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## Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad Among US, French and Chinese Students

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# Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad Among US, French and Chinese Students

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# Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad Among US, French and Chinese Students

## Executive Summary

Universities and business schools are making significant efforts to increase student and faculty involvement in international education. The AACSB encourages its accredited member schools to increase their commitment to international business programming, including study abroad. For business students of all majors, study abroad is often strongly recommended and usually offered as an option.

Students tell us that various factors motivate them to participate in study abroad programs. Motivations include professional, cultural and personal considerations. Research indicates there are also barriers that lead students to think that it would be difficult for them to study abroad. Important barriers include language differences, money, time, and concern that study abroad will delay graduation. Although researchers have studied what motivates students to study abroad, few studies have explored them across cultures. This paper tries to do this, and will contribute to the literature on international business education programming and on the influence of culture on decision-making.

We believe that students' motivations will influence their decision to study abroad, and that the decision will be affected by the degree to which barriers weigh on the decision. We also predict that motivations within national groups will be similar, but that across groups motivations will differ. We conducted an exploratory study on these relationships, using a model based on expectancy theory.

We collected data from 477 respondents in the USA, France and China. Results suggested that students' motivations influence their intention to study abroad. We found general support for the idea that due to differences in nationality, motivations for studying abroad vary. Finally, we found that both student nationality and barriers moderate the relationship between motivations and intention to study abroad.

Our results suggest that some degree of universality of motivations exists among students across the three countries, and they seem to influence – sometimes positively and sometimes negatively – students' intention to study abroad. But there are differences: for example, the intention to study abroad among US, French and Chinese students are influenced by very different motivators and barriers.

The rapid development of the international higher education segment requires that we understand very well the characteristics of the market it tries to tap. This study explores some of those characteristics among students from several countries. We argue that while choices are influenced by national culture, and while there are significant similarities across students from different nations, there are also significant differences. Since what motivates human behavior is strongly influenced by culture, it is important that we deepen our understanding of cultural systems as they vary from nation to nation.

# Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad Among US, French and Chinese Students

## Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between students' motivations and their intention to participate in study abroad programs using a model based on expectancy theory. We surveyed US, Chinese and French business students who studied in their home countries. Results suggest that certain motivations are common among students from the three countries. We found that the direction of the relationship between motivations and the intent to study abroad varied among the three countries, that nationality moderates all of the relationships, and that different levels of the barriers moderate the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural studies, expectancy theory, motivations, study abroad.

Universities in many industrialized and economically emerging countries are making significant efforts to increase involvement of students and faculty in study abroad programs. Student study abroad from their home countries to the OECD countries has doubled in twenty years (OECD, 2005). According to that agency, the fewest number of students studying abroad come from the USA, France and Great Britain, with those from Austria, Switzerland, Luxemburg, Ireland, Norway and Greece representing the largest number. The countries that receive the largest number of foreign students are Australia (17.8%) and Switzerland (17.1%). France, with 11%, is in tenth place and the US is in 15<sup>th</sup> place with only 5.7% of study abroad students (OECD, 2005).

In France in 2004, 11% of university students were foreign: 28.5% from Asia, 20.5% from the US, 12.4% from Africa and 4.4% from other European countries (INSEE, 2005). The number of foreign students in France grew 53% between 1999 and 2004, demonstrating the attractiveness of completing university studies in France. Looking outside the OECD, between 1978 and 1996, about 270,000 Chinese students went abroad, especially to the USA, for advanced studies. In 1995 alone, 2,751 Chinese students received their Ph.D. degree in USA (Beijing, 2004). This is more than 10% of the total number of foreign students who received their doctorate in the US. While less than three percent of U.S. undergraduates study

abroad, several surveys show that about three-quarters of adult respondents felt that students should have a study abroad experience during their university experience (Marcum, 2001).

What factors might explain these differences? The OECD (2004) suggests that differences in national investment in education might be one explanation: the greater the resources spent on education, the greater the number of foreign students received and the fewer the number of native students who leave. But this does not explain the differences we note above. What are the real reasons?

In recent years, business schools in particular have started to see study abroad programs as a way to increase revenues, diversify the student body, add value to academic programs by offering the benefit of an international student population, and provide experiences in international teaching to faculty. Since the early 1990s the international business school accrediting organization, the AACSB, has put pressure on its accredited member schools to increase their commitment and participation in international business programming for graduate and undergraduate students. As a result, many schools worldwide have developed and implemented academic programs in international business (IB) at both levels. In addition to including international courses in accounting, finance, information technology, marketing and management, many undergraduate IB major programs and graduate IB emphases require a study abroad experience. For business students pursuing non-IB, functional majors, study abroad programs are strongly recommended at best and offered as an option at least (Tucker, 2003).

Students attest that there are several factors that motivate them to participate in study abroad programs. Studies reveal that student reasons range from professional to cultural to personal. They include the desire to use study abroad as a stepping stone to an international job or career (Emanoil, 1999), to gain work experience through a host university's internship program that will facilitate an international career (Malliah, 2001), to master a foreign language, to experience living in another country, to study at another university, to make new international friends, to find excitement and enjoyment (Schroth & McCormack, 2000), and to experience a final college-level sojourn before moving from university life to a full-time job in the home country. U.S. students who participate in study abroad programs were found to

possess a stronger sense of world mindedness than students with no study abroad experience (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001).

Research also has shown that there are perceived barriers that lead students to conclude that it would be difficult for them to study abroad. Significant perceived barriers include language differences, money, time, concern that study abroad will delay graduation, work commitments, family commitments, ethnocentric attitudes, no connection between study abroad and professional education, among others (Marcum, 2001). Henthorne, Miller and Hudson (2001) note that program cost, student interest and language barriers are among the factors considered for positioning study abroad programs to students.

Although researchers have studied student motivators and barriers to study abroad, few studies have examined them across cultures. This exploratory study attempts to do this, and intends to contribute to the literature that examines the influence of culture on decision-making.

