

A Preliminary Research on the Lifestyle of International Students

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The focus of this study is to explore the lifestyle of international students and also the difficulties faced by them due to the language barrier (difficulty in learning the Chinese language) in Taiwan. Motivation for this study comes from the increasing number of international students, and the related educational policy settings of the government in Taiwan. In general, these international students are very focused on their studies, they foster a close relationship with their families and firmly believe that this family support motivates them to perform better and learn more. However, language seems to be a major barrier for them while adapting to the life in Taiwan, thereby, making it difficult for the students to comprehend the local news and gather information. Moreover, they are also not used to the local food, which might be one of the reasons that may motivate them to return to their own countries/homelands. The purpose of this study is: (1) to determine the relationship between the variables, population statistics and lifestyle; and (2) to understand the lifestyle of international students. We classified lifestyle into seven domains with the help of factor analysis: optimism-oriented, participation-oriented, fashion-oriented, nostalgia-oriented, benefit-oriented, independence-oriented and actuality-oriented. We also analyzed the demographics data and found that there are significances in the dimensions related to participation-oriented, fashion-oriented, nostalgia-oriented, benefit-oriented, independence-oriented and actuality-oriented lifestyle domains. Furthermore, research shows that international students, who were very participation-oriented, mainly chose to live in dormitories, as they could keep in touch with people and also had access to necessary information. Further, marriage also influences their level of participation.

Keywords: international students, lifestyle, Chinese language, Taiwan

Introduction

Motivation

Due to increasing international trade and key transportation locations, the Taiwanese government has

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developed relevant policies, in order to attract more foreign human resources and businesses. Simultaneously, enterprises in Taiwan try to gain a competitive advantage in their business operations through foreign collaborations and recruitment of foreign executives from other countries, since internationalization is becoming very crucial for Taiwan with reference to the government policy. Another important policy move was an increase in the student enrollment across various universities in Taiwan. Hence, it is extremely important to explore the lifestyle and language learning of the international students in Taiwan.

In this study, international students were chosen as sample participants. By exploring the lifestyle of international students, we can have a better understanding of their preferences and needs. It will be easier for the government to make relevant educational policies, if we are able to decipher the lifestyle of international students.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is: (1) to understand the lifestyle of international students in Taiwan; and (2) to determine the relationship between the variables, population statistics and lifestyle.

Research Questions

We develop the following research questions based on the purpose mentioned above, as well as the lifestyle dimensions addressed by Wells and Tigert (1971) and Plummer (1974):

- (1) What is the lifestyle of international students in Taiwan?
- (2) What is the relationship between the variables of population and their lifestyles?

Definition/Explanation

International students refer to those students who are from countries other than Taiwan, and studying in universities or colleges in Taiwan.

Lifestyle is the integration of an individual's internal and external behavior. It is influenced by an individual's interaction with the environment and displayed by their activities, interests and opinions. Lifestyle dimensions proposed by Plummer (1974) are so-called AIO (Activity-Interest-Opinion) scale for measure and consist of various activities, interests and opinions.

Background and Literature Review

International Students

The number of international students keeps increasing every year (Ministry of Education in Taiwan, 2009), and the maximum number of them are from Japan, Southeastern Asia and USA (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of International Students at Universities/Colleges in Taiwan

Academic year	Japan	Southeastern Asia	USA	Total
1999-2000	1,324	1,685	737	6,616
2000-2001	1,486	2,174	721	7,524
2001-2002	1,520	1,158	790	6,380
2002-2003	1,832	961	849	7,331
2003-2004	1,825	1,002	862	7,844
2004-2005	1,879	1,391	1,252	9,616
2005-2006	2,126	1,394	1,452	11,035
2006-2007	2,188	1,555	1,602	13,070
2007-2008	2,297	1,658	1,866	15,436
2008-2009	2,128	2,056	1,986	16,909

