financial burdens—adopting outright rejection or excessive interference—students are highly likely to develop misconceptions such as: “My parents don't understand the pressures of modern job competition” or “They're trying to stifle my independence” (Bristow, 2023). This cognitive bias causes university students to shift from rational evaluation to emotional defense, generating intense resistance. Driven by this psychological impulse, university students may no longer focus on the cost-effectiveness of studying abroad in Southeast Asia itself, but instead seek to uphold their adult autonomy and dignity by insisting on their own views or seeking external support (Montagne et al., 2026). The increase in consumption propensity is not solely driven by product appeal, but rather serves as a compensatory behavior to counteract household power suppression and safeguard self-determination. The study further indicates that when understanding and communication are lacking within the family, individuals tend to seek emotional substitutes externally (Hannemann et al., 2024). For the elderly, salespeople's warm inquiries serve as emotional substitutes; for university students, the peer socialization, elite growth pathways, and exotic cultural experiences touted by Southeast Asian study tour agencies often function as compensatory tools for emotional fulfillment and identity (Tan et al., 2022). If university students feel misunderstood or rejected within their family environment, they are more likely to channel their emotional needs for independence and respect into the consumption behavior of study abroad programs (Winkel et al., 2021). College students hope to demonstrate their global competence through study abroad experiences, thereby regaining influence within their family relationships (Mu et al., 2022). Therefore, Family Behaviors Actions not only promote consumption through positive reinforcement but may also stimulate individuals' defensive consumption motives through negative conflict.

H3: Family behaviors and actions exert a significant influence on consumption propensity.

H7: Family Behaviors and Actions significantly influence Personal Initiative.

The Relationship Between Personal Initiative and Consumption Propensity

Extensive historical research demonstrates a positive relationship between personal initiative and consumption propensity. Research indicates that robust psychological needs within individuals are the primary factor driving consumption propensity (Wu & Han, 2021). In sociological research, the strong demand for health and emotional well-being is directly transformed into purchase intention through the mediating variable of attitude (Lim & An, 2021). Among university students, the psychological need for self-improvement, enhanced career competitiveness, and broadened international perspectives constitute the intrinsic motivation for the intention to study abroad. When university students demonstrate strong initiative in personal development, they adopt a more positive attitude toward the educational value, cultural experiences, and resume enhancement offered by study tours to Southeast Asia. This positive attitude bridges the gap between intrinsic motivation and the external act of participating in study tours (Clanton Harpine, 2024). University students who demonstrate greater initiative in personal career planning exhibit a deeper appreciation of Southeast Asia's value as a study-abroad destination, thereby generating a stronger propensity to consume (Kayashima & Asada, 2024). The strength of personal initiative is particularly evident in information acquisition methods and has a direct impact on the quality of consumption decisions. Research has found that the passive nature of older adults in acquiring knowledge about health supplements often leads to irrational consumption impulses (Šrol & Čavojevová, 2022). For university students, the study tour market in Southeast Asia suffers from information asymmetry. If students lack initiative in information gathering, relying solely on fragmented content from social media (such as Xiaohongshu or Douyin), visually packaged influencer hotspots, or peer group pressure to form their perceptions, they become highly susceptible to irrational study abroad intentions. This passive information consumption pattern leads students to overlook safety risks, academic quality, and tangible outcomes during study tours, resulting in blind conformity. Conversely, students with high information proactivity build rational understanding by verifying official credentials, comparing course syllabi, and consulting professionals. This proactivity helps curb impulsive desires,

steering consumption decisions back toward rationality. Bandura's self-regulated social cognitive theory emphasizes that self-efficacy serves as a mediator in behavioral change (Chou et al., 2024). In consumption scenarios, the strength of an individual's willingness is determined by their conviction that they possess the capability to complete specific consumption actions and manage associated risks. Within the context of study tours in South-East Asia, self-efficacy manifests as university students' confidence in their cross-cultural communication abilities, capacity to adapt to life abroad, and aptitude for recognising pitfalls inherent in study tour programmes. Research indicates that enhancing an individual's personal initiative—that is, strengthening their ability to identify erroneous beliefs and establish rational convictions—can effectively regulate consumption propensity (Peled-Laskov, 2024). When university students possess a high level of self-efficacy, they are more likely to proactively overcome concerns regarding safety, language and other aspects of South-East Asia, thereby transforming latent interest into concrete purchasing intent. This sense of efficacy, acting as a moderating variable, determines the efficiency with which personal initiative translates into concrete action. University students are currently in the phase of establishing social relationships, with some demonstrating a strong initiative to integrate into specific elite social circles or gain peer recognition (Friend, 2021). Businesses often capitalise on this mindset, packaging study tours to South-East Asia as a symbol of high-end social standing or an escape from mediocrity. When university students actively seek such emotional validation and social compensation, they may mistakenly translate their desire for social success into a willingness to purchase study tour products. At this juncture, this high degree of proactivity on an emotional and social level may instead obscure the educational essence of the study tour itself, becoming a catalyst for irrational, impulsive study tour consumption.

H4: Personal Initiative and Consumption Propensity have a significant impact.

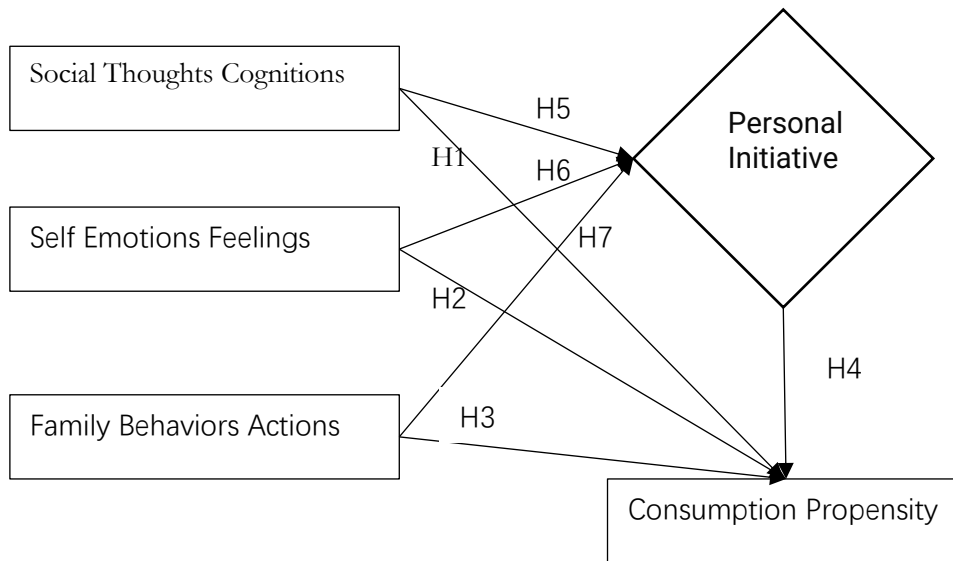
The Mediating Effect of Personal Initiative

Within the logical framework of Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), Personal Initiative is regarded as a complex mediating variable. It is not merely an individual's simple response to external environmental stimuli, but rather a comprehensive trait permeating social environmental cognition, self-emotional regulation, and family interaction dynamics. This study draws upon analytical perspectives concerning proactive misuse, emotional compensation, and adversarial autonomy in older adults' consumption behavior to examine the mediating effect of personal initiative in the formation process of intention to study abroad. Personal Initiative manifests at the level of social cognition as an individual's capacity to process and evaluate external information (Zhang et al., 2021). Personal Initiative acts as an intermediary, transforming external marketing messages into a herd mentality that drives purchasing decisions and helps individuals avoid falling behind. Self-emotions and feelings-level initiative manifest as self-regulation strategies that individuals employ to alleviate negative emotions. Among university students, this initiative manifests as compensation for career anxiety. Faced with a challenging employment landscape, university students have demonstrated remarkable initiative, such as actively participating in various internships and professional certification programmes (Hui et al., 2025).