### **Motivations**

Motivations are what drive a person to obtain satisfaction from a class of stimuli. Motivations allow people to articulate their needs in a concrete way by focusing on specific stimuli such as money, prestige, power, curiosity, achievement, etc. (Jolibert & Baumgartner, 1997). A person's abstract values are deconstructed into specific, concrete motivations that help him meet his needs. When one speaks of one's personal values, he or she usually provides some information regarding their needs and what motivates them to obtain satisfaction from those needs (McClelland, 1985; Rokeach, 1973).

Researchers in the social sciences have tended to create a circular causality between motivations, needs, and values. Rokeach (1973) argued that values are surrogates for motivations. Jolibert and Baumgartner (1997) confirmed this and found that values and motivations (and personal goals as well) were very similar concepts, perhaps due to an inherent hierarchical relationship among them.

But while values are relatively stable constructs, people do not always think deeply about their held values when they make everyday decisions. Verplanken and Holland discuss the example of a person who values honesty, but who might be less honest and more opportunistic while filling out his tax return. There

may be several reasons why opportunism wins over honesty in this case: honesty may not be a sufficiently central value to this person, he may not see his tax return as one to which honesty applies, or he may prefer a competing value, such as materialism (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Therefore, the behavior chosen by a person is influenced by the degree to which the perceived or expected outcome that would result from the choice is attractive. This is the core of expectancy theory (John, 1992; Vroom, 1964). Expectancy theory suggests that people consciously choose particular paths based upon their perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs (Isaac, 2001), and we will discuss it in further detail in this paper.

For example, Schwartz (1994) found the universal value called stimulation was related to several lower-order motivations such as desiring an exciting life, desiring a varied life, and being daring. If a person claims to value stimulation, then he might choose to try something different, such as participate in university studies in another country. However, he may realize that the outcomes of studying abroad might be pressure from his parents or his girlfriend, or more student debt, as well as other outcomes such as a new and exciting experience and chances to improve his professional resume. Although he values stimulation, his ultimate decision on whether or not to study abroad might be negative because he might perceive the barriers (negative valences) to be greater than the motivations (positive valences). This does not mean that he does not value stimulation, but his ultimate choice is influenced by something that comes between values and behavior: motivations and barriers. Therefore, we think that a person's motivations will have a strong influence on his decision to study abroad, and that decision may be affected by the degree to which barriers, or negative outcomes, weigh on the decision. This discussion leads us to explore the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad, and the effect of various barriers as a moderator of this relationship.

### **Values, Motivation and National Culture**

Schwartz' (1992, 1994) research in dozens of countries has found that the structure and nature of ten values seem to be universal among people across most nationalities. But despite findings that the same, universal *structure* of motivational commonalities organizes people's values everywhere, individuals differ



significantly in the relative *importance* they attribute to the ten values (Schwartz, 1999). In fact, there will be differences across *nationalities* as to the importance people attribute to the ten values. Several scholars have found that national cultural dimensions of values reflect the basic issues or problems that societies must confront to organize human activity (Hofstede, 2001; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1999). Zhang found that traditional Chinese values influenced Chinese women's purchasing behavior much more significantly than did some western values (Zhang, 2001). People in national cultural groups communicate about these problems, plan responses, and motivate one another to solve them. The values of a national culture (i.e., success, justice, freedom, social order, tradition) are the vocabulary of socially approved goals used to motivate action, and to express and justify the solutions chosen (Schwartz, 1999). As a result, members of national groups share many value-relevant experiences, and they are motivated by similar phenomena. Certainly there are individual differences in what drives and motivates people of the same nationality due to the unique experiences of individuals. However, the values attributed to a nation's members tend to reflect the central thrust of what motivates people in that nation to act (Schwartz, 1999).

Schwartz (1999) found that universal values were prioritized in six broad groups of nations: Western Europe, English-speaking, Far East, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Islamic nations. Each group emphasized and de-emphasized certain values, and there were significant differences among the priorities across the six national groups (Schwartz, 1999). Similarly, we predict that motivations among national groups will be similar, and that across groups motivations will differ as people find different ways to solve problems and resolve daily choices, such as the decision to study abroad. This discussion drives us to explore the effect of differences in nationality on motivations and barriers to study abroad among students from different countries. We also are interested to know how the barriers modify the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad, given differences in nationality.

## **The Model**

To explore these relationships, we propose a model based on expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), complemented by Schwartz' (1999) research on universal values. Expectancy theory suggests that a person puts forth Effort to achieve Performance and a Reward that is considered Valuable to him or her (Vroom, 1964; Wang, 2004). If the person does not consider the reward or outcome to be valuable – that is, if the reward has a more negative or a less positive valence -- then his effort may not lead to the high level of performance expected. In our model, we propose that motivations serve as proxies for effort. We suggest that certain universal motivations are found across cultures, and that some motivations will be more prevalent in some cultures than in others. These motivations influence people's choices or how they will perform, in this case, the expressed intention to study abroad. In addition, barriers and nationality will also influence choice (performance), because they help determine if people perceive the outcome or reward – that is, the actual study abroad -- to have negative or positive value. Understanding the motivations, barriers and valence of the outcomes that influence their choice may help identify the incentives that would motivate students from different cultures to choose, as opposed to not choose, to study abroad. Expectancy theory is a useful approach for improving people's motivation because the theory considers the value people place on rewards, and the linkage between results and a specific reward they consider to be important (Nebeker & Pritchard, 1981). Stated in a simple way, we posit that a student's basic motivations will explain why a student chooses to study abroad or not, and that there will be variance in that relationship, depending on the student's nationality and other barriers. The model suggests that the motivations explain the intention to study abroad, and that both barriers and student nationality will moderate the relationship. Figure 1 illustrates.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **Research Design**

This part of the study involved two major stages. The first, qualitative stage allowed us to explore the motivations and barriers for deciding to study abroad. Based on first stage results, we constructed and executed a quantitative survey in the second stage.