Lifestyle

Lifestyle involves the special behavior and habit of individuals or groups (Collins Cobuild English-Chinese Language Dictionary, 2000, p. 1050). It can also be defined as a developmental role, affecting and controlling the individual behavior and choice of recreation (Trumble & Stevenson, 2004, p. 1589). The theory of lifestyle originated from the Theory of Personal Constructs (Kelly, 1955). In this study, we identified the definition of lifestyle in four different ways. Initially, lifestyle is the response of an individual's internal thoughts. It is the result of a combination of values and personality wherein personal values are also affected. Scholars emphasized that lifestyle is an intrinsic response, rather than a visible behavior (Reynolds & Darden, 1974; Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1982). Secondly, lifestyle is a visible behavior, a systematic idea that represents' unique characteristic of a certain society or group (Lazer, 1963). This concept further emphasized that lifestyle is a visible behavior of an individual or a group, rather than an internal reaction. Hence, lifestyle is the result of culture, values, attitudes, thoughts, resources and laws (Sobel, 1981). Thirdly, lifestyle is an integration of the internal and external behavior of an individual. It can be measured through the visible behavior influenced by the inner behavior of an individual. Wells and Tigert (1971) stated that the study of lifestyle consists of various activities, interests and opinions and that the ATO lifestyle scale was made up of three variables. According to Reynolds and Darden (1974), lifestyle is a search for the shared dimensions of lifestyle of groups, in order to understand and predict the behavior in the future, since lifestyle can reflect a person's activities, interests and opinions. Kotler (1997) and Kotler and Armstrong (2007) claimed that lifestyle is an individual's way of life, namely, visible activity, interest and opinion that reflects not only in the social class or personality, but also through complete performances and interactions with the surroundings. Fourthly, lifestyle can dominate the behavior in life. Andreasen (1967) argued that lifestyle is a concept of social science and the combination of special behavior of an individual or group. In other words, it is how an individual and group choose different activities to make the best use of their available time and resources. Engel, Blackwell and Kollat (1987) reported that lifestyle displays how people live and utilize their time and money which would reflect in their personal values and personality. Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1993) claimed that lifestyle is the performance of consumers' motivation, prior learning, social classes and demographics.

The AIO Scale of Lifestyle

Wells and Tigert (1971) presented the AIO scale to measure lifestyle and the 300 designed items about lifestyle. Three dimensions in the AIO scale—activity, interest and opinion were not defined properly until Reynolds and Darden (1974) gave the clear definitions.

Activity implies behavior, action or activity which is concrete and can be observed. It also comprises of the interaction of an individual or group. Interest refers to the excitement that a person feels about an object, an event, or a topic. Opinion refers to a response expressed verbally or through written. This response can identify an individual's explanation, attitude, expectation and evaluation about situations. Therefore, lifestyle is an integrated concept that can be reflected in the various activities, interests and opinions (Plummer, 1974). People construct events around them using the concepts of lifestyle (see Table 2).

Research Method

The Research Structure

This study aims to investigate the relationship between independent variables—demographics and the

dependent variable—AIO lifestyle scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics are used for analysis.

Table 2

Lifestyle Dimensions

Activity	Interest	Opinion
Work	Family	Themselves
Hobbies	Home	Social issues
Social events	Work	Politics
Vacation	Community	Business
Entertainment	Recreation	Economics
Club membership	Fashion	Education
Community	Food	Products
Shopping	Media	Future
Sports	Achievement	Culture

Subjects and the Process of Sampling

International students were chosen as population, including those pursuing bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. According to the Department of Statistics of Minister of Education of Taiwan (2007), only eight universities registered all their international students (see Table 3). International students in these universities totaled to 582.

Table 3

Eight Sample Universities and the Number of International Students

Universities	County/city	Number of international students	Subjects
National Cheng Kung University	Tainan	408	196
University of Tainan	Tainan	22	19
Leader University	Tainan	7	7
Chang Jung Christian University	Tainan	6	6
Tainan National University of the Art	Tainan	4	4
Southern Taiwan University of Technology	Tainan	94	72
Kun Shan University	Tainan	40	36
Chia Nan University of Pharmacy and Science	Tainan	1	1
Total		582	341

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was composed into two parts. The first part had eight items to investigate into the subjects' personal details, including homeland, gender, age, degree, marriage, number of children, dormitory and monthly income. The second part consisted of various questions relating to lifestyle, modified from the 36 dimensions of Plummer's AIO scale (1974). It included 25 questions and was measured with Likert's scale of 1 to 5. The reliability of the lifestyle scale was: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.703$, and the validity of lifestyle scale was: KMO (Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy) = 0.795.