Study tours in Southeast Asia have become a tool for university students to proactively alleviate competitive anxiety due to their relatively low financial barriers and high cost-effectiveness in terms of international exposure (Li et al., 2025). Personal Initiative, acting as an intermediary variable, transforms inherent occupational stress into a strong desire for study abroad programs, forming an affective loop of stress perception and behavioral compensation (Priya & Christopher, 2025). Family relationships serve as significant external variables influencing consumption decisions, while individual cognitive responses manifest as behavioral counter-initiatives (Velonaki, 2021). University students' study abroad decisions often involve cognitive struggles with their families. When parents express reservations about Southeast Asian study programs due to safety or financial concerns, students may develop cognitive biases such as “parents fail to grasp contemporary demands” or “my decision-making autonomy is restricted.” This perception drives students to proactively “defend their autonomy” by persistently asserting their intention to study abroad, thereby demonstrating their mature judgment as adults. At this point, personal initiative is being misused as a confrontational psychological defense mechanism. This “I want to be in control” approach, lacking a scientific risk assessment as its foundation, can evolve into an obstinate, even rebellious, and irrational desire. Bandura's social cognitive theory indicates that self-efficacy is the core mediator of behavioral change (Romeo et al., 2021). In studies examining the intention to study abroad, the positive influence of personal initiative is contingent upon rational self-efficacy. When university students demonstrate high proactive information discernment and can scientifically evaluate the educational outcomes and potential risks of study tours in Southeast Asia, this “sense of high efficacy” will exert a positive moderating effect. Research indicates that enhancing university students' active recognition abilities through cognitive interventions enables them to discern false marketing endorsements and prevent blind emotional dependency (Stanley et al., 2022). At this juncture, rational personal initiative serves as an intermediary, successfully filtering out external irrational stimuli and transforming impulsive desires into rational choices grounded in career planning.

H8: Personal Initiative mediates the relationship between Social Thoughts Cognitions and Consumption Propensity.
 H9: Personal Initiative mediates the relationship between Self Emotions Feelings and Consumption Propensity.
 H10: Personal Initiative mediates the relationship between Family Behaviors Actions and Consumption Propensity.

Research Framework



- H1:STC→PI H2:SEF→PI H3:FBA→PI
 H4:PI→CP
 H5:STC→CP H6:SEF→CP H7:FBA→CP
 H8:HTC→PI→CP H9:SEF→PI→CP H10:FBA→PI→CP

Figure 2.1 Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Regarding sampling strategy, this study employed a combination of purposive sampling and random sampling. The research period was set from September to November 2025, coinciding with the transition between academic years and the peak season for international study tours. This timing ensures the collection of the most timely behavioral samples. To guarantee homogeneity within the respondent group and the generalizability of research conclusions, strict eligibility criteria were established: respondents must have completed a full-time high school education within China and graduated normally. This prerequisite was established to eliminate interference variables stemming from cross-national educational backgrounds, ensuring the sample accurately reflects the cognitive patterns and behavioral intentions of university students within China's domestic education system regarding study tours to Southeast Asia. For sample coverage, the study selected six highly representative Malaysian higher education institutions as research bases, including five public research universities—the University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), and the top private institution, Taylor's University. These institutions serve as benchmarks for Southeast Asian higher education and are core destinations for Chinese university students undertaking short-term study tours and credit exchanges.

During the data collection phase, the research team adopted a dual-track approach combining online and offline methods. By randomly recruiting eligible Chinese international students and study tour groups within the aforementioned campuses, paper questionnaires were distributed to ensure the depth of face-to-face interviews and the authenticity of responses. Simultaneously, electronic questionnaires were utilized to broaden coverage and enhance data collection efficiency. This complementary research methodology not only effectively mitigated

sampling biases inherent in single-source data collection but also established a robust empirical foundation for subsequent factor analysis grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Theory.

Instruments

In this study, the measurement tools were designed in strict accordance with the logical framework of Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), utilizing the 5-point Likert scale as the assessment method. The questionnaire constructed five core variables, utilizing 15 refined items to comprehensively and systematically cover the entire psychological pathway from cognitive processing to emotional regulation, and ultimately to behavioral intention. The specific design details are as follows.

The Social Thoughts Cognitions variable focuses on examining the shaping effects of external environments on individual cognition. This variable is measured through three dimensions—authority identification cognition, peer conformity cognition, and propaganda efficacy cognition—to assess how external social stimuli are transformed into an individual's initial cognition. The Self Emotions Feelings variable centers on uncovering the internal psychological drivers within individuals. The study examines three levels—employment/competition anxiety cognition, social capital compensation cognition, and self-worth enhancement cognition—to investigate how individuals utilize the Intention to Study Abroad to regulate and compensate for their internal emotional states. The Family Behaviors Actions variable explores interactive dynamics within microenvironments. Further subdivided into decision autonomy cognition, defense/cognitive dissonance cognition, and strategic communication cognition, it fully reflects the psychological resistance and adaptation processes of university students under familial constraints. Personal Initiative, serving as the key mediating variable in this study, measures behavioral tendencies driven by cognitive processes. The scale precisely captures the level of agency in decision-making through three dimensions: proactive information seeking, proactive benefit optimization, and proactive non-academic motivation. Consumption Propensity, as the outcome variable, is comprehensively assessed across three dimensions: willingness to make substantial investments, willingness to engage deeply, and willingness to plan sustainably. The scale designed in this study constructs a multidimensional, hierarchically structured empirical framework through 5 variables and 15 items, providing a rigorous and reliable measurement foundation for in-depth analysis of the influence mechanisms on Chinese university students' intention to study abroad in Southeast Asia.

Table 3.1 Survey Questionnaire

Variable	Code	Observation Indicators	References
Social Thoughts Cognitions Social Thoughts Cognitions	STC1	Authoritative Recognition: I believe the study tours to Southeast Asia recommended by overseas education agencies, seasoned education experts, or senior students during information sessions hold significant value.	(Gao et al., 2025)
	STC2	Peer Conformity: Seeing classmates and friends in my social circle all participating in the Southeast Asia study tour, I feel I should join too, otherwise I'll fall behind in the resume competition or social conversations.	(Laursen & Veenstra, 2023)
	STC3	Perception of Program Effectiveness: I believe study abroad programs that promote "short-term enhancement of international perspectives" or "facilitate internal referrals to prestigious companies" are credible and worth pursuing for background enhancement.	(Donkin & Rasmussen, 2021)
	STC4	Reciprocal obligation: If a salesperson gives me free eggs, noodles, or small gifts, I feel obligated to buy some of their products.	(Twum-Danso Imoh, 2022)
Self Emotions Feelings Self Emotions Feelings	SEF1	Employment/Competition Anxiety Perception: I am highly concerned about future job market competition and believe I must participate in a study tour to Southeast Asia to gain 'overseas experience' to maintain my competitive edge.	(Wang & Zhang, 2025)
	SEF2	Social capital compensation: The social circles and cross-cultural exchange opportunities provided by the Southeast Asia study tour program compensate for the lack of social connections in my campus life, bringing me psychological fulfillment.	(Afzali et al., 2022)
	SEF3	Self-worth enhancement: Participating in this international study tour has made me feel like I'm becoming a 'global citizen,' boosting my confidence and enhancing my standing among peers.	(Birni & Eryilmaz, 2024)
	SEF4	Placebo Effect: Even if I'm not sure if it actually works, just taking supplements makes me feel like my body is getting healthier, and my mood lifts too.	(Neogi & Colloca, 2023)
Family Behaviors Actions Family Behaviors Actions	FBA1	Decision-Making Autonomy: I view participating in the study tour as an investment in my future. This is a personal development decision, and even if my parents oppose it, I will stand by my choice.	(Li et al., 2021)
	FBA2	Defense/Cognitive Dissonance: I believe that if my parents prevent me from participating in the Southeast Asia study tour, it's because they either don't understand the severity of the current job market or they're too conservative in their thinking.	(Yu et al., 2025)
	FBA3	Strategic Communication Approach: To persuade my parents to support my study abroad program, I will selectively emphasize safety and cost-	(McGreavy et al., 2022)