During the first stage of the project we conducted a qualitative survey of 49 international students at one of the schools. We requested they complete a short, open-ended questionnaire that asked them to tell us why they chose to study in a country other than their home country or country of residence. A similar survey was given to a sample of Chinese students in China, and the results of both surveys provided items that would serve as possible motivations and barriers for students from western and far eastern nations. We developed several basic categories of motivations, and specific items in each category that would represent students' reasons for participating in international study

During the second stage of the research design, we developed a final survey instrument to tap the constructs of the proposed model, based on the results of the first, qualitative stage. The final survey instrument contained a list of motivations and barriers that was drawn from the first stage; one additional item measured the intention of the respondent to study abroad. For all items, the respondent was asked to indicate to what degree he or she agreed or disagreed with the statement by choosing 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The instrument was prepared in English, translated into Chinese and French, then reverse translated into English. It contained 97 items, and was pre-tested on approximately 20 students at each university. We then modified it to correct errors or weaknesses, and implemented the final instrument to the target population of students in the three countries.

### **Analysis and Results**

We received usable data from 477 respondents in the three countries (100 from the USA, 123 from France and 254 from China). The general methodology employed to analyze the data is summarized in Figure 2.

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### **Motivations and barriers**

For each of the three countries we performed Principal Components Analyses, first, on the items corresponding to the motivations, and second, on the items corresponding to the barriers. Figures 3a and 3b summarize the results of the analyses of the motivations for each country. Figure 4a and 4b summarize those of the barriers.

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Insert Figures 3a, 3b, 4a and 4b about here

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We can see that to “learn other languages” was a motivation to study abroad only for the US sample of students. For the Chinese students, the, “search for a new experience” was divided into two independent factors, the “search for a new experience” and “search for travel.” The Chinese student sample did not express the motivation to “improve a professional situation,” and for them, the “search for liberty/pleasure” was linked to international or foreign experience items.

Students from e three countries exhibited the same four barriers: familial, financial, psychological and social barriers. This is consistent with Leuthge’s (2004) findings that study abroad programs carry components of social, financial and psychological risk. But for each country, what each barrier means is different because different items comprise each one. To explore the moderating effect of the barriers on the relationship between “motivations” and “intention to study abroad,” we first performed a cluster analysis, using the factors obtained from the analysis on the items that comprised the barriers, to determine if there were groups within each country sample that demonstrated different levels of the moderating variables. For each country we found two groups. To validate the results of the cluster analysis we performed a discriminant analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). The size of the groups and the analyses results are shown in Figures 5a, 5b and 5c.

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Insert Figures 5a, 5b and 5c about here

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In the US, the two groups differed significantly on family barriers, financial barriers and psychological barriers, but no difference was found on social barriers. Group 1 (n=65) demonstrated low family barriers yet high financial and psychological barriers to studying abroad. Group 2 (n=35) demonstrated high family barriers yet low financial and psychological barriers to studying abroad. In France, the two groups were significantly different on family barriers, financial barriers and psychological barriers, but no difference was found on social barriers. Group 1 (n=62) demonstrated low psychological barriers yet high family and financial barriers. Group 2 (n=61) demonstrated high psychological barriers yet low family and financial barriers to studying abroad. In China, the two groups were significantly different on psychological barriers, financial barriers and social barriers, but no difference was found on familial barriers. Group 1 (n=148) demonstrated low psychological barriers yet high financial and social barriers. Group 2 (n=106) demonstrated high psychological barriers yet low financial and social barriers to studying abroad.

### **The influence of motivations on the intention to study abroad**

We used regression analysis to explore the relationship between motivations and intention to study abroad for each of the two groups, suggesting high or low levels of the moderating variables for each country sample. Figures 6a, 6b and 6c graphically illustrate the results of these analyses on the original model.

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Insert Figures 6a, 6b and 6c about here

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In the US, we found that for the group with the highest financial and psychological barriers (Group 1), there is a significant positive relationship between two motivations (search for pleasure or liberty and

the desire to learn other languages) and the intention to study abroad. Concerning Group 2, which had highest familial barriers, there is a significant positive relationship between the desire to learn other languages and the intention to study abroad, but a significant negative relationship between the search for a new experience and the intention to study abroad. In France, we found that for Group 1, the group with the highest familial and financial barriers, the only motivation that had a significant relationship with the intention to study abroad was the search for pleasure. For Group 2, the group with the highest psychological barriers, there is a significant positive relationship between the two motivations (the desire to improve a social situation and to search for liberty/pleasure) and the intention to study abroad.

In China, we found that for Group 1, the group with the highest financial and social barriers, there was no significant relationship between any of the motivations and the intention to study abroad. For Group 2, the group with the highest psychological barriers, the only motivation that had a significant relationship with the intention to study abroad was the will to improve the social situation. Nevertheless, for the Chinese sample we found a high level of intention to study abroad (mean=1.93 and standard deviation=0.93 for a scale from 1 “strongly agree” to 5 “strongly disagree”), and this could explain the insignificant relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad.

The  $R^2$  coefficients are also shown in Figures 6a, 6b and 6c for all groups for each country. These figures graphically represent the results of all the analyses based on the original model. Motivations explained 26.7% (Group 1) and 23% (Group 2) of the variance of “intention to study abroad” for the American students; 25.4% (Group 1) and 19% (Group 2) for the French students; and 0% (Group 1) and 10.3 % (Group 2) for the Chinese students.

## **Discussion**

The results we obtained allowed us to compare the differences between motivations and barriers among students in different countries, as well as the relationship between these motivations and students’ intention to study abroad. But the relationship was relatively limited. Our results suggest that due to differences in nationality, motivations and barriers for studying abroad will vary, and that barriers will

moderate the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad. We will discuss these results in greater detail below.

