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Motivations for Participation and Cross-culture Adjustment of Taiwanese Working Holiday Makers in Australia

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss working tourists' experiences, which include the motives before departure, cross-culture shock and adaption during the journey, and reflection after returning to Taiwan. Qualitative in-depth interviews were provided by 28 participants recruited through snowball sampling. We found that participation in a working holiday could be driven by three types of motivation: the influences of a reference group, high pay, and policy leniency. The transcripts of participants' interviews allowed the development of the two themes of sociocultural and psychological adjustment. Working holiday participants believed they could achieve several benefits, including improving their language skills, enhancing their ability to deal with people and situations, training their decision-making skills, and changing their attitudes towards life.

KEYWORDS: Working holiday makers, Motivation, Self-identity, Cross-cultural adjustment

1. Introduction

In recent years, working holidays (WHs) have become a popular form of travel among young people in Taiwan. The Australian Working Holiday Maker (WHM) program has contributed to the international youth travel market in Australia for many years. Australia's WHMs program has been in existence since 1975 and enables eligible young people 18 to 30 years old to visit Australia and to supplement their travel funds through short-term employment. Due to the flexible nature of the WHM program in Australia (e.g., unlimited visa quota, mobility, and longer duration of stay), it is a more popular destination than other countries, such as Canada, Germany, or the UK (Reilly et al.,2018). Over the past few years, Australia has been the number one destination for Taiwanese youth heading overseas as WHMs (Fang et al.,2017). According to the Australia Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2020), the WHM program statistics for the 2019/2020 year showed that a total of 18,752 combined Work and Holiday (first and second) visas were issued. There was a 5.5% growth overall, which came from Ireland (up 87% to 18,274) and Taiwan (up 41% to 11,430). Taiwan was considered the fifth-largest source market for the Australian WHM program, with a market share of 7.5 percent in 2019/2020. The number of Taiwanese WHM visitors to Australia has experienced year-on-year growth since the program began in late 2015.

Some related studies have provided detailed discussions on WHM motivations (Ho et al., 2014; Nagai et al., 2018; Tsai & Collins, 2017; Yang & Wen, 2016) using various methods to examine the motivational factors. Gaining a better understanding of the WHMs' underlying motivations is an effective way of exploring their behavior. The extensive literature on WHMs' motivations provides an abundant theoretical background and information for studying the WH phenomenon in the context of tourism motivation. Broadly speaking, most previous studies have been conducted using surveys with scale items (Lee & Lee, 2011; Ooi & Laing, 2010). Some researchers have started to investigate the conditions and circumstances surrounding the WHM experience, but these studies have remained somewhat limited, focusing on Japan (Horikawa, 2002; Kawashima, 2010) or Great
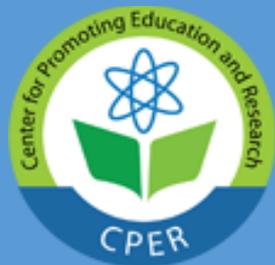
Britain (Clarke, 2004; 2005; Rice, 2010); while other studies have examined WHMs' perceived values and satisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2011) or travel risk perceptions (Nagai et al., 2014).

Although the number of WHMs in Australia has been increasing steadily, limited research using qualitative methods has been conducted on their motivation, self-identity, and cross-culture adjustment. Thus, this qualitative exploratory study aims to fill a gap in WHM literature by examining the relationships among WHMs' motivation, self-identity, and cross-culture adjustment. Our findings provide insights into these inter-relationships among Taiwanese WHMs in Australia.

2. Literature review

2.1 Working Holiday Maker Programs

To date, WHM programs have been adopted by more than 50 countries. The enormous growth of these programs has been attributed to public diplomacy and international friendship goals. They allow people aged 18–35 to holiday in a destination and to supplement their travel funds with temporary employment. The visa usually lets recipients stay up to 12 months, with a maximum of 6 months for work, and additional opportunities for study or training. The temporary stay can serve as a probationary period for permanent residency in the country, and it is not unusual for WHMs to become permanent residents, as seen in New Zealand (Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment-New Zealand, 2015).