		effectiveness to them, or inform them after the decision is made to minimize resistance.	
	FBA4	Emotional Contradiction: My children are too busy with work to visit me regularly, yet they rush over to criticize me when I buy health supplements. This makes me feel extremely angry and misunderstood.	(Killingsworth et al., 2023)
Personal Initiative Personal Initiative	PI1	Proactive Information Search: I will actively monitor the official websites of international offices at major universities and study abroad WeChat accounts, and punctually attend every online information session regarding study abroad programs in Southeast Asia.	(Chen et al., 2025)
	PI2	Proactive Pursuit of Benefits: To secure study abroad scholarships, early bird discounts, or credit transfer opportunities, I proactively reach out to organizers and spend considerable time searching social media platforms for “scam avoidance” or “money-saving” strategies.	(Lebel et al., 2023)
	PI3	Non-academic motivation initiative: Beyond the academic curriculum itself, I proactively sought out information on local tourist attractions, culinary experiences, and social events in Southeast Asia, using these as key factors in my decision-making process.	(Marfán, 2025)
	PI4	Social Sharing Initiative: When I discover quality health supplements or educational seminars, I proactively recommend them to my longtime friends and invite them to join me.	(Machin-Mastromatteo, 2023)
Consumption Propensity Consumption Propensity	CP1	Willingness to make significant investments: I am willing to pay tens of thousands of yuan (exceeding a typical travel budget) for this project if it significantly enhances my credentials (such as a certificate from a prestigious institution).	(Ali et al., 2022)
	CP2	Willingness to Engage Deeply: If additional self-funded cultural experiences or visits to renowned companies are offered during the study tour, I would feel a strong urge to participate and would be willing to pay extra for these opportunities.	(Robinson et al., 2021)
	CP3	Ongoing Commitment to Planning: I plan to continue participating in international study tours or short-term exchange programs in the future, considering this an essential part of my university career planning.	(Alzoraiki et al., 2023)
	CP4	Preference for Alternative Medicine: If money is tight, I'd rather cut back on other expenses or reduce hospital visits to ensure I can afford health supplements.	(Gohsman & Johnson, 2023)

This study strictly adhered to standardized procedures for empirical social science research in the design of measurement tools and the planning and execution of the pre-survey process. Specifically, it can be broken down into three phases: questionnaire structure design, content validity optimization, and reliability verification.

Regarding questionnaire structure, the measurement tool employed in this study was meticulously constructed from two major components. The first section focused on demographic background information, comprehensively covering five core dimensions: respondents' gender, type of school attended, grade level, family economic status, and prior overseas experience. The purpose of this demographic background survey is to provide precise control variables for subsequent differential analysis. The second part constitutes the main body of the scale. Based on Cognitive Behavioral Theory, it meticulously constructs five core measurement variables aimed at deeply analyzing the generative logic of university students' intention to study abroad.

In the questionnaire content optimization and validity control phase, the research team introduced the Delphi Method during the initial questionnaire development stage. Through multiple rounds of expert interviews and academic deliberations, the team conducted iterative revisions targeting the formulation of scale indicators, dimensional classification, and logical consistency. These measures ensured the questionnaire's content validity fully met rigorous academic research standards.

Entering the pre-survey and reliability validation phase, the research team meticulously planned and implemented a small-scale pre-test to ensure the robustness of the measurement tool. They randomly selected 80 university students meeting the inclusion criteria as survey participants, ultimately collecting 78 valid questionnaires—achieving an impressive 97.5% response rate. Subsequently, the team conducted rigorous statistical tests on the pre-survey data using SPSS software. The results demonstrated that the Cronbach's α coefficients for all measurement constructs significantly exceeded the 0.70 threshold. This statistical outcome robustly confirms the exceptional internal consistency and construct reliability of the measurement tool.

Sample and Data Collection

This study strictly adhered to statistical sampling theory and academic norms throughout the sample size determination and data validity verification phases. Regarding population size estimation, based on official statistics released by China's Ministry of Education, the number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia reached 33,000 in 2025. Given that Malaysian higher education programs (undergraduate, master's, and doctoral) typically span 3 to 5 years, this study conservatively estimates the current population size of Chinese students in Malaysia to be between 100,000 and 150,000. This macro-level context provides an extensive and representative target population for the study.

For sample size calculation, this study referenced the classic model proposed by [Morgan \(1970\)](#). This theory explicitly states that when the population size exceeds 75,000, the minimum recommended sample size is 382 to control sampling error within 5% at a 95% confidence level. To ensure robustness and effectively mitigate potential risks of invalid samples, the research team set the target sample size at 400 during the actual survey phase. This allowance also accounted for anticipated disruptions such as respondent non-cooperation, incomplete questionnaires, or the occurrence of outliers.

During the data collection and validity assessment phase, the research team rigorously screened questionnaires and conducted quality checks, ultimately obtaining 384 valid responses. This sample size not only exceeded the critical threshold of 382 set by [Krejcie and Morgan](#) but also achieved an ideal effective response rate. From a statistical perspective, 384 valid samples provide sufficient support for inferential statistical analysis, assuming a population size of 100,000 to 150,000. This ensures the research conclusions possess the necessary scientific rigor and persuasiveness when describing the influence mechanisms of Chinese university students' intentions to study abroad in Southeast Asia.

Data Analysis

During the statistical analysis phase, this study employed a covariance-based structural equation model and selected AMOS statistical software as the primary analytical tool. In the model construction phase, given the high-dimensional complexity and abstract nature of latent variables within the Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) framework, this study employed latent variable modeling for design. This approach not only captures the granular dimensional characteristics within latent variables more precisely but also effectively simplifies the path relationships in the structural model, thereby enhancing the model's explanatory power for complex psychological processing.

In terms of analytical procedures, the research process followed a two-stage modeling paradigm. Before formal modeling, researchers first employed AMOS to conduct descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. This aimed to preliminarily validate the directional relationships among constructs and their logical consistency, while providing empirical foundations for subsequent causal inferences. Subsequently, the study entered the core analytical phase involving the construction and testing of structural equation models (SEM).

Regarding model efficacy, SEM offers distinct advantages by integrating measurement and structural models within a unified analytical framework. This technique not only handles multiple sets of complex causal pathways simultaneously but also effectively controls for the impact of measurement error on variable relationships. By evaluating model fit indices and conducting significance tests on path coefficients, this study aims to empirically investigate the psychological representations and behavioral drivers underlying Chinese university students' decisions to study abroad in Southeast Asia. Finally, leveraging this high-precision statistical approach, the study systematically elucidates the transmission effects and operational mechanisms of cognitive, affective, familial, and proactivity variables on the intention to study abroad. This not only provides robust mathematical support for validating research hypotheses but also outlines a more comprehensive and nuanced academic landscape for understanding the intrinsic logic of university students' cross-border study-abroad behavior.

4.1. Construct reliability and validity

To ensure the scientific rigor and robustness of the research conclusions ([Sansbury et al., 2022](#)), this study meticulously constructed a rigorous statistical testing framework designed to conduct an in-depth assessment of the psychometric properties of the measurement scales.