Research Findings

Lifestyle Analysis

In Table 4, the results are as follows: Work items, part-time job and earning tuitions showed that 52.5% of the international students had a part-time job, for earning their tuitions. Social event items, such as “interacting with people”, “getting along with classmates”, “staying at university” and “accepting objects”, showed that almost 60%-70% of the them got along well with their classmates. They also liked to stay at the university and interact with people. Community item, such as “being independent and little interaction with others”, showed that nearly 5% of the participants thought that they interacted well with others, while the rest of them thought that they were independent. Shopping and media, “information by watching TV” and “buying newspapers” showed that 33% of them acquired information about their local surroundings, while 20% of them gained this information through newspapers that they purchased. This might be due to the difficulty in comprehending the local language, which made it difficult for the international students to gather information through electronic media or print media. Family item, “contacting with family monthly”, “having good relationship with family” and “returning to homeland”, showed that 80% of the international students had a good relationship with their family. Fashion item, “fashion trend” revealed that 33% of the international students understood the fashion trend, whereas 34.4% of them felt that they did not understand it very well, and 31.7% of them did not understand the fashion trend at all. Likewise, this might be caused by their difficulty in comprehending the local language. “Vital function” and “not getting used to food” manifested that 50% of the international students thought that they were not really used to Taiwanese food. Under achievement item, “college education” showed that most of the students felt that education would benefit them and hence were very much inclined to go to universities in Taiwan. Finally, education item, “teacher’s help” displayed similar results to that of education items. Nearly 70% of the students felt that their universities and teachers were very helpful to them.

Factor Analysis on Lifestyle

The KMO value of lifestyle (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy) was 0.795, indicating that factor analysis seemed suitable for this study (see Table 5).

Table 6 shows that there are 13 items with communality greater than 0.6, eight items with communality greater than 0.5, and four items with communality greater than 0.4. Since numerous characteristics of the variables are common, factor analysis seemed suitable for this study.

After factor analysis, the 25 lifestyle items of the international students in Taiwan were classified into seven factors, as seen in Table 7. According to the different characteristics, factor 1 was named optimistic-oriented, factor 2, participation-oriented, factor 3, fashion-oriented, factor 4, nostalgia-oriented, factor 5, profit-oriented, factor 6, independence-oriented, and factor 7, pragmatic-oriented.

The Analysis on Significance in Demographics and Lifestyle

Table 8 shows the differences in demographics and lifestyle using *t*-test (independent *t*-test) and one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) analyses.

Homeland and lifestyle. There were significant differences in terms of “fashion-oriented”, “nostalgia-oriented”, “benefit-oriented” and “actuality-oriented” variables due to students being from different homelands. With respect to “nostalgia-oriented” variable, international students from Southeastern Asia were more nostalgia-oriented than those from America and Canada. As for “benefit-oriented” variable, international

students from Southeastern Asia were more benefit-oriented than those from Europe (see Table 9).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Lifestyle

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Adapting to environment	4.04	0.951
Interacting with people	3.84	0.884
Daily routine	3.63	1.119
Part-time job	3.24	1.651
Earning tuition	2.34	1.438
Getting along with classmates	4.03	0.947
Teachers' help	3.78	1.003
Staying at university	2.24	1.251
Participate in activities	3.11	1.149
Interested in activities	3.44	1.125
Little attention to activities	3.53	1.084
Being independent and little interaction with others	2.66	1.216
Accepting objects	3.07	1.066
Vital function	3.47	1.067
Not getting used to food	2.70	1.233
Contacting with family monthly	4.09	1.222
Having good relationship with family	4.38	1.047
Returning to homeland	3.51	1.218
Information by watching TV	2.85	1.285
Buying newspapers	2.14	1.367
Fashion trend	2.99	1.156
Showing less concern about something	3.14	1.069
College education	3.66	1.042
Preparing for the future	3.60	1.135
Enrich every day	3.60	1.013

Table 5

Factor Analysis on Lifestyle With KMO and Bartlett Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin		0.795
Bartlett test	Chi-square test	1671.8
	Degree of freedom	300
	Significance	0.000

Sex and lifestyle. The data in Table 10 show the significant differences among the sexes with respect to “nostalgia-oriented”.

Age and lifestyle. Table 11 shows that there are significant differences relating to “fashion-oriented” and “nostalgia-oriented” variables, especially with reference to age. International students aged at 51-60, 41-50 and 31-40 were more fashionable than those aged at 21-30. However, international students aged at 51-60 were the most fashionable. With regard to “nostalgia-oriented” variable, international students aged at 31-40 were more nostalgia-oriented than those aged at 41-50.

