FACTORS INFLUENCING AIRLINE CHOICES OF CHINESE LONG-TERM RESIDENTS IN THAILAND
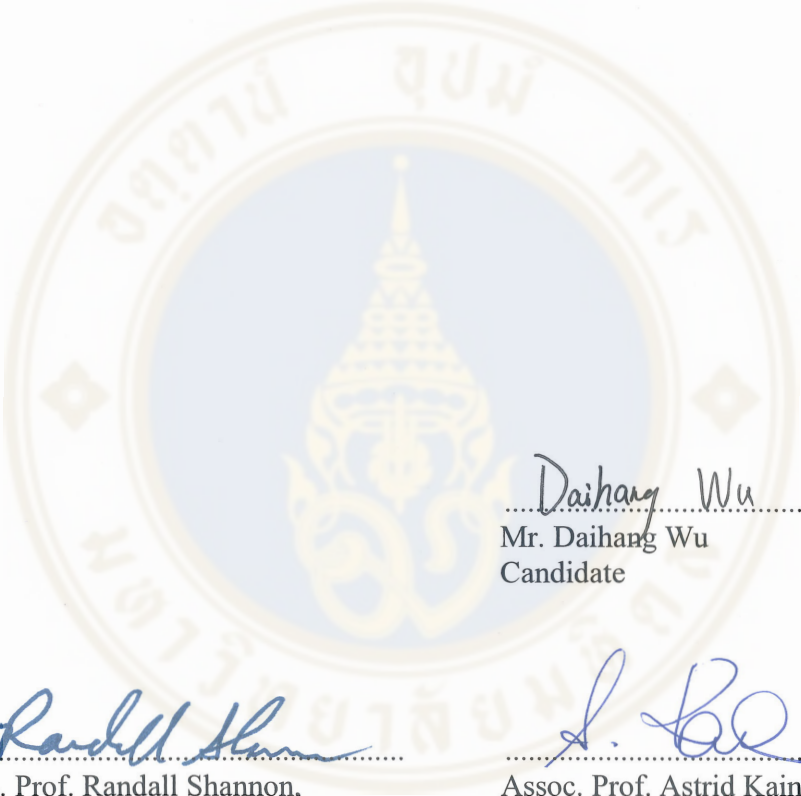
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FACTORS INFLUENCING AIRLINE CHOICES OF CHINESE LONG-TERM RESIDENTS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the key factors influencing airline choices among Chinese long-term residents in Thailand, including international students and expatriates. As this group represents a consistent travel segment, understanding their preferences is vital for airlines operating in the China–Thailand market. A quantitative approach was employed, collecting survey data from 168 respondents. Six factors were examined: price, on-time performance, service quality, brand reputation, sustainability, and convenience. Results show that only convenience and accessibility significantly influence airline selection, while service quality has marginal impact. Other factors were not statistically significant. The findings underscore the importance of user-friendly booking, flexible schedules, and airport connectivity, offering practical implications for airlines, policymakers, and travel agencies.

KEY WORDS: AIRLINE CHOICE/ CHINESE RESIDENTS/ THAILAND/ CONSUMER BEHAVIOR/ AIR TRAVEL

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Thailand has emerged as a major destination for Chinese nationals, not only for short-term tourism but also for long-term residency, including international students and expatriates. In recent years, Thailand's appeal as an educational hub for Chinese students has grown significantly. In 2023 and 2024 alone, more than 20,000 Chinese students enrolled in Thai universities (Sohu, 2024), reflecting the country's increasing attractiveness as a higher education destination. Additionally, a substantial number of Chinese expatriates have chosen to reside in Thailand for work, business, and retirement, further driving the demand for air travel between China and Thailand.

As of 2019, the total number of Chinese citizens in Thailand exceeded 100,000 (UN, 2024), encompassing workers, students, and retirees. By 2024, the Thai government had issued approximately 40,000 work permits to Chinese nationals, surpassing the number issued to Japanese citizens. This indicates a significant presence of Chinese professionals contributing to various sectors in Thailand (NIKKEI, 2025).

The post-pandemic recovery of outbound Chinese travel has also contributed to the rising demand for air connectivity. In 2023, over 87 million Chinese travelers went abroad (ChinaDailyHK, 2024), with projections estimating 130 million in 2024 (Sabre, 2024). Among these, Chinese long-term residents in Thailand represent a significant and growing segment, distinct from short-term tourists. While international tourist arrivals in Thailand exceeded 7.3 million in 2024 (Fulcrum, 2024), it is the Chinese student and expatriate population that maintains consistent, year-round travel demand, reinforcing the strategic importance of the China-Thailand aviation corridor.

The aviation market catering to China-Thailand travel is highly competitive, with numerous airlines competing for passenger traffic. Key players include AirAsia (FD and XJ), Thai Lion Air (SL), China Eastern Airlines (MU), Spring Airlines (9C), Xiamen Airlines (MF), Thai Airways (TG), Thai Vietjet Air (VZ), China Southern

Airlines (CZ), Cathay Pacific (CX), Hainan Airlines (HU), and Air China (CA). These airlines operate a variety of pricing strategies, flight schedules, and loyalty programs to attract Chinese passengers. For instance, Air China offers direct flights from Beijing to Bangkok under flight numbers CA959 and CA979, providing a crucial link for business travelers, students, and expatriates. As a result, the China-Thailand air travel market remains a dynamic and highly competitive sector, shaped by evolving consumer preferences and increasing demand from long-term Chinese residents.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the significant market size and the growing number of Chinese nationals residing in Thailand, there remains a research gap in understanding the specific determinants of their airline choices (Lim & Tkaczynski, 2017). While extensive studies have examined general tourism trends, limited research has focused on the long-term Chinese residents in Thailand, including international students and expatriates, who constitute a substantial and consistent travel segment (Michael, Armstrong, & King, 2004). Their travel patterns differ from those of short-term tourists, necessitating a more targeted exploration of the key factors influencing their airline selection.