In the reliability analysis phase, this study selected Cronbach's alpha as the core metric for measuring the internal consistency of the scale ([dos Santos Barros et al., 2022](#)). Utilizing this coefficient, the study evaluates the logical homogeneity of items within the same dimension, thereby ensuring that each observed indicator reliably reflects the factors influencing university students' intention to study abroad in Southeast Asia. Regarding validity and structural reliability testing, this study will further calculate Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The CR value is used to evaluate the structural consistency of internal observations within latent variables. Compared to Cronbach's α , it provides a more accurate reflection of the composite quality of the scale. AVE serves as a key criterion for assessing convergent validity, measuring the strength with which latent variables explain their associated observed items.

By comprehensively evaluating these statistical indicators, this study aims to fully validate the measurement tool's accuracy in capturing latent traits related to “cognitive behavior.” This analytical process not only ensures the scale's superior measurement precision but also establishes a robust foundation of empirical validity for subsequent investigations into the causal mechanisms linking cognition, emotion, and behavioral intentions.

Table 4.1 Reliability and Validity Test Results

Factors	variable	factor loadings	Cronbach'a	CRValue	AVEValue
STC	STC1	0.863	0.880	0.908	0.713
	STC2	0.881			

	STC3	0.850			
	STC4	0.780			
SEF	SEF1	0.857	0.879	0.917	0.735
	SEF2	0.893			
	SEF3	0.852			
	SEF4	0.825			
FBA	FBA1	0.881	0.893	0.920	0.743
	FBA2	0.885			
	FBA3	0.871			
	FBA4	0.808			
PI	PI1	0.797	0.866	0.892	0.673
	PI2	0.813			
	PI3	0.817			
	PI4	0.854			
CP	CP1	0.796	0.847	0.877	0.641
	CP2	0.835			
	CP3	0.820			
	CP4	0.748			

The measurement instrument in this study consists primarily of five latent variables, each corresponding to four items, resulting in a total of 20 observed indicators; it does not include any second-order variables.

The researchers conducted reliability and validity tests on these 20 items. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.847 to 0.893, all of which were above the standard value of 0.80, indicating good consistency among the variables.

The Composite Reliability (CR) values for this study ranged from 0.877 to 0.920, all exceeding the standard requirement of 0.80, further indicating good internal consistency for each variable.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values in this study ranged from 0.641 to 0.743, all of which exceeded the critical value of 0.50, indicating that each variable demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Factor Analysis

This study will use Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to analyze the data. This method primarily employs the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity to assess the presence of a typical factor structure among the variables and the appropriateness of factor analysis. The KMO measure is used to evaluate the suitability of the sample data for factor analysis. The Bartlett sphericity test is used to determine whether significant correlations exist among the variables. Next, the researcher will assess the cumulative variance contribution of the final factor solution to quantify the overall explanatory power of the extracted common factors relative to the variance of the original variables. Through these steps, the researcher aims to identify and establish the underlying dimensional structure.

Table 4.1 Results of Scale Validity Tests for the Intention to Study Abroad Scale in Chinese University Students in South-East Asia

Variable	STC	SEF	FBA	PI	CP
STC	STC1		0.863		
	STC2		0.881		
	STC3		0.850		
	STC4		0.780		
SEF	SEF1		0.857		
	SEF2		0.893		
	SEF3		0.852		
	SEF4		0.825		
FBA	FBA1	0.881			
	FBA2	0.885			
	FBA3	0.871			
	FBA4	0.808			
PI	PI1			0.797	
	PI2			0.813	
	PI3			0.817	
	PI4			0.854	
CP	CP1				0.796
	CP2				0.835

	CP3					0.820
	CP4					0.748
	KMO	0.845				
	χ^2	4142.002				
	df	190.000				
	Sig.	0.000				
	Eigenvalue	5.056	3.131	2.508	2.176	1.739
	Percentage of variance	25.279	15.655	12.542	10.882	8.697
	Cumulative variance percentage	25.279	40.934	53.476	64.358	73.055

In the EFA stage, this study first examined the suitability of the scale. The KMO test results showed that the KMO statistic was 0.845, significantly higher than the threshold standard of 0.7. This indicates that there is strong shared variance among the observed variables, the sample size is adequate, and the Sampling Adequacy is excellent, fully satisfying the prerequisites for conducting factor analysis.

In the Bartlett's sphericity test, the statistical result showed $df = 190$, and the significance level (p -value) was far less than 0.001. This result, at a very high level, rejected the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, strongly confirming the presence of significant correlation among the observed items and thus ensuring the statistical validity of the factor extraction process.

In the factor extraction and power assessment phase, this study employed principal component analysis to extract several common factors, which together accounted for 73.055% of the cumulative variance. According to the academic standard, an explanatory power exceeding 60% indicates strong representativeness. The over 70% explanatory power in this study fully demonstrates that the extracted common factors can highly condense and reconstruct the core information of the factors influencing Chinese university students' intention to study abroad in Southeast Asia. This not only demonstrates the scale's excellent construct validity but also provides robust support for dimensional reduction in subsequent path analyses based on Cognitive Behavioral Theory.

Correlation Analysis

To thoroughly investigate the independence among the constructs, this study first conducted a Discriminant Validity test. Specifically, the researcher used Pearson Correlation Analysis to examine the correlations between the three first-order indicators and the six second-order indicators. This analysis aims to assess whether there is excessive overlap or conceptual confusion among the different constructs or variables, thereby confirming that they possess sufficient discriminant validity both theoretically and empirically.

Table 4.3 Correlation Analysis Results Among Variables

		STC	SEF	FBA	PI	CP
STC	Pearson correlation	1	.018	.162**	.246**	.269**
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.730	.001	.000	.000
	N	386	386	386	386	386
SEF	Pearson correlation	.018	1	-.033	.139**	.121*
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.730		.516	.006	.017
	N	386	386	386	386	386
FBA	Pearson correlation	.162**	-.033	1	.159**	.221**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.001	.516		.002	.000
	N	386	386	386	386	386
PI	Pearson correlation	.246**	.139**	.159**	1	.379**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.000	.006	.002		.000
	N	386	386	386	386	386
CP	Pearson correlation	.269**	.121*	.221**	.379**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.000	.017	.000	.000	
	N	386	386	386	386	386
* At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.						
* At the 0.05 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.						

The findings of this study indicate that all core latent variables exhibit statistically significant positive correlations. The specific Pearson correlation coefficients and corresponding significance levels are presented below.

- STC and PI: $r = 0.246, p < 0.01$
- SEF and PI: $r = 0.139, p < 0.01$
- FBA and PI: $r = 0.159, p < 0.01$
- PI and CP: $r = 0.379, p < 0.01$
- STC and CP: $r = 0.269, p < 0.01$
- SEF and CP: $r = 0.121, p < 0.01$
- FBA and CP: $r = 0.221, p < 0.01$

Model Construction

To thoroughly examine the causal relationships between different latent variables within this study's theoretical model, the researcher employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Specifically, the researcher utilised the Amos statistical software package to construct the corresponding structural model, subsequently analysing the established structural equations to validate or refute the previously proposed research hypotheses.