### **Motivations and barriers**

There was considerable congruence observed in the motivations and barriers among the students, although we found that the items that defined the motivations and barriers were different among the three country samples. Nevertheless, we identified common dimensions with regard to motivations and barriers for all three countries: a search for a new experience, a search for liberty / pleasure, and the desire to improve their social situation.

The American students demonstrated a rich characterization of the dimension “search for a new experience” (with 13 items), while the French only captured 9 items and the Chinese 4 items. The American students perceive that a new experience represents a change: “to obtain a different view of the world,” or what is possibly an even richer characterization “to become part of a new culture.” The Chinese students, on the other hand, separate the idea of travel from the dimension “search for a new experience.” This might suggest that the Chinese students wish to travel for reasons that are different from those of the Americans and the French, who associate travel with new experiences.

Similarly, American students consider the dimension “improve a professional situation” differently and in a richer manner than the French students (the dimension does not even emerge among Chinese students). American students tend to mix the professional aspect with the social aspect: improve my career, become wealthy and independent. French students consider “improving a professional situation” as professional training or academic study per se. Regarding the “search for liberty and pleasure,” American and French students had similar results. On the other hand, Chinese students associated liberty with foreign and international experience.

To describe the dimension “improve a social situation,” American students associated the desire to please their parents and improve their social recognition with the idea of living in a place where they could freely practice their religion and where privacy is respected. The French students’ view was not much

different: while they did not integrate the ideas of living in a place where they could freely practice religion or pleasing their parents, they associated the idea of being able to expose their children to a better educational system. The Chinese students seemed to associate the possibility to improve their lifestyle, become wealthy, and improve their social status with “improving a social situation.”

Concerning the barriers, results showed that students in the three countries identified the same barriers -- family, financial, psychological, and social -- although they experienced them to different degrees.

One interesting observation is that there were not significant differences among the two groups of American students and the French students with regard to the intensity of the social barriers (emotional linkages with friends or family). However, for the Chinese students, both groups held the same intensity of family barriers, which might suggest a significantly higher level of dependency on family than for the other samples. This might be explained by the influence of Confucianism, in which the family plays a very important role.

In conclusion, the similarities across the three-country sample suggest that students may be encouraged (and discouraged) by similar stimuli when they consider what might drive them to study abroad, nevertheless the results also suggest that the specific composition of those stimuli may differ in different countries.

### **The relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad**

The results of the study indicated that motivations explain only a portion of the variance in the intention to study abroad. While motivations explained about one-quarter of the variance in intention among both groups of American students, and between 19% and 25% of the variance among both groups of French students, there was no relationship between motivations and intention among one group of Chinese students and only 10% of the variance explained in the second group.

For the Chinese students, our results suggest they have a strong intention to study abroad, but the variance is small. This may be explained by the apparent strong movement among Chinese youth to study



outside of their home country. A market for international education exists in China and demand is being met by local and foreign higher education institutions. As a result, many Chinese young people and their parents are influenced by advertising and promotions for overseas opportunities that will satisfy curiosity, provide novelty, offer a taste of freedom away from family, or provide higher education abroad. Figure 7 helps illustrate.

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Insert Figure 7 about here  
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We suspect that the Chinese students' motivations to study abroad do vary, and that within the context of this study it may have been difficult for them to articulate exactly why they want to study abroad. Many of today's Chinese students enjoy a different lifestyle than did students from the "first" generation who studied abroad when reforms and an open policy had only started to emerge in China. The first generation's motivation to study abroad was so homogenous such that they did so principally to enhance their future professional career. At that time, the Chinese were less wealthy than they are today, and youth may have acknowledged the responsibility to their family and their country more readily, that is, to succeed according to traditional norms. Today, a significant number of young Chinese who study abroad finance their own education, have left their homes, and are single. Their financial situation is significantly better than that of students who studied abroad previously. Many can afford to pay tuition and fees abroad without facing financial barriers. These explanations are conjectural, and we suggest that more research be done to explain our results and others that may emerge.

For the U.S. students, the search for pleasure/liberty positively influenced the intention to study abroad if there were low familial barriers and high psychological and financial barriers. The search for a new experience negatively influenced US students with high familial barriers and low psychological and financial barriers. This may be because the parents of students with high familial barriers might find the idea of studying abroad simply for gaining new experience rather frivolous, and that their children could

reap whatever benefits study abroad might offer more effectively if they stayed closer to the family home. On the other hand, the parents of students with low familial barriers may think studying abroad as a pleasurable experience is perfectly acceptable. These parents might encourage their children to undertake as many diverse and different experiences as possible, even if study abroad is principally perceived by students as a pleasurable adventure.

The desire to learn other languages positively influenced the intention to study abroad in both groups of US students, but did not influence French or Chinese students. This result may be due to the fact that Americans generally are not as exposed to as many foreign languages as are European and Chinese students. Americans tend to speak only one language, English, in a masterful way, while many European students and more Chinese students speak their native language plus at least one other language which is often English. Therefore, American students more quickly associate a study abroad program with a foreign language experience as well. European students, who are generally more accustomed to hearing foreign languages in their own countries, may not be as likely to associate study abroad and foreign language learning.

The French students in the sample attended a private French school specializing in business education (an *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce*). These schools are relatively expensive to attend, while most other higher education in France is public, and financed by the government. Therefore, it is possible that two groups of students emerged: one comprised of students whose education was paid for by their parents, and another comprised of students in a less privileged financial situation that may have had to incur debt to study. The fact that the “search for a new experience” is positively correlated with the intention to study abroad, among the group of students with high financial and family barriers might be explained by the fact that students with fewer financial resources have had less opportunity to travel at other times in their lives, and they now wish to experience other cultures by studying abroad. On the other hand, students who have few financial barriers may view study abroad as a way to further experience liberty and entertainment, thereby improving their lifestyle in a different way.