For Chinese long-term residents in Thailand, air travel is not just a matter of leisure but a fundamental necessity, serving as a crucial link between their host and home countries. Their airline preferences are shaped by multiple factors, including ticket pricing, service quality, flight convenience, brand reputation, and sustainability considerations (Lin & Huang, 2015; Wongsuwan & Rimkeeratikul, 2015). Price sensitivity remains a key determinant, especially for students managing budget constraints (Grigolon, Kemperman, & Timmermans, 2012). However, service quality—including inflight amenities, baggage policies, customer service responsiveness, and overall travel experience—also plays a vital role in shaping their airline choices (Lim & Lee, 2020). Additionally, flight convenience, such as direct flight availability, flight frequency, departure times, and layover durations, significantly impacts decision-making (Buaphiban, 2015). Given the increasing awareness of environmental concerns, some passengers may also consider sustainability initiatives in airline selection, adding another layer of complexity to consumer behavior (Gössling et al., 2019).

With the continuous expansion of the China-Thailand air travel market, it is imperative for airlines to understand the unique behaviors and expectations of Chinese long-term residents in Thailand. However, existing research has predominantly focused on short-term tourists (Li et al., 2017; Gao & Koo, 2014), leaving a gap in understanding the specific airline preferences of long-term Chinese travelers in Thailand. By identifying the key factors influencing airline selection among Chinese long-term residents, airlines can refine their service offerings, optimize pricing models, and develop marketing strategies tailored to this growing and distinct consumer segment. Moreover, these insights will be valuable for travel agencies and policymakers in designing policies that enhance passenger satisfaction and market competitiveness.

1.3 Objective

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the key factors influencing the airline choices of Chinese international students and expatriates in Thailand. This research aims to explore the relative significance of ticket price, service quality, and flight convenience in shaping airline preferences. By identifying these determinants, the study will provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and airline selection patterns within this market segment.

A quantitative research methodology will be adopted, involving the collection of primary data through surveys targeting Chinese travelers who frequently commute between China and Thailand. Through comprehensive statistical analysis, this study will assess the impact of various factors and examine the interrelationships among them to determine their relative influence on airline selection (Faiyetole & Yusuf, 2018).

The findings from this research will offer actionable recommendations for airlines operating within this competitive market. Insights into consumer behavior will enable airlines to enhance their service differentiation strategies, refine their marketing efforts, and develop targeted pricing models. Additionally, by addressing the specific needs and expectations of Chinese travelers, airlines can improve customer satisfaction and foster long-term brand loyalty.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader body of literature on airline consumer behavior while offering practical implications for aviation industry stakeholders, including airline executives, travel agencies, and policymakers. Understanding the key factors influencing airline preferences will help industry players create more tailored and efficient air travel services, ensuring long-term competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic market.

1.4 Conceptual Framework
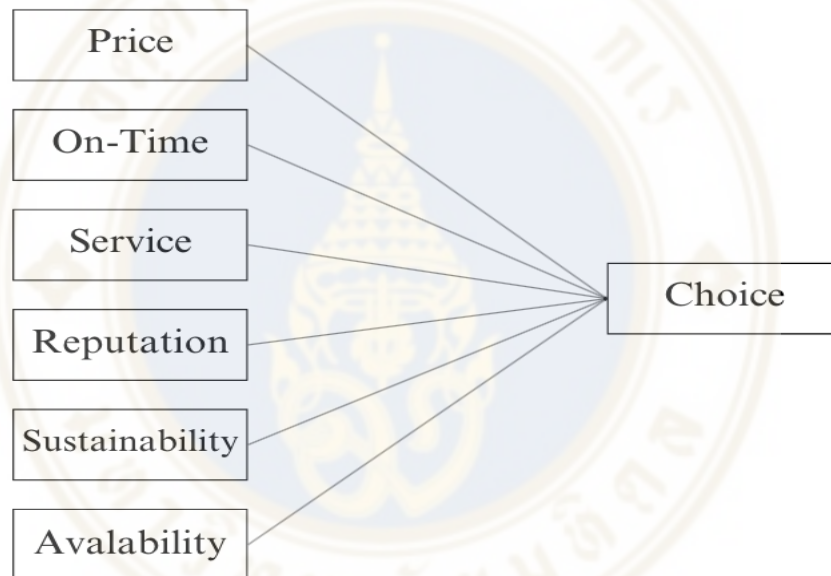
Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework

1.5 Research hypotheses

H1: Price and Value for Money has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H2: On-Time Performance and Reliability has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H3: Service Quality Perception has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H4: Brand Reputation and Loyalty Programs have a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H5: Sustainability Considerations have a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H6: Convenience and Accessibility has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The airline industry has undergone continuous transformation due to evolving consumer preferences, technological advancements, and regulatory changes. The rise of low-cost carriers (LCCs) and the sustained presence of full-service carriers (FSCs) have intensified competition, prompting airlines to focus on key factors such as pricing, service quality, convenience, and sustainability to attract and retain passengers. Understanding these influences is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and airline operators to develop strategies that align with passenger needs while ensuring operational efficiency and profitability. This literature review provides an extensive analysis of existing research on airline selection determinants, customer satisfaction drivers, and the broader implications for the aviation industry.

- Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Airlines

Service quality is a fundamental aspect influencing passenger satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat travel intentions. Researchers have compared FSCs and LCCs to assess how service attributes impact consumer experiences and overall travel decisions.

- Differences in Service Expectations

Wongsuwan and Rimkeeratikul (2015) investigated the comparative service quality of premium and budget airlines, finding that premium airlines excel in providing superior in-flight experiences, including enhanced seating comfort, gourmet meals, and personalized entertainment. Conversely, budget airlines attract price-conscious travelers by prioritizing efficiency, streamlined boarding, and essential service offerings. Their study emphasizes that customer satisfaction is directly related to initial expectations—while premium travelers expect high-end service, budget travelers prioritize affordability and reliability.

- Service Perception and Value

Lim and Lee (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of FSCs and LCCs, concluding that FSC passengers rate in-flight services, customer service responsiveness, and additional amenities more highly, whereas LCC passengers emphasize affordability, punctuality, and basic service efficiency. The study highlights that perceived value plays a significant role in shaping satisfaction, with higher expectations often leading to more critical evaluations of service quality.

Buaphiban (2015) examined factors influencing airline selection in Thailand, noting that price-sensitive travelers prioritize affordability over service quality, while premium travelers emphasize flight reliability, seating comfort, and in-flight entertainment. The research suggests that airlines need to adapt their service strategies based on customer segments to maximize satisfaction and loyalty.

- Post-Flight Service and AI Integration

Liu and Wen (2021) expanded on these findings by analyzing the role of post-flight services such as complaint resolution, refund policies, and customer follow-ups. Their study suggests that airlines incorporating artificial intelligence (AI)-driven service solutions, such as automated chatbots and real-time customer support, significantly enhance customer trust and long-term loyalty. The seamless management of service recovery processes is increasingly regarded as a competitive differentiator in the airline industry.

- Determinants of Airline Choice: Low-Cost vs. Full-Service Carriers

The competition between LCCs and FSCs has led to extensive research on the underlying factors driving passenger preferences and trade-offs between cost, convenience, and service quality.

- Pricing and Loyalty

Jarrunakarain and Hoffman (2016) found that LCCs appeal primarily to price-sensitive travelers who prioritize cost and convenience, whereas FSCs are preferred for long-haul travel, where comfort and service play a more significant role. Frequent flyer programs and airline reputation were also found to influence long-term passenger loyalty, with many travelers opting for airlines that offer substantial mileage benefits and exclusive perks.

- Key Selection Factors

Lin and Huang (2015) applied an analytic network process to assess critical factors influencing LCC selection, identifying price, flight frequency, and brand reputation as the most significant determinants. Their findings suggest that while cost competitiveness remains a primary driver, LCCs must balance affordability with a minimum level of service quality to sustain customer retention.

- Regional Differences in Airline Preferences

Koti (2019) analyzed airline choice factors in Kurdistan, concluding that pricing and punctuality were the most decisive factors, whereas Western markets placed greater emphasis on brand loyalty and premium service experiences. These findings underscore the importance of regional economic and cultural differences in shaping passenger preferences.

- The Role of International Students in Airline Demand

International students represent a unique consumer segment characterized by frequent travel needs, financial limitations, and a preference for flexible booking policies.

- Financial Considerations and Travel Preferences

Lim and Tkaczynski (2017) analyzed how students' financial backgrounds and home countries influence their airline expectations. Their research found that students from high-income countries prioritize airline reputation and safety, while those from developing economies emphasize affordability and flexible ticket options.

Michael, Armstrong, and King (2004) explored the relationship between studying abroad and airline choices, noting that international students are frequent travelers who seek budget-friendly options for both academic and personal trips. Their study suggests that students typically rely on LCCs for short-haul flights while opting for FSCs for long-haul journeys.

- Impact of Travel Restrictions

Tanaka and Lim (2023) investigated the impact of travel restrictions on international students' airline preferences, finding that flexible rebooking policies played a crucial role in their decision-making process, particularly during global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings suggest that airlines targeting this demographic should offer more adaptable cancellation and change policies to enhance their appeal.

- Environmental and Sustainability Considerations in Airline Choice

Growing environmental concerns and the increasing awareness of carbon emissions have influenced airline selection behaviors, with many passengers considering sustainability initiatives when choosing an airline.

- Passenger Attitudes Toward Sustainability

Gössling et al. (2019) analyzed consumer willingness to reduce air travel due to climate concerns. Their study found that while passengers recognize environmental issues, frequent travelers often justify air travel based on business obligations or personal commitments. The research suggests that raising awareness and introducing incentives for sustainable travel choices could influence passenger behavior.

- Airline Sustainability Strategies

Wong et al. (2024) examined sustainability strategies within the airline industry, including the adoption of biofuels, carbon offset programs, and fuel-efficient aircraft. However, their study found that many passengers remain reluctant to pay additional fees for green initiatives, indicating that regulatory policies and airline-driven sustainability incentives will be essential in shaping future consumer preferences.

- Reward-Based Sustainability Initiatives

Liao et al. (2023) explored sustainability-focused loyalty programs, where passengers accumulate rewards based on their participation in carbon offset initiatives. Their research indicates that younger travelers, particularly those from developed economies, are more inclined to engage with sustainability-driven airline programs.

- Market Implications and Future Perspectives

This review highlights the interplay between pricing, service quality, brand reputation, and evolving consumer expectations in shaping airline choice. While LCCs dominate the affordability segment, FSCs continue to attract travelers who prioritize comfort, reliability, and a premium experience.