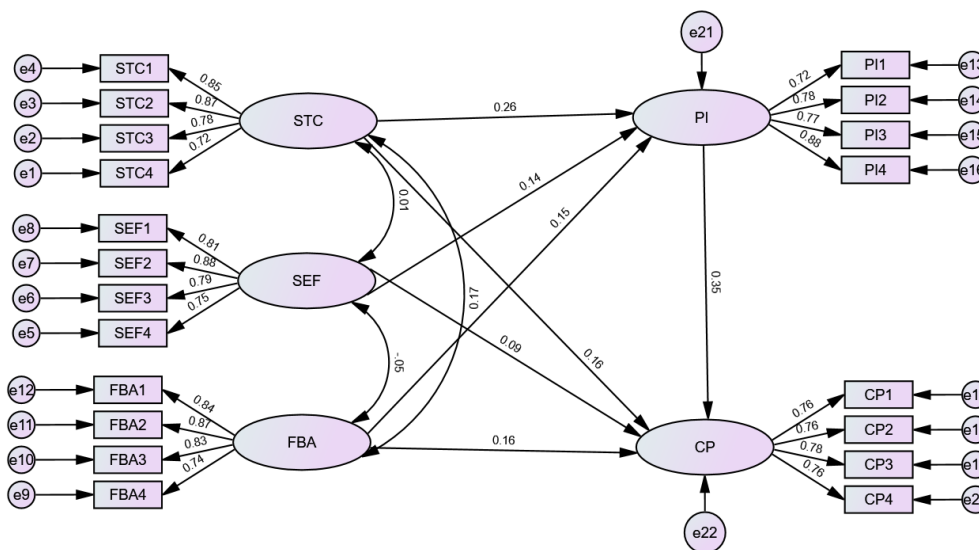


Figure 4.1 Structural Equation Model

Upon completing the construction of the structural equation model, researchers must conduct a practical assessment of its robustness. To address this requirement, this study employed goodness-of-fit testing methods.

Table 4.3 Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model (n=384)

Measurement model	X2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Evaluation indicators	<5	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	<0.08
Outcome model	1.167	0.953	0.938	0.956	0.993	0.021

In the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis process, evaluating model goodness-of-fit is a critical step for verifying the alignment between theoretical frameworks and observed data. For the theoretical model “Chinese University Students' Intention to Study Abroad in Southeast Asia,” the specific fit indices are analyzed as follows.

Regarding overall model fit, the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 1.167. This value precisely falls within the ideal range of 1 to 3, strongly indicating the model's high parsimony while ruling out biases caused by over-specification or sample size distortion.

Regarding absolute fit indices, the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) was 0.953, and the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) was 0.938. Both metrics significantly exceeded the statistically accepted threshold of 0.90, indicating that the constructed Cognitive Behavioral Theory model accurately reproduced the covariance matrix of the observed data.

Regarding Incremental Fit Indices, the Normative Fit Index (NFI) was 0.956, and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) reached 0.993. These metrics substantially exceeded the recommended standard of 0.90, with the CFI

particularly approaching the ideal value of 1. This performance fully highlights the model's exceptional efficacy in explaining the causal relationships among University students' cognition, affect, and willingness toward study abroad.

Regarding model prediction residuals, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was only 0.021, far below the excellent threshold of 0.05 (and superior to the acceptable upper limit of 0.08). This exceptionally low value further confirms the model's precision in handling measurement error and structural pathways.

The above analysis reveals highly consistent core fit indices, systematically validating the “Cognitive Behavioral Theory-Based Model of Chinese University Students' Intention to Study Abroad in Southeast Asia” as possessing excellent construct validity and data fit. This not only demonstrates the theoretical model's strong explanatory power for real-world samples but also provides a robust mathematical foundation for subsequent in-depth exploration of path coefficients between variables and hypothesis testing.

Analysis of Main Effects and Mediating Effects

Following an analysis of the research factors, the main effects among the five variables were examined through Estimates, standard errors, confidence intervals, and p-values.

Table 4.4 Analysis of Main Effects for Variables

Hypothetical	Path			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Conclusion
H1	STC	→	PI	0.264	0.065	4.508	***	Support
H2	SEF	→	PI	0.143	0.052	2.577	0.010	Support
H3	FBA	→	PI	0.147	0.052	2.607	0.009	Support
H4	PI	→	CP	0.161	0.046	2.936	0.003	Support
H5	STC	<---	CP	0.164	0.057	2.877	0.004	Support
H6	SEF	<---	CP	0.091	0.045	1.694	0.090	Not supported
H7	FBA	<---	CP	0.352	0.056	5.681	***	Support

Table 4.4 indicates that the estimated standard error ranges from 0.091 to 0.352, suggesting minimal annotation error and close approximation between predicted and actual values. The standard error (S.E.) falls between 0.045 and 0.065, reflecting relatively precise estimation. The correlation coefficients (r) range from 0.694 to 0.681, indicating strong linear relationships between variables, all of which are positively correlated. The P-values for H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H7 are all less than 0.01, thus confirming these hypotheses. However, the P-value for H7 exceeds 0.01, therefore rejecting the H7 hypothesis.

Table 4.5 Mediating Effect Analysis

Hypothetical	Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P	Conclusion
H8	STC→PI→CP	0.094	0.048	0.154	0.006	Support
H9	SEF→PI→CP	0.042	0.024	0.086	0.001	Support
H10	FBA→PI→CP	0.043	0.012	0.070	0.020	Support

As shown in Figure 4.5, the estimated standard errors range from 0.042 to 0.094, indicating that the labelled errors are relatively small and the predicted values are pretty close to the actual values. The p-values for H8, H9, and H10 are all less than 0.01, thus confirming the hypotheses. This demonstrates that Personal Initiative can exert a mediating effect between the independent and dependent variables.

DISCUSSION

Enhancing Social Thinking and Cognitive Abilities can Boost Consumption Propensity and Personal Initiative

Social Thoughts Cognitions, as the core component of individual cognitive processing, encompasses four dimensions: authority recognition cognition, peer conformity cognition, persuasive efficacy cognition, and reciprocal obligation cognition. These cognitive dimensions all exert a significant positive predictive effect on university students' personal initiative in participating in study tours in Southeast Asia. Authority recognition cognition exhibits a positive correlation with university students' initiative for study tours. When students strongly endorse the national strategic orientation and academic authorities' affirmation of the value of Southeast Asia study tours, they develop a heightened sense of decision compliance. When universities promote Southeast Asian study tours by emphasizing alignment with the national Belt and Road Initiative and featuring renowned professors as

academic leaders, many students proactively gather program information, independently plan academic pathways, and significantly increase their initiative and participation. Peer conformity reinforces students' study tour action through social identification (Mansor et al., 2023).

University students are susceptible to peer group behavior, viewing study tours as a crucial pathway to gain a sense of belonging and social capital. Taking one class as an example, when some students took the lead in signing up for a Southeast Asia study tour program, others, driven by a desire not to be left behind, proactively sought peer support and actively applied for the necessary procedures, fostering a positive atmosphere of participation. Perceived promotional effectiveness significantly increased the frequency of participation in study tours among university students. When program promotions were precisely aligned with students' expectations for background enhancement and self-actualization, effective messaging reshaped their perception of feasibility. Emphasizing the programs' role in boosting resume competitiveness and broadening international perspectives, many students proactively invested time and effort in preparatory work, breaking away from the status quo.

The perception of reciprocal obligation triggers compensatory proactive engagement among university students. When students perceive preferential resource allocation and prior care from universities or institutions, the psychological need for equilibrium in social exchange generates a motivational drive for positive reciprocation. For instance, when a university provides full scholarships and one-on-one mentor guidance to study-abroad students, the recipients actively participate in program selection and execution to fulfill the psychological contract of reciprocity. Thus, the four dimensions of Social Thoughts Cognitions synergistically drive university students' personal initiative in study abroad decisions in Southeast Asia through the cognitive-behavioral pathway. This finding confirms that reinforcing positive social cognition is a key motivational factor in enhancing students' willingness and capacity for execution in cross-border mobility.

Enhancing university students' social thought cognition abilities not only helps them navigate through information fog but also transforms them from passive followers into strategic self-planners. At the outset of the research, many students' motivation for studying abroad in Southeast Asia stemmed from a passive defense against employment pressures and anxiety about peer competition. In this low-cognition state, students acted unthinkingly, mechanically accumulating credentials for background enhancement. Following cognitive enhancement, students deepened their social thought cognitions regarding the Belt and Road Initiative, regional economic integration, and Southeast Asia's geopolitical significance, leading to a fundamental shift in their understanding of the initiative. University students no longer passively select pre-packaged study abroad programs, but proactively conduct strategic research. Before intervention and deep cognitive guidance, some students viewed cross-border study tours as a compensatory pathway to acquire social currency and prove superiority, often expending their initiative on social media displays.