It is interesting that the motivators “search for new experiences” and “search for liberty and pleasure” were related (in one case negatively) to the intention to study abroad in one group each of US and French students, but these items were not related to Chinese students’ intention. Chinese students, and only the group with highest psychological barriers, plus one group of French students, were motivated by the idea that study abroad can help them improve their social situation. This could be the case because US students believe they have adequate opportunities to improve their social and professional status without studying abroad, since the level of development in their country is quite high and offers many opportunities. These students perceive study abroad as an opportunity for pleasure and adventure, rather than as a way to enhance their future success. French students may think be that for a successful career in international business, they need to see and visit a country other than their own. Chinese students, who come from an emerging economy, may see much potential in their country, but they may believe that their chances for success and social acceptance will be enhanced by a foreign education. In fact, to Chinese students, “search for new experiences” and “search for liberty and pleasure” are merely secondary and superfluous benefits to studying abroad – not main goals. Perhaps some young males, the product of China’s “one child policy,” may long to live in a liberal environment that is far away from their guardians, especially as the young men mature. On the other hand, most Chinese students consider the chance to “improve their social situation” and “accept a higher level education” as their principal objectives. To them, studying abroad provides opportunities for advanced knowledge, to learn about western civilization, to learn to adapt to the unique culture of a foreign company that is working in China or in a foreign country, to help them learn to work independently, etc. Today, more Chinese students return to China following their foreign study experience than ever before. They recognize that an experience abroad gives them considerable social advantage in their careers.

The results of this study suggest that some degree of universality of motivations exists among students across the three countries we studied. Certain common motivations, although they may have different meanings in each of the three cultures, seem to influence – sometimes positively and sometimes

negatively –students’ intention to study abroad. But there are differences in the motivations across the three cultures. For example, the intention to study abroad among US, French and Chinese students is influenced by very different motivators and barriers. Therefore, we found support for the idea that nationality will moderate the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad. Also, different levels of the barriers will moderate the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad.

The rapid development of the international higher education segment requires that we understand very well the characteristics of the market it tries to tap. This study attempted to explain the motivations and barriers felt by students from several countries regarding their intention to study abroad. The results of our research suggest that it is important to realize that choices are influenced by national culture, and while there are significant similarities across students from different nations, there are also significant differences. Since what motivates human behavior is strongly influenced by culture, it is important that we continue deepen our understanding of cultural systems as they vary from nation to nation.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provide valuable insights and contributions to cross-cultural research on students’ motivations to participate in international study programs. Our results allow us to derive possible explanations for variances in business students’ participation in study abroad programs and exchanges. These explanations will be important to academics, administrators and practitioners who work in international business education by contributing to improved strategic planning and implementation of exchange and study abroad programs.

We found it quite interesting that almost all of the Chinese students responded that they had a strong intention to study abroad. To us, perhaps the most interesting finding of this study is a new question: why did most Chinese students indicate the intention to study abroad, while most US and French students did not? There may be two reasons for the Chinese students’ response. First, to be accepted for study at a good university in China, Chinese students must pass National Uniform Entrance Exams (similar

to the American SAT test). If a student fails those exams, his or her choices are to pursue technical training, to earn a foreign-sourced or western degree within China (Willis, 2004), or to study abroad at a foreign university. The value of a foreign-sourced or foreign-earned degree is much greater than the value of technical training received in China: students who earn foreign degrees can more easily obtain a good job in China (Willis, 2004) and thereby enhance his social status. Secondly, many students want to earn a diploma and language experience at the same time. As more foreign companies establish subsidiaries in China, they need significant numbers of skilled employees who not only understand management and administration, but who have proficiency in foreign languages. A Chinese student who wishes to have a career with an international company will see study abroad as an effective way to achieve this objective.

On the other hand, an explanation for the lack of interest to study abroad by most U.S. and French students is that there are ample opportunities for quality higher education and career development in both the United States and France. U.S. and French students do not feel they must leave their country to be successful in education and in business. Again, reviewing our findings, we discover that the primary motivation for U.S. and French students to study abroad is the search for a new experience, not to improve their career possibilities. But things are changing among European and American business schools. Perhaps if we surveyed the French and U.S. students at the same two institutions today, many more might strongly agree with the intention to study abroad since a study abroad program is a requirement for certain majors in these two schools. .

Advocates of international business study at the university level try to maximize the motivations and minimize the barriers so that more students might study abroad. Our results suggest that programs that promote study abroad must vary, depending on the student's nationality, and the student's level of familial, psychological and financial barriers. Our results suggest that such programs must be sensitive to students' national differences, and to individual differences that may be very personal and involve their families, their financial situation and certain psychological barriers.

Considering the difference between occidental culture and oriental culture, it may be useful to construct models that reflect differences from one national culture to another. Such models may help achieve an understanding of the true characteristics of each educational market, and develop appropriate strategies.

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Figure 1.

A model exploring the relationship between motivations and the intention to study abroad.  
Adapted from Vroom (1964).