Buaphiban (2015) emphasized the role of regional variations in airline selection, noting that emerging markets exhibit higher price sensitivity. His research underscores the importance of tailoring airline marketing and service strategies to align with demographic and economic differences.

As sustainability concerns grow, airlines must integrate eco-friendly initiatives into their business models. While cost remains a major determinant of airline choice,

increasing awareness of carbon emissions may gradually shift consumer preferences toward environmentally responsible carriers. Future research should explore how airlines can successfully implement sustainability efforts while maintaining financial viability and passenger convenience.

2.2 Conclusion

This literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of factors influencing airline passenger decision-making, including pricing, service quality, and sustainability. As the airline industry continues to evolve, companies must adopt innovative strategies to cater to diverse consumer needs. Future research should assess the long-term impact of sustainability policies, technological advancements, and post-pandemic industry shifts on consumer behavior. Airlines must continuously adapt to these changing dynamics, balancing cost efficiency, service excellence, and environmental responsibility to remain competitive in the global aviation market.

2.3 Key Factors Identified from Literature Review

Price and Value for Money – Multiple studies, including those by Lin and Huang (2015) and Buaphiban (2015), highlight that ticket pricing is a dominant factor influencing airline selection. Passengers weigh cost against service offerings, particularly in the competition between low-cost carriers (LCCs) and full-service carriers (FSCs).

On-Time Performance & Reliability – Research by Koti (2019) and Jarrunakarain and Hoffman (2016) suggests that flight punctuality significantly affects passenger satisfaction and loyalty. Punctuality is particularly crucial for business travelers and those with time-sensitive itineraries.

Service Quality Perception – Studies by Wongsuwan and Rimkeeratikul (2015) and Lim and Lee (2020) emphasize the importance of service quality, including seating comfort, in-flight services, and customer support. Passenger expectations for service quality vary between LCCs and FSCs but remain a critical determinant of satisfaction.

Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs – The impact of brand perception and frequent flyer programs is evident in the research of Buaphiban (2015) and Sokolovskyy

(2012). Passengers often develop long-term affiliations with airlines that offer reliable service and rewarding loyalty benefits.

Sustainability Considerations – As Wong et al. (2024) and Gössling et al. (2019) indicate, environmental concerns are playing an increasing role in airline choice. Passengers are becoming more aware of sustainability initiatives and may factor eco-friendly policies into their airline selection decisions.

Convenience & Accessibility – Fernández i Temprado (2024) explores convenience and accessibility as key factors influencing young adults' air travel choices. The study highlights that fast check-ins, flexible booking options, and seamless airport navigation significantly impact airline preferences. Additionally, digitalization, such as mobile check-ins and automated services, enhances accessibility and overall travel convenience. Socio-economic factors also shape decision-making, with affordability and lifestyle considerations playing a role in airline selection.

These six key factors provide a structured foundation for understanding airline consumer behavior and will guide further research in this area.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To thoroughly analyze the factors influencing airline choice and service quality perception, a quantitative research approach is deemed necessary. Quantitative methods, particularly questionnaire surveys, will be employed to systematically measure passenger preferences and experiences, thereby providing empirical insights into the key determinants of airline selection. Thus, questionnaire surveys will serve as the primary data collection method to obtain objective and statistically valid information.

3.1 Questionnaire format

The questionnaire consists of three main sections: screening questions, general background questions, and specific questions related to airline choice preferences.

Screening Questions: These questions determine whether respondents have experience with air travel and their frequency of travel between Thailand and China. This section helps ensure that participants are relevant to the study.

General Background Questions: This section collects demographic information about respondents, including age, gender, length of stay in Thailand, current status, and personal income. These factors provide insights into the profiles of Chinese long-term residents in Thailand and their potential influence on airline preferences.

Specific Questions on Airline Choice: This section identifies the key factors influencing respondents' airline selection when traveling between Thailand and China. The study examines six primary constructs that affect airline choice:

Price & Value for Money: Evaluates the affordability and perceived value of full-service carriers (FSCs), including promotional offers and fare flexibility.

On-Time Performance & Reliability: Assesses the importance of punctuality and flight delay management in airline selection.

Service Quality Perception: Measures passengers' satisfaction with cabin comfort, crew professionalism, in-flight services, and the overall travel experience.

Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs: Explores the impact of airline reputation, frequent flyer programs, and personalized rewards on passenger preferences.

Sustainability Considerations: Examines whether environmental policies, fuel efficiency, and carbon offset initiatives influence airline choices.

Convenience & Accessibility: Focuses on factors such as flight schedule availability, airport connectivity, ease of booking, and customer service responsiveness.

Respondents are asked to rate the significance of these factors using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represents "Strongly Agree." Additionally, an open-ended question is included to capture the most important criteria that come to mind when selecting an airline.

3.2 Data collection

This study employs a random online quantitative survey method to gain insights into the airline preferences and travel patterns of Chinese long-term residents in Thailand. Data collection is conducted using Wenjuanxing to ensure convenience and efficiency.

The questionnaire is distributed primarily through WeChat groups and snowball sampling, targeting Chinese communities and frequent travelers between Thailand and China. These platforms provide a valuable opportunity to gather responses from individuals with real experience in airline selection, ensuring that the study accurately reflects the preferences and decision-making factors of the target group.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are used to summarize and analyze the collected data, providing an overview of respondents' demographic characteristics and airline preferences. Measures such as frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations are applied to interpret the data effectively.