After enhancing their understanding, students deepened their awareness of the essence of intercultural communication skills and global competence, realizing that actual value lies in deeply engaging with diverse cultures. This awakening of value drove strong subjective initiative. Students transitioned from passively completing itineraries to proactively designing in-depth interviews, engaging in substantive exchanges with local youth, and leveraging study tours to enhance practical foreign language skills and cross-cultural collaboration techniques. This shift in cognition moved them from consumption-driven compensation to self-enrichment, completing a transformation from passive participants to active explorers. Family Behaviors Actions directly improved the quality of proactive communication in students' study-abroad decision-making. Previously, students often perceived parental financial oversight or safety concerns as infringements on personal freedom due to cognitive biases, leading to arguments or passive-aggressive resistance. Post-cognitive enhancement, students engaged in "positive self-dialogue" from a holistic family perspective, adopting a proactive proposal model. Social Cognition capability enhancement is pivotal in transforming university students' intention to study abroad into high-quality, proactive behavior. By correcting misaligned perceptions, cognitive restructuring awakens students' sense of self-efficacy, propelling them from passive policy responders to proactive practitioners of international talent development. This elevates study abroad outcomes, achieving a systemic leap in personal comprehensive quality and life perspective.

Enhancing Self-Emotional Awareness and Feelings can Boost Consumption Propensity and Personal Initiative

Self-emotions refer to the process of recognizing and processing internal emotional states. By filtering external environmental stimuli, it directly drives university students' intention to study abroad in Southeast Asia. This study found that all four dimensions of Self-Emotions Feelings exert a significant positive influence on university students' intention to study abroad in Southeast Asia. Employment/Competition Anxiety manifests as risk-averse tendencies triggered by career crises. Under the current higher education evaluation system and intensified competitive landscape, university students widely experience pronounced employment anxiety and concerns about mediocrity. University surveys indicate that over 70% of students worry that lacking international experience will

place them at a disadvantage in the job market. This perception prompts students to view study abroad programs as a “risk-mitigation tool” to alleviate career crises.

Given the high cost-effectiveness of study tours in Southeast Asia and their alignment with national Belt and Road talent needs, students experiencing heightened anxiety are more likely to participate in such programs to mitigate employment risks, demonstrating strong purchasing intent (Nguyen et al., 2023). The perception of social capital compensation stems from compensatory desires triggered by deficiencies in one's social circle. When self-assessing, university students often perceive their limited social resources and yearn to acquire high-tier social capital and international networks through cross-border learning. For instance, one student experienced acute deprivation due to their existing social circle failing to meet developmental needs. This compensatory cognition transforms the intention to study abroad into an emotional compensation behavior. Students perceive participating in Southeast Asian study tours as an opportunity to enter elite social circles or international networking spheres. The deeper their awareness of social capital scarcity, the stronger their motivation to compensate through study tours, significantly boosting participation intent. The perception of self-worth enhancement manifests as the integration of global competence with self-identity. Students closely associate study tour outcomes with self-actualization and the label of international talent, reflecting their desire to elevate personal social status and self-identity.

College students perceive study tours in Southeast Asia as enhancing cross-cultural communication skills and alleviating the fear of mediocrity. This perception directly translates into motivation for study tours—the more positive the perception, the more they view such tours as high-return self-investment, leading to firm consumption decisions. The psychological comfort effect manifests as belief reinforcement under actionism. The placebo effect in psychology is evident in study tour decisions, as students believe that action equals progress. For instance, when facing postgraduate entrance exams or job-hunting pressures, participating in international programs provides positive reinforcement that “I am actively improving.” Even if the short-term academic benefits are unclear, the belief that international experience itself confers value can alleviate psychological stress. This cognitive pattern of “paying for peace of mind” significantly boosts repurchase and recommendation intentions for study tours. These four dimensions collectively form the psychological compensation mechanism underlying university students' decisions to study abroad. The greater the negative perceptions and positive expectations, the more pronounced the positive willingness to purchase Southeast Asian study abroad services for psychological equilibrium, emotional redemption, and self-reinvention. This confirms the logical pathway where emotional cognition drives intent.

The enhancement of Self-Emotions and Feelings abilities serves as the core driving force, enabling individuals to transition from generating intentions to actively executing actions. During the decision-making process for study abroad programs in Southeast Asia, students can significantly increase their proactive engagement by recognizing, regulating, and reconstructing the efficacy of their own emotions. Many students initially develop the intention to study abroad due to blind conformity to peer pressure or a compensatory mindset in response to future uncertainties. At lower cognitive levels, students often passively absorb information. After enhancing their Self Emotions Feelings capabilities, they can accurately pinpoint the underlying drivers behind anxiety—a genuine desire for international perspectives and competitive differentiation—rather than mere group conformity. This clarity fosters strong initiative. The widespread anxiety among university students about enhancing their credentials resembles the health anxieties of older people, often triggering irrational impulses toward study abroad programs. Employing cognitive debate techniques from CBT guides students to scrutinize irrational beliefs, such as the notion that “only studying abroad can lead to success.” Once students learn to regulate this competitive anxiety and gain a scientific understanding of the value of the Southeast Asian market, their initiative becomes more rational and efficient. This proactivity is no longer blind, action-driven by panic, but somewhat rational self-regulation and scientific planning based on their own growth trajectory. Many students harbor an intention to study abroad but hesitate due to doubts about their ability to adapt in a foreign environment or concerns about communication barriers. As their awareness of their ability to manage emotions and solve problems increases, students demonstrate unprecedented initiative in decision-making. They proactively draft detailed plans to persuade their parents, actively apply for scholarships, and hold a positive vision for their future. This heightened sense of self-efficacy transforms students from hesitant observers into proactive individuals who pursue global competence and are capable of independently navigating cross-border challenges. When students can accurately identify competitive anxieties, rationally regulate emotional responses, and build robust self-efficacy beliefs, they shift from passively responding to policy environments to actively creating learning opportunities. This positive relationship not only enhances the scientific rigor of study abroad decisions but also drives proactive leaps in personal global competitiveness through cognitive dividends.

Enhancing Family Behaviors and Actions can boost Consumption Propensity and Personal Initiative

Family Behavioral Actions represent the psychological representations individuals form regarding decision-making authority, sense of responsibility, and communication patterns during family interactions. Research

suggests that university students' cognitive processing of family relationships has a direct impact on their decisions to study abroad. The following analysis examines the significant positive relationship between these behaviors and consumption propensity across four dimensions. Decision autonomy perception manifests as a psychological struggle for university students to achieve a sense of adulthood and independence. University students are in a critical transitional phase from "family dependence" to psychological weaning, driven by a strong cognitive need to prove their ability to handle complex matters independently. For some students, participating in a Southeast Asia study tour represents an act of exercising personal decision-making authority and a declaration of independence from parental control. The stronger their pursuit of autonomy, the more resolute their intention to study abroad becomes. Even when confronted with family skepticism, this student maintained their stance to uphold self-efficacy. Driven by the psychological urge to prove independence, consumption propensity paradoxically increased. Defensive/cognitive misalignment manifests as students mistakenly perceiving study tour expenditures as "burden reduction." Influenced by traditional Chinese family ethics, students often develop defensive cognition, viewing early competitiveness enhancement and avoiding becoming a financial burden to their family as core responsibilities. However, under cognitive bias, they erroneously link this long-term responsibility to "immediate study tour investments." For instance, one student developed the misaligned logic that future unemployment would inflict greater losses on the family if they did not participate in a study tour. Driven by this altruistic cognition, they believed spending family funds on a Southeast Asia study tour was fulfilling their responsibility to the family's future. The deeper this cognitive misalignment regarding responsibility, the stronger the student's willingness to purchase study abroad services, attempting to trade short-term educational investment for long-term family economic security. This strategic communication strategy represents a game-theoretic "persuasion rent-seeking" tactic employed by university students.