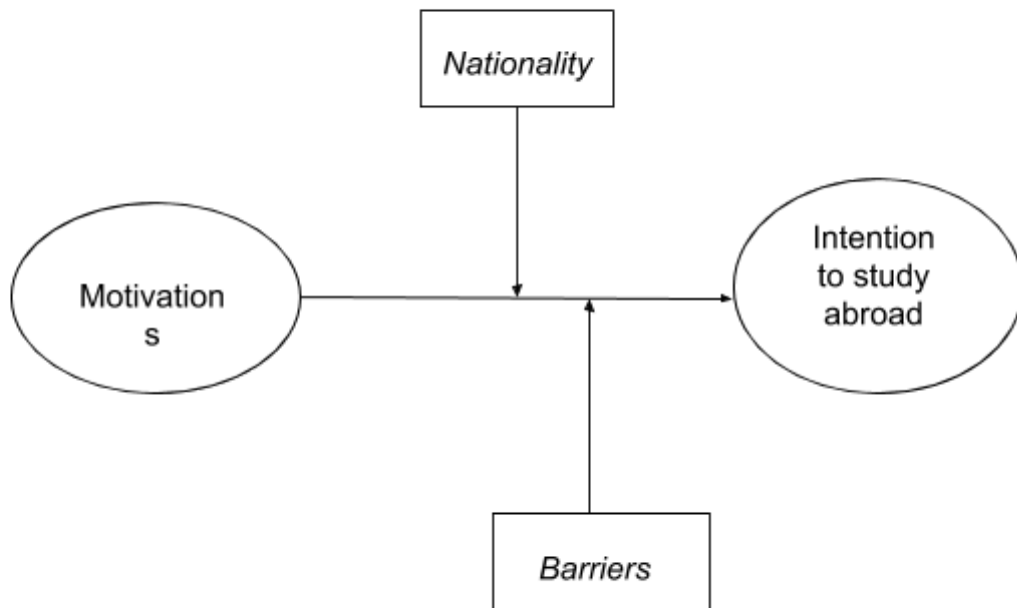


Figure 2. The methodology used for data analysis.

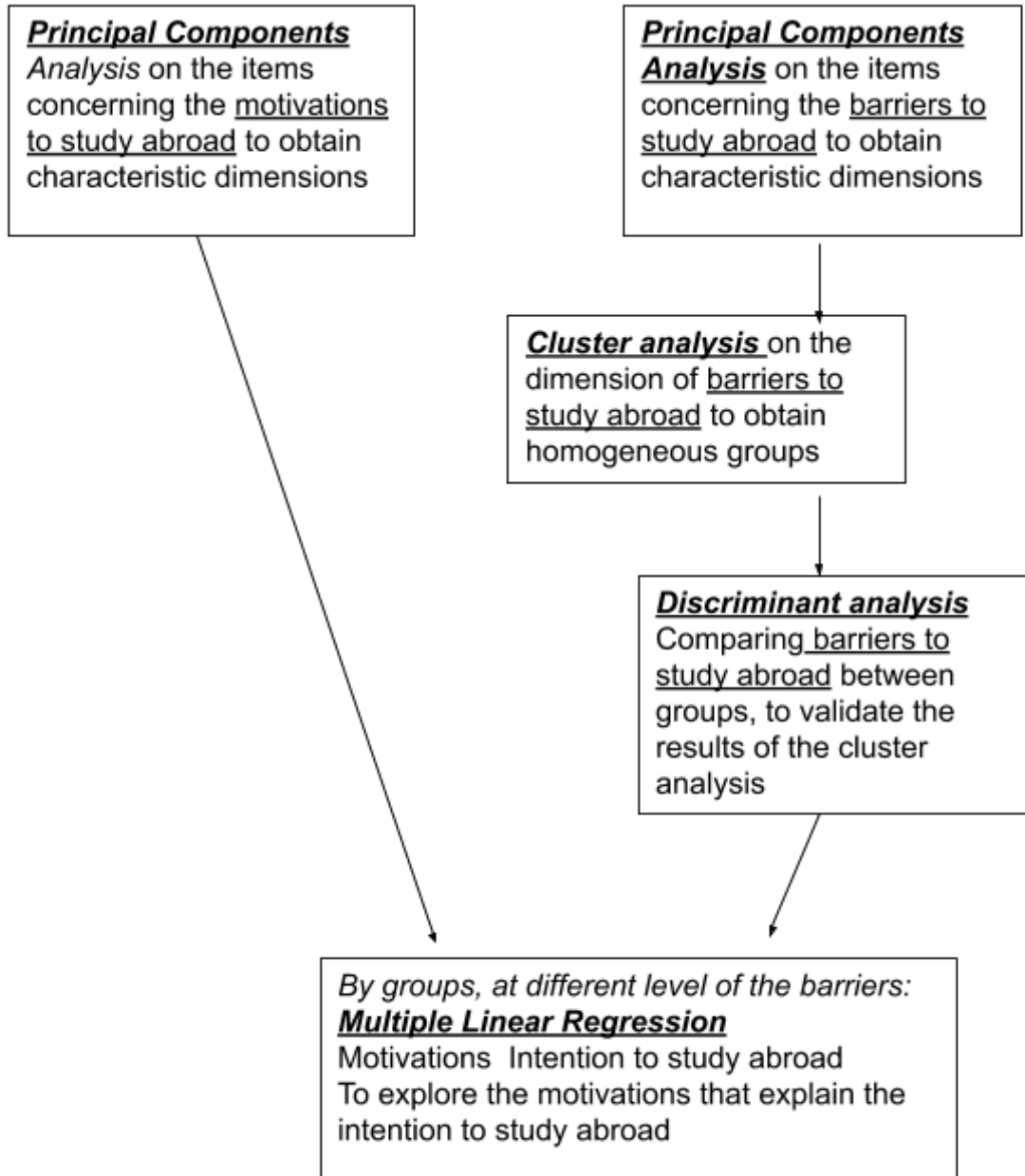


Figure 3a. Results of the Principal Components Analysis of Motivations

(Note: We kept only those factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and those items whose communalities and loading factors were greater than 0.50. We then tested the reliability of each component using a Cronbach's alpha.)