3.4 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics are used to analyze the survey data and generalize findings to a larger population. Multiple linear regression is applied to examine the relationship between six independent variables—price, service quality, on-time performance, brand reputation, sustainability, and convenience—and the dependent variable, which is the intention to choose a specific airline.

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings derived from the survey data analysis. The results provide insights into the demographic characteristics of Chinese long-term residents in Thailand, their travel behavior, and the factors influencing their airline choices. Descriptive statistics summarize general trends, while inferential statistical analysis identifies the significant relationships between key selection criteria—such as price, service quality, on-time performance, brand reputation, sustainability, and convenience—and the intention to choose a specific airline. The findings offer a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences, which can guide airlines in optimizing their services to better meet the needs of this target group.

4.1 Descriptive statistical findings

The demographic information of the respondents is summarized as follows:

Table 4.1 Demographic information

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–25 years old	56	32.60%
	26–35 years old	75	43.60%
	36–45 years old	25	14.50%
	46–55 years old	8	4.70%
	56 or above years old	8	4.70%
Total		**172**	**100%**
Gender	Male	72	41.90%
	Female	96	55.80%
	Prefer Not to Say	4	2.30%
Total		**172**	**100%**

Table 4.1 Demographic information (Cont.)

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Length of Stay in Thailand	Less than 1 year	27	15.70%
	1–2 years	53	30.80%
	2–4 years	47	27.30%
	More than 4 years	45	26.20%
Total		**172**	**100%**
Current Status in Thailand	International Student	73	42.40%
	Working Professional	73	42.40%
	Other Long-term Resident	26	15.10%
Total		**172**	**100%**
Annual Personal Income	No income/Unstable	31	18.00%
	Below 300,000 THB	25	14.50%
	300,000–600,000 THB	46	26.70%
	600,000–1,000,000 THB	31	18.00%
	Above 1,000,000 THB	17	9.90%
	Prefer Not to Say	22	12.80%
Total		**172**	**100%**

According to Table, in terms of gender, the majority of respondents (55.8%) are female, followed by 41.9% who are male, and 2.3% who prefer not to disclose their gender. Regarding age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents (43.6%) fall within the 26–35 years old age group. This is followed by those aged 18–25 years old (32.6%), 36–45 years old (14.5%), and smaller proportions of respondents aged 46–55 years old (4.7%) and 56 years or older (4.7%). With respect to their length of stay in Thailand, 30.8% of respondents have been in the country for 1–2 years, while 27.3% have stayed for 2–4 years. Additionally, 26.2% of respondents have been in Thailand for more than 4 years, and 15.7% have stayed for less than 1 year. Regarding current status in Thailand, equal proportions of respondents (42.4%) are international students and working professionals, while 15.1% are classified as other long-term residents.In terms of annual personal income, the largest share of respondents (26.7%) earn between 300,000 and 600,000 THB per year, followed by those earning 600,000–1,000,000 THB

(18.0%) and those with no income or unstable earnings (18.0%). Additionally, 14.5% of respondents earn below 300,000 THB, while 9.9% earn above 1,000,000 THB. A further 12.8% chose not to disclose their income.

All mean scores reported in this section are based on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher values indicating stronger agreement or satisfaction.

Table 4.2   Price & Value for Money

On-Time Performance & Reliability	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
Punctuality is critical in my FSC selection	3.9	0.992	Agree
I'm satisfied with the punctuality of FSCs I've used	4.06	0.986	Agree
I prefer FSCs with effective delay management systems	3.95	1.056	Agree
Overall	**3.97**	**1.01**	

The attitudes toward the pricing strategies, affordability, and overall value for money of airlines considered by respondents can be summarized as follows:

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The results indicate that respondents generally agree on the importance of price and value for money when choosing full-service carriers (FSCs). The highest-rated statement is "I choose FSCs that provide flexible pricing (3.95, SD = 0.963)", suggesting that promotions and discounts significantly influence airline choice. The preference for competitive fares (3.9, SD = 0.912) and overall ticket value satisfaction (3.84, SD = 1.085) also received strong agreement. The overall mean score of 3.9 (SD = 0.99) reflects that affordability remains a key factor in airline selection, though some variation in responses exists.

Table 4.3   On-Time Performance & Reliability

On-Time Performance & Reliability	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
Punctuality is critical in my FSC selection	3.9	0.992	Agree
I'm satisfied with the punctuality of FSCs I've used	4.06	0.986	Agree
I prefer FSCs with effective delay management systems	3.95	1.056	Agree
Overall	**3.97**	**1.01**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The respondents' attitudes toward on-time performance and reliability of airlines can be summarized as follows:

The findings suggest that punctuality and reliability are important factors in airline selection. Respondents strongly agree that they are satisfied with the punctuality of FSCs they have used (4.06, SD = 0.986), indicating that most full-service carriers meet expectations. Effective delay management (3.95, SD = 1.056) and punctuality in airline selection (3.9, SD = 0.992) also received positive ratings. The overall mean score of 3.97 (SD = 1.01) highlights that reliability significantly influences airline choice, though slight variations in preferences exist.