University students possess a deep understanding of family communication patterns, enabling them to accurately identify parental pain points and develop strategic communication frameworks that are tailored to the family's power structure. Perceived emotional conflict serves as a compensatory escape from generational divides. Some students sense familial constraints or outdated parental values, which can result in significant emotional barriers between generations. University students perceive a lack of understanding within their families and feel their horizons are limited. This negative emotional perception of the family creates a push to explore outward, viewing study tours in Southeast Asia as a means to escape their original environment and seek spiritual freedom. The more severe the perception of emotional conflict within the family, the more positive and significant the student's desire for emotional compensation becomes, as they seek external validation and build independent social circles through cross-border study tours. Study tours thus become an antidote to resolve the psychological dilemmas within the family. The logic by which family behaviors influence university students' study-abroad intentions operates as follows: when students perceive constraints on independence, future responsibility pressures, or emotional disconnect within family relationships, they process these experiences through compensatory or defensive cognitive frameworks. They then view study-abroad programs in Southeast Asia as the optimal solution for achieving autonomy, fulfilling responsibilities, or alleviating family pressures. Consequently, the propensity to engage in study-abroad consumption increases significantly and positively as the complexity of family cognitive conflicts intensifies.

Enhancing family behaviors and capabilities does not necessarily boost university students' personal initiative. Overreliance on external motivation from the family level may instead suppress an individual's intrinsic drive. Decision-making substitution within the family system inhibits personal exploration and initiative. Within complex family dynamics, when parents comprehensively manage or excessively support study abroad pathways, it reinforces students' psychological dependency. This structural reliance creates cognitive biases, leading students to perceive study abroad as a family obligation rather than a personal growth opportunity. Research indicates that excessive family support can foster decision-making inertia, leading to low engagement and minimal exploration during the program. Such experiences become superficial, failing to facilitate proactive growth. Intergenerational cognitive misalignment creates a disconnect between family support and intrinsic motivation. CBT suggests that behavioral change stems from loosening deep-seated, irrational beliefs. Even with improved family communication skills and ample funding, external pressure fails to translate into internal initiative if students' underlying risk-averse cognition or self-doubt remains unaddressed. The externalities of social environments cannot be fully covered by family support alone. Peer groups and external societal evaluation systems constrain university students' initiative. Family behavioral capacity enhancement remains confined to the private sphere, struggling to resolve information silos and social pressures in the public domain. Improved Family Behaviors Actions do not equate to an explosion of University Student Personal Initiative. Enhancing study abroad initiatives fundamentally requires students to undergo cognitive restructuring, cultivate self-planning abilities, and benefit from synergistic social support systems.

The enhancement of personal initiative serves as the core driving force for individuals to transform vague intentions to study abroad into rational, resolute consumption decisions. In the context of university students'

study tours in Southeast Asia, initiatives act not only as a catalyst for motivation but also as a filter for the quality of consumption. The awakening of self-efficacy prompts university students to shift from passive conformity to proactive strategic selection. University students' initial intentions to study abroad are often passive, easily influenced by social media personas or peer pressure (FOMO). After reconstructing their self-efficacy through cognitive interventions, students proactively research the industrial strengths of various Southeast Asian countries. They proactively compare course outlines and academic credit recognition. This active cognitive behavior transforms consumption propensity from blind following to rational selection. Students no longer pay for expensive, purely tourism-focused packages, but instead choose cost-effective programs that enhance their professional background. The shift in value goals drives university students from experiential consumption toward investing in human capital. As cognitive depth increases, personal initiative strengthens, providing deep-seated value support for consumption propensity. Upon recognizing Southeast Asia's high demand for multilingual talent, students proactively redirected funds from leisure spending toward intensive study tours in Southeast Asia. They selected programs incorporating corporate visits and government engagements, viewing these as "pre-career investments." This return to self-agency guided university students from psychological compensation toward autonomous development decisions. Some students pursue study tours to escape academic pressure or seek emotional compensation. When students regain their sense of intrinsic value and control through active practice and exchange, their Consumption Propensity returns to a rational trajectory. Enhanced Personal Initiative is the foundation for rational Intention to study abroad, driving university students toward more informed consumption choices.

Personal Initiative mediates the relationship between Social Thoughts and Cognitions, Self Emotions and Feelings, Family Behaviors and Actions, and Consumption Propensity

Personal Initiative does not operate in isolation but functions as a core mediating variable, playing a crucial role in regulating and transforming the relationship between Social Thoughts, Cognitions, Self-Emotions, Feelings, Family Behaviors, Actions, and University Student Study Abroad Consumption Propensity in Southeast Asia.

First, enhanced Social Thoughts and Cognitions serve as the compass for Personal Initiative. In the decision-making process for study abroad programs, Social Thoughts and Cognitions encompass objective understanding of globalization trends, regional economies, and the quality of educational resources in Southeast Asia. Merely knowing policy information is insufficient to stimulate rational Consumption Propensity. When a university student's level of Social Thoughts and Cognitions improves, this understanding takes effect through the guidance of Personal Initiative. After intensively studying the Belt and Road Initiative, students are no longer passively accepting study abroad program information promoted by agencies. Instead, they proactively analyze regional industrial strengths—such as Malaysia's manufacturing sector or Thailand's tourism industry—and compare academic reputations and local employment policies across universities in countries like Singapore and Vietnam. This cognitive-driven proactive screening transforms vague, impulsive study-abroad desires into rational consumption propensity grounded in career planning, strategically positioning students for future professional development.

Secondly, enhanced Self Emotions Feelings serve as the driving force behind Personal Initiative. University students' intentions to study abroad are often intertwined with competitive anxiety, peer pressure (also known as FOMO), and a desire for personal growth. Strengthening self-emotions and Feelings enables students to clearly identify the cognitive biases that lead them to pursue study abroad programs as a means to alleviate anxiety. This internalized cognitive ability sparks the initiative to change their current situation. Initially anxious upon seeing peers enrolling in study abroad programs, the student considered mindlessly following the trend. However, after enhancing Self Emotions Feelings, he no longer merely scrolled through social feeds to compensate for psychological gaps. Instead, he channeled emotional energy into proactive actions to improve cross-cultural communication skills—actively participating in practical foreign language training and Model United Nations activities to comprehensively enhance his overall capabilities. This initiative served as an intermediary bridge, transforming compensatory/avoidant consumption propensity into a growth-investment mindset driven by self-enhancement. This significantly strengthened the intrinsic stability of the study abroad decision-making process.

Furthermore, enhancing Family Behaviors and Actions skills provides a stable foundation for Personal Initiative. Families serve as the primary financial supporters for study abroad decisions. Students' understanding of family dynamics, parental expectations, and financial circumstances directly influences their Intention to study abroad. Previously, students might have perceived parental concerns as obstacles, leading to defensive conflicts. After improving Family Behaviors and Actions skills, students developed a desire for proactive communication and collaborative decision-making. Initially, the student had planned to disregard the family's financial situation and insist on participating in an expensive study abroad program, which would have led to intense conflict with their parents. After enhancing His Family Behaviors, he proactively submitted a detailed study abroad proposal to his parents. This proposal included research data, risk mitigation measures, and expected returns, and he actively

established a goal-based agreement within the family. This cognitive shift, achieved through proactive negotiation as an intermediary step, dissolved the decision-making resistance stemming from generational conflict. Consequently, the Consumption Propensity shifted from dependency and rebellion back to a rational, collaborative model grounded in family consensus.