**Principal Components Analysis of Motivations in USA**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Search for a new experience	20.153	.9279
Improve a professional situation	15.881	.9036
Improve social situation	11.586	.8444
Search for liberty/ pleasure	7.534	.7439
Learn other languages	7.038	.8387
TOTAL	62.192	

**Principal Components Analysis of Motivations in France**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Search for a new experience	23,998	.8906
Improve social situation	14,119	.8304
Search for liberty/pleasure	12,113	.7599
Improve a professional situation	9,544	.9803
TOTAL	59,774	

**Principal Components Analysis of Motivations in China**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Improve social situation	14.584	.7082
Search for a new experience	14.383	.6461
Search for travel	14.190	.7724
Search for liberty/pleasure	13.647	.6471
TOTAL	80,073	

Figure 3b. Common Motivations found in the Three Nation Samples

Motivations	USA	France	China
Search for a new experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To experience another culture</li> <li>To be exposed to people from other countries</li> <li>To live in another culture</li> <li>To obtain a different view of the world</li> <li>To have exciting experience</li> <li>To experience a lifestyle other than my own</li> <li>To learn about other cultures</li> <li>To travel</li> <li>To see the world</li> <li>To see new things</li> <li>To become part of a new culture</li> <li>To have international experience</li> <li>To better learn about human civilization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To live in another culture</li> <li>To have international experience</li> <li>To be exposed to people from other countries</li> <li>To experience a lifestyle other than my own</li> <li>To learn about other cultures</li> <li>To see new things</li> <li>To experience another culture</li> <li>To better learn about human civilization.</li> <li>To travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To see the world</li> <li>For personal enhancement</li> <li>To see new things</li> <li>To experience a lifestyle other than my own</li> </ul>
Search for liberty / pleasure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase my enjoyment level</li> <li>To experience a more exotic life</li> <li>To have fun</li> <li>To live independently. without worrying so much about what others think of me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase my enjoyment level</li> <li>To have fun</li> <li>To find greater freedom</li> <li>To be able to breathe the "air of liberty"</li> <li>To live where personal relations are relatively simple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have international experience</li> <li>To achieve my dream of having a foreign experience</li> <li>To have exciting experience</li> <li>To find greater freedom</li> </ul>
Improve a professional situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To benefit my future career</li> <li>To make a professional work connection</li> <li>To more easily enter the job market</li> <li>To find a work environment that allows me a chance to succeed</li> <li>To provide a good living to my children</li> <li>To learn about new ways of doing business</li> <li>To be richer</li> <li>To be exposed to a higher academic level of thought</li> <li>So that my children can be exposed to a complete. modern and systematic educational system</li> <li>To help me be able to work in another country</li> <li>To study at a prestigious university</li> <li>To create my own independent life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To study at a prestigious university</li> <li>To earn a double degree or diploma</li> <li>To earn a prestigious diploma</li> </ul>	
Improve a social situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because there are more opportunities in other countries than in my country to obtain a university degree</li> <li>To improve my parents' social recognition</li> <li>To please my parents</li> <li>To live where personal relations are relatively simple</li> <li>To be able to freely practice my religious beliefs</li> <li>To live where ones private life is respected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>So that my children can be exposed to a complete. modern and systematic educational system</li> <li>To provide a good living to my children</li> <li>To improve my parents' social recognition</li> <li>To provide a good living to my family</li> <li>To live where ones private life is respected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To earn a better living</li> <li>To be richer</li> <li>To provide a good living to my family</li> <li>To achieve a higher social status</li> </ul>

		To achieve a higher social status	
Learn other languages	To learn other languages To learn a beautiful language that I like very much To learn a native language		
Search for travel	To increase my enjoyment level To experience a more exotic life To have fun To live independently. without worrying so much about what others think of me		To vacation To travel To experience Western life

Figure 4a. Results of the Principal Components Analysis of Barriers

(Note: We kept only those factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and those items whose communalities and loading factors were greater than 0.50. We then tested the reliability of each component using a Cronbach's alpha.)

**Principal Components Analysis of Barriers in USA**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Familial barriers	25.193	.8855
Financial barriers	16.738	.8084
Psychological barriers	13.744	.7282
Social barriers	12.736	.7212
TOTAL	68.411	

**Principal Components Analysis of Barriers in France**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Financial barriers	20,399	.7906
Familial barriers	17,223	.7530
Psychological barriers	14,209	.5263
Social barriers	14,121	.7120
TOTAL	65,952	

**Principal Components Analysis of Barriers in China**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Psychological barriers	19.091	.7069
Financial barriers	17.211	.6160
Social barriers	14.930	.6516
Familial barriers	13.835	.5295
TOTAL	65.084	

Figure 4b. **Common Barriers found in the Three Nation Samples**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>China</b>
Familial barriers	<p>I would not be able to take care of my family and friends</p> <p>My family would not be able to depend on me if I were away</p> <p>If I did not have to leave my family and/or my friends</p> <p>It would be difficult for my family if I were away from home</p> <p>I have many obligations here at home</p> <p>I would miss my family and friends</p>	<p>It would be difficult for my family if I were away from home</p> <p>I would miss my family and friends</p> <p>If I did not have to leave my family and/or my friends</p> <p>My family would not be able to depend on me if I were away</p>	<p>None of my friends have ever studied abroad</p> <p>I may not be able to practice my religion if I study abroad</p> <p>I have financial obligations that I would not be able to meet if I studied abroad</p>
Financial barriers	<p>I would have to go into debt to do so</p> <p>I have financial obligations that I would not be able to meet if I studied abroad</p> <p>It were not so expensive</p> <p>Studying abroad is a luxury</p>	<p>I would have to go into debt to do so</p> <p>It were not so expensive</p> <p>I have financial obligations that I would not be able to meet if I studied abroad</p> <p>Studying abroad is a luxury</p>	<p>I have a job that I cannot afford to leave to study abroad</p> <p>I would have to go into debt to do so</p> <p>Studying abroad is a luxury</p>
Psychological barriers	<p>I may not be able to practice my religion if I study abroad</p> <p>None of my friends have ever studied abroad</p> <p>My country is the best place for me to study</p> <p>I would be wary of new places</p>	<p>I may not be able to practice my religion if I study abroad</p> <p>None of my friends have ever studied abroad</p> <p>I have a job that I cannot afford to leave to study abroad</p>	<p>One of my good friends did it with me</p> <p>I had family and/or friends in the country where I would study abroad</p>
Social barriers	<p>One of my good friends did it with me</p> <p>I had family and/or friends in the country where I would study abroad</p>	<p>One of my good friends did it with me</p> <p>I had family and/or friends in the country where I would study abroad</p>	<p>I would not be able to take care of my family and friends</p> <p>My family would not be able to depend on me if I were away</p>