Table 4.4   Service Quality Perception

Service Quality Perception	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
Cabin cleanliness and seat comfort meet my expectations.	3.85	1.06	Agree
The attitude and professionalism of the cabin crew are satisfactory.	3.94	1.05	Agree
The quality of in-flight services (food, entertainment, Wi-Fi).	3.58	1.13	Agree
The boarding and check-in process is smooth and efficient.	3.82	1.1	Agree
Overall	**3.8**	**1.09**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The results indicate that respondents generally agree with the service quality of full-service carriers (FSCs). The highest-rated aspect is cabin crew professionalism and attitude (3.94, SD = 1.05), suggesting that airline staff play a crucial role in passenger satisfaction. Cabin cleanliness and seat comfort (3.85, SD = 1.06) and the boarding/check-in process (3.82, SD = 1.1) also received positive feedback. However, in-flight services (3.58, SD = 1.13) received the lowest score, indicating potential areas for improvement. The overall mean of 3.8 (SD = 1.09) reflects a positive perception of service quality.

Table 4.5 **Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs**

Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
Market reputation significantly affects my FSC choice	4	1.11	Agree
Frequent flyer programs influence my FSC preference	3.68	1.11	Agree
I value personalized rewards from FSCs	3.74	1.15	Agree
Overall	**3.81**	**1.12**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The results suggest that brand reputation and loyalty programs play a role in airline selection. The highest-rated factor is market reputation (4.00, SD = 1.11), indicating that a strong brand image significantly influences passenger preference. Personalized rewards (3.74, SD = 1.15) and frequent flyer programs (3.68, SD = 1.11) are also valued, though with slightly lower ratings. The overall mean of 3.81 (SD = 1.12) reflects a generally positive perception of brand reputation and loyalty benefits, suggesting that FSCs can enhance customer retention by strengthening these programs.

Table 4.6   Sustainability Considerations

Sustainability Considerations	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
I notice FSCs' environmental policies (carbon offset/fuel efficiency)	3.41	1.23	Neutral
I choose eco-friendly FSCs when prices are comparable	3.63	1.18	Agree
I would pay slightly more for lower-emission FSC flights	3.28	1.34	Neutral
Overall	**3.44**	**1.25**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The results indicate a neutral stance toward sustainability considerations in airline selection. While respondents agree that they prefer eco-friendly FSCs when prices are comparable (3.63, SD = 1.18), they are neutral regarding awareness of FSCs' environmental policies (3.41, SD = 1.23) and willingness to pay more for lower-emission flights (3.28, SD = 1.34). The overall mean of 3.44 (SD = 1.25) suggests that while sustainability may be a factor, it is not a primary driver in airline selection unless other conditions, such as price competitiveness, are met.

Table 4.7   Convenience & Accessibility

Convenience & Accessibility	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
Flight schedule availability affects my FSC selection	3.87	1.18	Agree
I prefer FSCs with good airport connectivity	3.81	1.1	Agree
Booking ease and customer service impact my FSC choice	3.8	1.2	Agree
Overall	**3.83**	**1.16**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The findings suggest that convenience and accessibility are key factors in FSC selection. Respondents agree that flight schedule availability (3.87, SD = 1.18) is the most important aspect, followed by airport connectivity (3.81, SD = 1.1) and booking ease/customer service (3.8, SD = 1.2). The overall mean of 3.83 (SD = 1.16) indicates that travel convenience significantly influences airline choice, with passengers valuing well-connected routes, flexible schedules, and a seamless booking experience.

Table 4.8   Intention to Choose an Airline in the Future

Intention to Choose an Airline in the Future	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
I will likely continue using my preferred FSC(s)	4.08	1.108	Agree
I may switch FSCs if better options emerge	3.94	0.978	Agree
I'll choose FSCs meeting expectations even at higher cost	3.81	1.065	Agree
Overall	**3.94**	**1.05**	

Note: All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The results indicate a strong intention to continue using preferred full-service carriers (FSCs), with the highest agreement on loyalty to current FSCs (4.08, SD = 1.108). However, respondents also express willingness to switch if better options arise (3.94, SD = 0.978), suggesting that loyalty is conditional. The preference for choosing FSCs that meet expectations even at a higher cost (3.81, SD = 1.065) further supports the idea that service quality and value justify premium pricing. The overall mean of 3.94 (SD = 1.05) highlights a positive but flexible loyalty trend among respondents.

Table 4.9   Overall Satisfaction & Recommendation

Overall Satisfaction & Recommendation	x̄	S.D.	Interpretation
I'm satisfied with FSCs' overall service quality	3.8	1.07	Agree
I recommend FSCs that meet my expectations	3.85	1.003	Agree
Past FSC experiences strongly guide my future choices	4.01	0.973	Agree
Overall	**3.89**	**1.02**	

The findings indicate a generally positive perception of FSCs, with respondents agreeing that past experiences strongly influence future airline choices (4.01, SD = 0.973). Satisfaction with overall service quality (3.8, SD = 1.07) and willingness to recommend FSCs that meet expectations (3.85, SD = 1.003) further support customer confidence in FSCs. The overall mean of 3.89 (SD = 1.02) suggests that while passengers are satisfied and likely to recommend FSCs, service quality improvements could further enhance loyalty and advocacy.

4.2 Inferential statistical findings

H1: Price and Value for Money has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H2: On-Time Performance & Reliability has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H3: Service Quality Perception has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H4: Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs have a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H5: Sustainability Considerations have a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

H6: Convenience and Accessibility has a positive and significant effect on intention to choose an airline.