Table 6

The Communality of Factor Analysis on Lifestyle

Items	Extracted value	Items	Extracted value	Items	Extracted value
Participating in activities	0.699	Getting along with classmates	0.644	Part-time job	0.569
Returning to homeland	0.698	Showing less concern about something	0.634	College education	0.564
Be independent and little interaction with others	0.697	Adapting to environment	0.633	Staying at university	0.538
Interested in activities	0.693	Buying newspapers	0.625	Contact with family monthly	0.537
Little attention to activities	0.685	Accepting objects	0.580	Not getting used to food	0.483
Preparing for the future	0.661	Information by watching TV information	0.576	Daily routine	0.471
Good relationship with family	0.653	Teacher's help	0.576	Earning tuitions	0.452
Fashion trend	0.651	Interacting with people	0.571	Vital function	0.412
Enrich every day	0.645				

Table 7

The Result About Lifestyle

Factors	Items	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance	
				Specific (%)	Total (%)
Factor 1 Optimism-oriented	Enrich every day	0.749	5.941	23.762	23.762
	Good relationship with family	0.704			
	Preparing for the future	0.688			
	Contact with family monthly	0.684			
	College education	0.669			
	Getting along with classmates	0.659			
	Teacher's help	0.636			
	Adapting to environment	0.621			
	Interacting with people	0.595			
	Vital function	0.489			
Daily routine	0.484				
Factor 2 Participation-oriented	Participating in activities	0.814	2.046	8.185	31.947
	Interested in activities	0.763			
Factor 3 Fashion-oriented	Fashion trend	0.746	1.672	6.687	38.635
	Buying newspaper	0.716			
	Information by watching TV	0.632			
	Staying at university	0.478			
Factor 4 Nostalgia-oriented	Returning to homeland	0.718	1.626	6.503	45.138
	Not getting used to food	0.624			
Factor 5 Benefit-oriented	Showing less concern about something	0.753	1.332	5.328	50.466
	Earning tuitions	0.445			
Factor 6 Independence-oriented	Being independent and little interaction with others	0.786	1.219	4.876	55.342
	Accepting objects	0.695			
Factor 7 Practice-oriented	Little attention to activities	0.781	1.111	4.445	59.787
	Part-time job	0.601			

Table 8

Lifestyle and Demographics

Variables		Statistical methods
Independent variables	Independent variables	
Homeland	Lifestyle	One-way ANOVA
Sex	Lifestyle	<i>t</i> -test
Age	Lifestyle	One-way ANOVA
Learning experience	Lifestyle	One-way ANOVA
Marriage	Lifestyle	<i>t</i> -test
Dormitory	Lifestyle	One-way ANOVA
Average monthly income	Lifestyle	One-way ANOVA

Table 9

Homeland and Lifestyle

Factors	<i>F</i> -value	Scheffé method
Optimism-oriented	0.960	
Participation-oriented	1.996	
Fashion-oriented	3.502**	
Nostalgia-oriented	4.618***	Southeastern Asia > the US, Southeastern Asia > Canada
Benefit-oriented	3.676**	Southeastern Asia > Europe
Independence-oriented	1.309	
Actuality-oriented	2.676*	

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 10

Sex and Lifestyle

Factors	Mean difference	<i>t</i> -value
Optimism-oriented	-0.156	-1.101
Participation-oriented	-0.156	-1.132
Fashion-oriented	0.135	0.967
Nostalgia-oriented	-0.302*	-2.177
Benefit-oriented	-0.143	-1.015
Independence-oriented	0.036	0.259
Practice-oriented	-0.060	-0.438

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 11

Age and Lifestyle

Dimensions	<i>F</i> -value	Scheffé method
Optimism-oriented	2.542	
Participation-oriented	2.375	
Fashion-oriented	7.115***	51-60 > 21-30, 41-50 > 21-30, 31-40 > 21-30
Nostalgia-oriented	5.171**	31-40 > 41-50
Benefit-oriented	1.024	
Independence-oriented	0.210	
Practice-oriented	1.593	

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Academic background and lifestyle. As shown in Table 12, it is obvious that there are significant differences in the factors related to the level of degree pursued by international students. With regard to the “participation-oriented” variable, international students who were doing executive masters were more participative than undergraduate students. As for “practice-oriented” variable, executive master students, graduate students and undergraduate students ranked third overall.

Table 12

Learning Experience and Lifestyle

Dimensions	F-value	Scheffé method
Optimism-oriented	0.455	
Participation-oriented	4.388**	executive masters > undergraduate students
Fashion-oriented	0.691	
Nostalgia-oriented	1.6321	
Benefit-oriented	2.124	
Independence-oriented	1.263	
Practice-oriented	12.172***	executive masters > undergraduate students’ masters > undergraduate students

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Marriage and lifestyle. Data in Table 13 shows that there were significant differences in “participation-oriented”, “fashion-oriented” and “independence-oriented” variables due to the marriage status of the international students.