Figure 5a. Cluster and discriminant analysis of the barriers: US students

Variables	Mean				
	Group 1	Group 2	Wilks's Lambda	F	p-value
Familial barriers	-.2915638	.5414756	.841	18.593	.000
Financial barriers	.3600398	-.6686453	.757	31.488	.000
Psychological barriers	.3518517	-.6534388	.768	29.643	.000
Social barriers	.1076700	-.1999586	.978	2.179	.143
Number	65	35			

Figure 5b. Cluster and discriminant analysis of the barriers: French students

Variables	Mean				
	Group 1	Group 2	Wilks's Lambda	F	p-value
Familial barriers	.72335	-.73521	.464	139.872	.000
Financial barriers	.22766	-.23139	.947	6.787	.010
Psychological barriers	-.36919	.37524	.860	19.644	.000
Social barriers	-.04998	.05080	.997	.311	.578
Number	62	61			

Figure 5c. Cluster and discriminant analysis of the barriers: Chinese students

Variables	Mean				
	Group 1	Group 2	Wilks's Lambda	F	P-value
Psychological barriers	-.5110379	.7135246	.634	145.526	.000
Financial barriers	.3168015	-.4423267	.859	41.256	.000
Social barriers	.3109618	-.4341731	.864	39.513	.000
Familial barriers	.0202565	-.0282827	.999	.145	.704
Number	148	106			



Figure 6a  
Moderating effects of the barriers on US students.

Group 1. **Highest psychological and financial barriers.** lowest familial barriers.

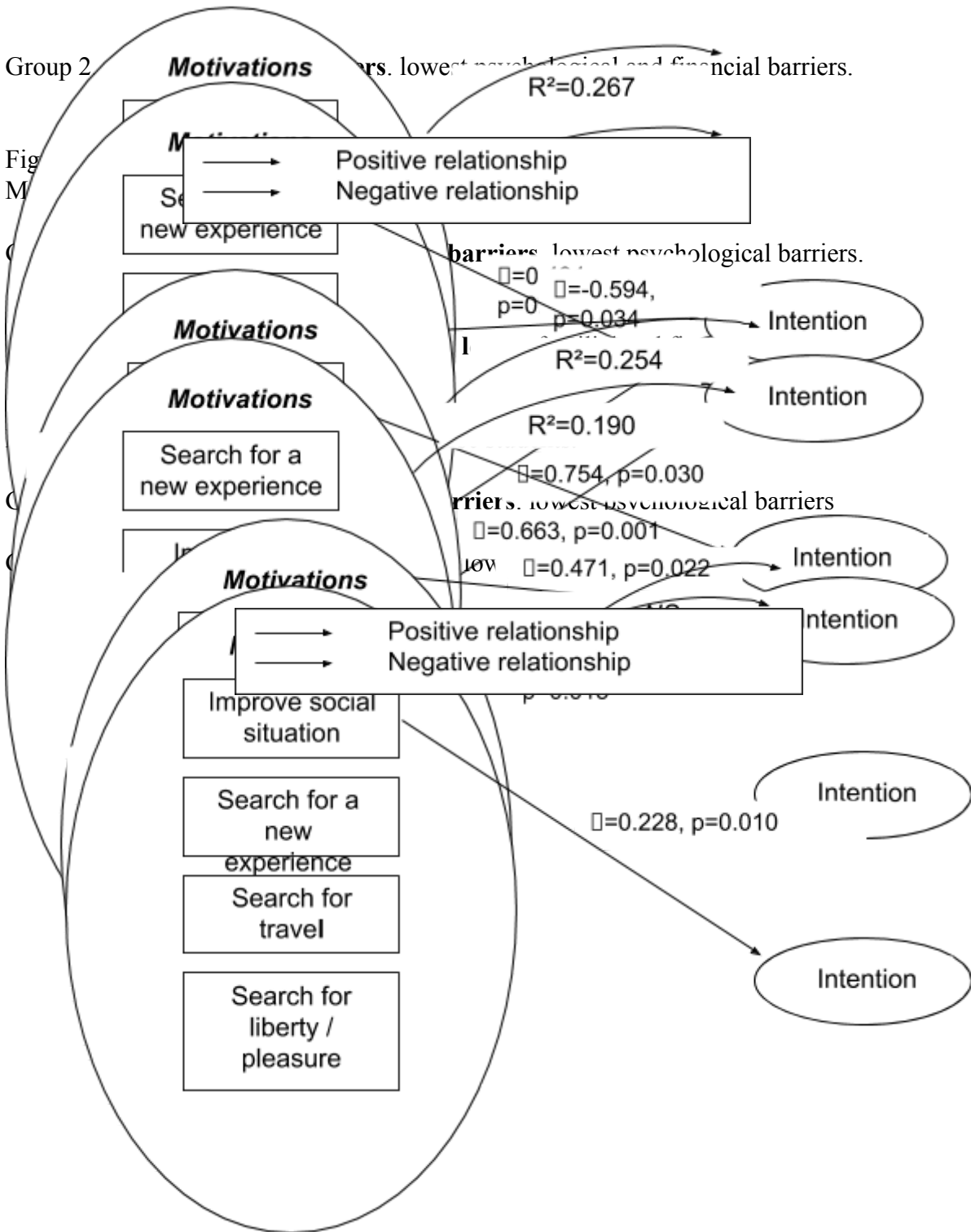


Figure 7.

Motivations common across the three-country sample that influence the intention to study abroad.

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>China</b>
	<b>A</b>		
Search for a new experience	X	X	
Search for liberty / pleasure	X	X	
Improve a professional situation			
Improve a social situation	X	X	X
Learn other languages	X		
Search for travel			