Fa (Price and Value for Money)

Fb (On-Time Performance)

Fc (Service Quality)

Fd (Brand Reputation & Loyalty)

Fe (Sustainability Considerations)

Ff (Convenience & Accessibility)

Yo (Intention)

Table 4.10 ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Fa	0.258	1	0.258	0.846	0.359
Fb	0.2	1	0.2	0.656	0.419
Fc	1.031	1	1.031	3.375	0.068
Fd	0.326	1	0.326	1.067	0.303
Fe	0.567	1	0.567	1.856	0.175
Ff	14.359	1	14.359	47.021	< .001
Residuals	50.385	165	0.305		

Ff (Convenience & Accessibility) is the only significant factor (F = 47.021, p < .001), indicating a strong impact on airline choice. Fc (Service Quality) is marginally significant (F = 3.375, p = 0.068), suggesting a potential influence but not at the 0.05 level. Fa (Price and Value for Money), Fb (On-Time Performance), Fd (Brand Reputation & Loyalty), and Fe (Sustainability Considerations) are all non-significant (p > 0.05), meaning they do not significantly affect airline choice in this model.

Table 4.11 Model summary

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.701	0.492	0.474	26.6	6	165	< .001

R = 0.701: Indicates a strong correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Intention to Choose an Airline). R^2 = 0.492: Suggests that 49.2% of the variance in airline choice intention is explained by the independent variables. Adjusted R^2 = 0.474: Slightly lower than R^2, indicating that the model retains strong predictive power even after adjusting for the number of predictors. $F_{(6, 165)}$ = 26.6,

p < .001: The overall model is highly significant, meaning that at least one independent variable significantly contributes to predicting airline choice intention.

Table 4.12 Collinearity Diagnostics

Variable	VIF	Tolerance
Fa	1.69	0.593
Fb	1.83	0.547
Fc	2.74	0.365
Fd	2.32	0.431
Fe	1.5	0.666
Ff	1.39	0.72

The collinearity statistics show acceptable levels of multicollinearity among all predictors, as indicated by Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) values below 3 (range: 1.39–2.74) and tolerance values all above 0.2. Although slightly higher multicollinearity is observed in Service Quality (Fc; VIF=2.74) and Brand Reputation & Loyalty (Fd; VIF=2.32), the results remain within acceptable limits. Overall, there is no significant multicollinearity issue affecting the regression analysis reliability.

Table 4.13 Coefficient

Model Coefficients - Yo

Predictor	Estimate	SE	90% Confidence Interval		t	p	Stand. Estimate	90% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper
Intercept	0.9402	0.2686	0.4959	1.384	3.500	<.001			
Fa	0.0656	0.0714	-0.0524	0.184	0.920	0.359	0.0663	-0.0529	0.185
Fb	0.0570	0.0703	-0.0594	0.173	0.810	0.419	0.0607	-0.0633	0.185
Fc	0.1609	0.0876	0.0160	0.306	1.837	0.068	0.1688	0.0168	0.321
Fd	0.0708	0.0685	-0.0426	0.184	1.033	0.303	0.0873	-0.0525	0.227
Fe	0.0735	0.0539	-0.0157	0.163	1.363	0.175	0.0926	-0.0198	0.205
Ff	0.3475	0.0507	0.2637	0.431	6.857	<.001	0.4482	0.3401	0.556

The regression results indicate that among all predictors, Convenience & Accessibility (Ff) is the only statistically significant factor ($\beta = 0.348$, p < 0.001), strongly influencing respondents' choices. Service Quality (Fc) shows marginal significance

($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.068$), suggesting a potential influence that warrants further exploration. Other variables, including Price & Value for Money (Fa), On-Time Performance (Fb), Brand Reputation & Loyalty (Fd), and Sustainability Considerations (Fe) are not significant predictors ($p > 0.05$). Thus, airlines aiming to attract customers should prioritize improving convenience and accessibility features.

Table 4.14 The summary of the hypothesis test

Research Hypothesis	p-value	Unstandardized Coefficient	Result
Price & Value for Money	0.359	0.0656	Reject
On-Time Performance & Reliability	0.419	0.0570	Reject
Service Quality	0.068	0.1609	Reject
Brand Reputation & Loyalty	0.303	0.0708	Reject
Sustainability Considerations	0.175	0.0735	Reject
Convenience & Accessibility	<0.001	0.3475	Accept

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to identify and analyze the key determinants influencing the airline choices of Chinese international students and expatriates residing in Thailand, focusing specifically on price, service quality, punctuality, brand reputation, sustainability, and convenience. Through quantitative analysis, significant insights were derived regarding consumer behavior in the context of China-Thailand air travel.

The study findings indicate that among all the factors examined, convenience and accessibility emerged as the most significant determinant influencing airline selection among Chinese long-term residents. Respondents highly valued factors such as flexible flight schedules, easy airport access, efficient booking systems, and responsive customer service. The significant relationship between convenience and accessibility and airline selection underscores the importance for airlines to streamline processes and enhance user experiences to effectively cater to this specific market segment.

Contrary to initial expectations, factors such as price, service quality, on-time performance, brand reputation, and sustainability considerations were not statistically significant predictors in the model. This suggests that while these elements remain important, they do not independently drive airline selection decisions among Chinese long-term residents as significantly as convenience and accessibility. Nevertheless, airlines should not disregard these factors entirely but instead integrate them strategically alongside convenience improvements.

From a managerial perspective, airlines should prioritize investments and innovations that enhance passenger convenience and accessibility. Efforts such as expanding flight frequency, optimizing flight schedules, providing user-friendly digital booking platforms, and enhancing customer support can significantly boost passenger satisfaction and loyalty.

Future research could explore additional qualitative methods to provide deeper insights into nuanced passenger preferences and expectations. Additionally, further studies should consider longitudinal analyses to assess how evolving market dynamics and consumer trends impact airline choices over time, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

5.2 Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the survey employed convenience and snowball sampling methods through WeChat groups, which may not fully represent the broader population of Chinese international students and expatriates residing in Thailand. Thus, the generalizability of these findings may be limited.

Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the survey limits the ability to capture evolving passenger preferences over time. Longitudinal studies might provide richer insights into how airline preferences shift due to changing market dynamics or external events such as economic fluctuations or geopolitical tensions.

Thirdly, this research relied exclusively on quantitative data. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could have provided a richer understanding of the underlying reasons behind respondents' preferences, particularly regarding nuanced factors like brand perception and sustainability considerations.

Lastly, respondents' perceptions were captured at a single point in time, potentially overlooking temporal variations and seasonal impacts on travel behavior. Longitudinal studies or comparative research at different times of the year could help address this limitation and provide a more comprehensive perspective.

5.3 Future work

1. Qualitative Exploration: Conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups to obtain deeper insights into the motivations and nuanced preferences influencing airline choices, especially aspects related to brand loyalty, service quality expectations, and sustainability concerns.

2. Seasonal and Longitudinal Analysis: Conduct longitudinal studies across different seasons and years to capture fluctuations and trends in airline preferences, thereby improving the robustness and applicability of findings over time.

3. Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Employ mixed-method research combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods, such as interviews or observational studies, to obtain more comprehensive insights into passenger behaviors and expectations.

4. Technology and Digitalization: Investigate the impact of technological innovations, such as AI-driven customer service and advanced digital booking platforms, on consumer preferences and airline competitiveness.

5. Impact of Emerging Sustainability Practices: Further explore the role and impact of specific airline sustainability initiatives, including carbon offsetting, biofuel adoption, and other environmental policies, on long-term resident airline selection patterns.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

The following is a questionnaire template. It should be noted that in the formal questionnaire, both Chinese and English will appear.

Survey on Airline Choice Preferences of Chinese Long-term Residents in Thailand

Introduction

Hello, I am a student at College of Management, Mahidol University conducting research on the airline preferences of Chinese long-term residents in Thailand. This study aims to explore factors influencing airline choices among Chinese expatriates, including international students, working professionals and others.

Your responses will be used solely for academic research purposes. All data collected will remain confidential and anonymous. The survey should take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. Thank you for your participation.

A. Respondent Information

Age

Under 18

18–25

26–35

36–45

46–55

56 or above

Gender

Male

Female

Other/Prefer not to say

Length of Stay in Thailand

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

2-4 years

More than 4 years

Current Status in Thailand

International Student

Working Professional

Other Long-term Resident (Please specify)

Annual Personal Income

No income/Unstable

Below 300,000 THB

300,000–600,000 THB

600,000–1,000,000 THB

Above 1,000,000 THB

Prefer not to say

B. Travel Background

How often have you traveled by air in the past 12 months?

Never

1–2 times

3–5 times

6–10 times

More than 10 times

How many times per year do you typically travel between Thailand and China?

1-2 times

3-4 times

5-6 times

More than 6 times

What is your preferred route when traveling between China and Thailand?

Direct flight

Transit flight

Primary Purpose of Travel

Business/Public Affairs

Leisure/Tourism

Visiting Family/Friends

Study/Education

Other (Please specify)

Which type of airline do you usually choose?

Full-Service Carrier (FSC)

Low-Cost Carrier (LCC) (If choose, the survey end)

Both, depending on the situation

Which airline do you like most/fly most often? (Open-ended)

Are you a frequent flyer or a loyalty program member of any airline?

Yes

No

C. Key Factors and Satisfaction Assessment

Please rate the following statements using a 1–5 scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree/Very Dissatisfied and 5 = Strongly Agree/Very Satisfied.

Definitions: Full-Service Carrier (FSC) refers to airlines providing comprehensive services including checked baggage, in-flight meals, and seat selection.

a. Price & Value for Money

I prefer FSCs that offer competitive fares

The value for money of FSC tickets I purchased is satisfactory

I choose FSCs that provide flexible pricing (e.g., discounts/promotions)

b. On-Time Performance & Reliability

Punctuality is critical in my FSC selection

I'm satisfied with the punctuality of FSCs I've used

I prefer FSCs with effective delay management systems

c. Service Quality Perception

Cabin cleanliness and seat comfort meet my expectations.

The attitude and professionalism of the cabin crew are satisfactory.

The quality of in-flight services (food, entertainment, Wi-Fi) is high.

The boarding and check-in process is smooth and efficient.

d. Brand Reputation & Loyalty Programs

Market reputation significantly affects my FSC choice

Frequent flyer programs influence my FSC preference

I value personalized rewards from FSCs

e. Sustainability Considerations

I notice FSCs' environmental policies (carbon offset/fuel efficiency)

I choose eco-friendly FSCs when prices are comparable

I would pay slightly more for lower-emission FSC flights

f. Convenience & Accessibility

Flight schedule availability affects my FSC selection

I prefer FSCs with good airport connectivity

Booking ease and customer service impact my FSC choice

g. Overall Satisfaction & Recommendation

I'm satisfied with FSCs' overall service quality

I recommend FSCs that meet my expectations

Past FSC experiences strongly guide my future choices

h. Intention to Choose an Airline in the Future

I will likely continue using my preferred FSC(s)

I may switch FSCs if better options emerge

I'll choose FSCs meeting expectations even at higher cost

D. Additional Comments & Open-Ended Questions

What other factors do you consider when choosing an airline? (Open-ended)

Do you have any suggestions or feedback for this airline? (Open-ended)

Thank You for Your Participation!

Your responses will be used solely for academic research. All data will remain confidential and anonymous.