Ultimately, the mediating effect of Personal Initiative bridges the gap between cognition and action. Personal Initiative serves as the pivotal node reinforcing cognitive correction and behavioral substitution. On the cognitive front, enhancements across three dimensions—social, emotional, and familial—provide university students with rational justification, emotional motivation, and an external supportive environment. At the mediating stage, clients' demonstrated behaviors—such as proactive research, self-management, and family proposals—are the key to transforming cognition into Consumption Propensity. Without proactive engagement, cognition remains confined to the intellectual realm, struggling to crystallize into resolute decision-making. At the outcome level, the ultimate shift in study-abroad consumption propensity is the inevitable result of Personal Initiative successfully fulfilling its mediating role.

Thus, external environmental stimuli alone or isolated cognitive inputs are insufficient to drive high-quality intention to study abroad. Personal Initiative plays an indispensable mediating role. Only when a university student's social awareness, emotional self-awareness, and family collaboration transform into a sense of self-efficacy—the belief that “I can plan my future”—can their intrinsic motivation be truly activated. This then facilitates a fundamental shift: transforming irrational, induced study-abroad impulses into rational Consumption Propensity grounded in global competence.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPACT, AND LIMITATIONS

Research Contributions

This study enhances innovation and deepens our understanding of theoretical dimensions. It breaks through the limitations of traditional study tour research, which typically focuses on marketing perspectives or demographic descriptions, by innovatively introducing CBT into the field of international consumption in higher education. The researchers constructed a three-dimensional driving model of social cognition—self-efficacy—family interaction, delving into how university students in Southeast Asia transform external environmental stimuli into internal behavioral motivation through cognitive restructuring during their study tour decision-making process. By introducing perceived global competence and individual proactivity as mediating variables, the study demonstrates—using university students as a case—that increased understanding of Southeast Asian cultures elevates perceived global competence and individual proactivity, thereby influencing study abroad decisions. This approach enhances the theoretical explanatory power of educational psychology and consumer behavior studies in the context of cross-border educational mobility, providing new academic foundations for understanding the complex decision-making processes of youth populations.

This study advances a paradigm shift at the practical level. Moving beyond superficial analyses that merely surveyed intentions, it pioneers a CBT-logic-based framework for guiding intentions and optimizing decision-making. From correcting cognitive biases to enhancing self-efficacy, the study constructs a structured, actionable evaluation system for influencing factors. This provides a technical template for university international exchange departments designing study tour programs and offers a practical pathway for relevant educational institutions to boost student participation through behavioral contracts and goal management, achieving a shift from information push to cognitive empowerment in practice.

This study enhances the practical mapping of social values. Against the backdrop of intensifying global competition and the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, this study proposes countermeasures from dual perspectives: talent cultivation and regional cooperation. By revealing the impact of peer pressure and information silos on university students' irrational or passive decision-making, the research suggests establishing a triple-linkage mechanism: government policy guidance, university-specific promotion, and rational family support. This framework aims to help university students develop rational and pragmatic perspectives on international development, thereby promoting the deep integration of educational resources between China and the Southeast Asian region.

Research Impact

This study advances a cognitive shift in research on internationalization in higher education. It breaks through the limitations of previous approaches that examined Intention to study abroad solely from marketing or external policy perspectives, redirecting the focus toward the internal psychological mechanisms of university students. The research reveals how global competence expectations and cross-cultural anxiety intertwine to influence consumption decisions, prompting educational administrators to transition from merely promoting programs to

providing deeper cognitive guidance. After incorporating these findings, universities enhanced students' social and cognitive thought about Southeast Asia through specialized lectures on regional development. This approach stimulated students' personal initiative, successfully transforming some students' short-term travel impulses into long-term development aspirations. It provides a novel logical starting point for international exchange practices.

This study provides a structured, actionable decision-making intervention template. It validates a structured framework encompassing cognitive restructuring, behavioral experiments, and self-efficacy enhancement, offering convenient tools for university international offices and educational consulting agencies. Addressing issues such as peer conformity or regional bias in university students' study abroad choices, this study demonstrates how the ABCDE model can guide students toward rational selection. For instance, after adopting this model, an educational consulting agency designed promotional strategies better aligned with students' cognitive development patterns, achieving a shift from information dissemination to decision-making empowerment.

This study advocates for the establishment of a collaborative support system that involves schools, families, and society. By analyzing Family Behaviors, Actions and Social Thoughts Cognitions, this study highlights the decisive role of multi-party collaboration in transforming student behavior. Extending to policy recommendations, it advocates for a collaborative network integrating university professional guidance, rational family support, and social resource linkage. This approach resolves cognitive misalignments in intergenerational communication—such as parents' excessive safety concerns regarding Southeast Asia—ultimately forming a comprehensive safeguarding system.

This research enhances the self-planning capabilities of university students and their global competence. It directly awakens students' sense of agency, transforming them from passive consumers into proactive global learners. This elevates their self-protection and rational decision-making skills, laying a foundation for their participation in global competition.

Research Limitations

Limitations in the representativeness of the research sample and statistical inferences. This study primarily focused on university student populations within specific regions or tiers of higher education institutions. Although firsthand data was obtained through questionnaires or in-depth interviews, its broad applicability in statistical terms remains limited. Students with different academic backgrounds, family economic levels, and prior overseas experience exhibit significant variations in cognitive biases and risk perceptions regarding study tours to Southeast Asia. The motivation structures of university students differ substantially from those of first- and second-year students, driven by career planning. Future research should expand the sample size to include institutions across diverse regions and types, using multi-group comparisons to validate the universality of the cognitive-affective-familial framework among broader university student populations.

This study lacks sufficient long-term tracking and verification of participants' intention to study abroad, as well as their conversion into actual behavior. While Cognitive Behavioral Theory emphasizes the persistence of cognitive restructuring, this research primarily focuses on cross-sectional analysis of study-abroad intentions, lacking longitudinal tracking of the conversion from intention to action. The intention to study abroad is significantly influenced by external policies, sudden public health events, and personal financial circumstances, making it highly susceptible to cognitive rebound or intention erosion. Current research has not yet validated, through long-term dynamic monitoring, whether enhanced personal initiative can withstand the pressures of graduation season or shifts in the employment landscape. Future studies should incorporate follow-up research to investigate whether intentions cultivated through cognitive interventions translate into sustained behaviors that build global competence over the long term.

The theoretical application of this study faces external constraints and irrational environmental limitations. While CBT focuses on modifying individual psychological and logical dimensions, it struggles to overcome external environmental constraints when addressing study abroad decisions fully. Fluctuations in national visa policies, shifts in international relations, and sudden security incidents—these non-psychological factors remain largely beyond the reach of cognitive interventions alone. Furthermore, while the study identifies proactivity as a mediating factor, isolated cognitive enhancement may prove insufficient when confronting overly polished study abroad marketing on social media and peer pressure driven by blind comparison. The research leaves room for further exploration regarding the profound impact of digital social media on cognitive distortions.

This study examines the depth and intervention blind spots of family and social system interventions. While emphasizing the importance of Family Behavior Actions, the actual intervention design showed limited engagement with parents and peer groups. University study abroad programs often entail significant financial expenditures for families. Parental cognitive patterns are often deeply ingrained, making short-term, student-focused interventions insufficient to fundamentally alter family decision-making logic. If family support networks fail to achieve genuine cognitive alignment, student initiative may falter against familial resistance. Future research

should explore the development of multi-stakeholder collaborative intervention modules, including those involving parents and mentors, to enhance the resilience of study abroad decision-support systems.

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