Table 13

Marriage and Lifestyle

Dimensions	Mean difference	t-value
Optimism-oriented	0.291	1.416
Participation-oriented	0.627**	3.113
Fashion-oriented	-0.788***	-3.931
Nostalgia-oriented	0.292	1.419
Benefit-oriented	0.234	1.127
Independence-oriented	-0.416*	-2.018
Practice-oriented	-0.154	-0.747

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Dormitory and lifestyle. As showed in Table 14, there are significant differences in “participation-oriented”, “fashion-oriented”, “nostalgia-oriented” and “benefit-oriented” variables, based on the international students’ places of residence. International students living in university dormitories were more active in university activities than others. With regard to “fashion-oriented” variable, international students living together were the most fashionable when compared to those living outside the university and on campus. However, students living on campus in dormitories were the least fashionable.

Average monthly income. Data in Table 15 shows that there were significant differences in the “participation-oriented”, “fashion-oriented” and “nostalgia-oriented” variables, because of the differences in the international students’ income levels. With regard to “fashion-oriented” variable, international students whose incomes were at 20,000 NT-25,000 NT (new Taiwanese dollars) were much different than those with income below 5,000 NT or at 5,000 NT-10,000 NT as well as those at 10,000 NT-15,000 NT. However, international

students whose income was over 30,000 NT were very different from those with income below 5,000 NT, at 5,000 NT-10,000 NT as well as those at 10,000 NT-15,000 NT.

Table 14

Dormitory and Lifestyle

Dimensions	F-value	Scheffé method
Optimism-oriented	0.281	
Participation-oriented	5.797**	
Fashion-oriented	14.753***	living university dormitory > living with others living with others > living university dormitory living alone outside the university > school dormitory living university dormitory > living with others living university dormitory > living alone outside the university
Nostalgia-oriented	7.310**	
Benefit-oriented	5.123**	
Independence-oriented	1.745	
Practice-oriented	0.381	

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 15

Average Monthly Income and Lifestyle

Dimension	F-value	Scheffé method
Optimism-oriented	1.522	
Participation-oriented	2.772*	
Fashion-oriented	8.757***	20,000NT-25,000NT > below 5,000NT 20,000NT-25,000NT > 5,000NT-10,000NT 20,000NT-25,000NT > 10,000NT-15,000NT over 30,000NT > below 5,000NT over 30,000NT > 5,000NT-10,000 NT 10,000NT-15,000NT > over 30,000NT
Nostalgia-oriented	6.213***	
Benefit-oriented	1.527	
Independence-oriented	2.084	
Practice-oriented	2.161	

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Conclusions

Lifestyle of the International Students in Taiwan

International students were independent, got well along with their teachers and classmates and also liked spending more time at universities. They were very concerned and aggressive about their life and future. Most of them wanted to return to their own homelands/countries since factors like food and language which serve as a barrier for them in Taiwan.

In general, international students are not very favorable in learning the local language (Chinese), but they are very inclined towards their universities, teachers and classmates. They consider education and teachers to be a great priority in their life. In spite of staying away from their families, yet they are in close contact with their families and this support factor makes them perform well in their studies and blend well with the environment in Taiwan. Language is one of the main barriers that international students face while “adapting to environment” in Taiwan and this factor makes them want to return to their own countries. They have

difficulties in comprehending information through media and news which is represented by the amount of time that the students spend in front of the television, in the frequency of the students who buy the newspapers and keep up with the fashion trend. International students are very focused on their goals and take all efforts to achieve them. However, they are not very attentive, and hence, overlook the opportunity of working part-time in spite of jobs being available. Thus, language plays an important role in hampering the life style of international students in Taiwan.

The Relationship Between Population Statistics and Lifestyles

We found a significance level between the variable of population and other factors, such as participation-oriented, fashion-oriented, nostalgia-oriented, benefit-oriented, independence-oriented and practice-oriented. Students belonging to the participation-oriented factor are studying in the Master's program and also actively involved in different activities than those in the bachelors program. Especially, actively participating students live in the dormitories and keep in touch with people and gather relevant information. Moreover, we also found that marriage also plays an important role in the international student's participation level.

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