The earliest and most cited authors addressing the topic of WHMs are Pape (1964), Blau (1967), and Cohen (1974). Prior to their publications, a 'holiday' was seen as an activity that was unrelated to work in any form. Uriely and Reichel (2000) explored the attitudes of working tourists towards their hosts. Their interest was the meaning that working tourists assigned to the tourism experience and their work, and the relationship with their hosts in Israel. Their work was based on Pearce (1990), who stated that long-term budget tourists tend to adopt a pragmatic attitude towards employment and see it as a means to continue traveling, which is in contrast to short-term tourists, who see their unpaid or paid work as an integral part of their tourism experience. These concepts influence the attitude of tourists towards their hosts, and WHMs are most likely seeing their hosts as employers only and are solely engaging in an 'economic exchange', which is an idea also highlighted by Blau (1976) and Brennan (2014b). Consequently, this type of relationship might lead to long-term working tourists not having a positive attitude towards their hosts in comparison to

groups where the working experience is an essential part of their stay and who are seeking a 'social exchange' rather than an economic one (Blau, 1976; Ho et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2009).

WHMs are often closely associated with backpackers in the Australian media, which might invite discriminatory or detrimental treatment from employers who do not see WHMs as 'normal' labor with rights to fair wages and working conditions (Brennan,2014a). The respondents faced various forms of discrimination in the workplace and were treated unequally in the job market due to their temporary work permit, limited English language skills, low social skills, and limited knowledge of Australian communication codes (Anderson, 2018; Peng & Hebbani, 2014). They became dependent on the support of the ethnic Chinese community in Australia to receive jobs, settlement assistance, and emotional assistance. The jobs they received were paid below the minimum legal wage and were without insurance or contracts.

Uriely and Reichel (2000) found that short-term tourists saw their working experience as an essential part of their experience, while long-term tourists mostly saw it as an 'economic exchange'. Another form of economic exchange has been highlighted by Jarvis and Peel (2013) who explored the role WHMs play in destination development. They state that WHMs contribute significantly to the local economy, as they 'live like locals' and spend the majority of their income at the location where they accept work. It is therefore vital for destination managers to effectively provide labor opportunities to these tourists by, for example, establishing a functioning information network between working hostels and potential employers. They also highlight the idea that hosts should treat working tourists as guests rather than temporary employees, not only to extend the duration of their stay through a positive social relationship but also to attract additional leisure backpackers.

2.2 Motivations for participating in the WHM program

There has been extensive literature on backpackers' motivations as theoretical background and information for studying the WHM phenomenon in this tourism motivational context. The motivations are diverse and multifaceted. Studies conducted in a Western context affirm that one of the main purposes is that a working holiday offers opportunity for WHMs both working and traveling outside of their home country (Rice, 2010; Robertson, 2014; Wilson et al., 2009). In contrast, for studies conducted in an Asian context, WHMs embark on such a
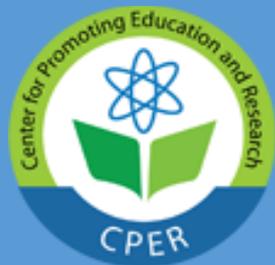
trip to construct a new temporary identity through travel and to be more courageous and independent (Fang et al., 2017; Ooi & Laing, 2010; Yang & Wen, 2016; Zhu et al., 2019). Existing research has recognized self-identity as one of the main core issues and key driving forces that brings young people to engage with WHM programs. WHM experiences are 'regarded as a means of gratification... with the values which are not being realized in daily life' (Ho et al., 2014, p. 469) and are perceived as a way of pursuing self-growth and maturity. Many WHMs seek positive experiences and valuable personal exchanges during or after their journeys as a kind of rite-of-passage from youth into adulthood (Frappa,2019). This form of exploration is focal to the construction of the self to the extent that a transformation of the self has been performed by WHMs accumulating personal experiences to redefine the foundation of their selfhood and assert a new identity (Reilly et al., 2018; Ooi & Laing, 2010). Another dominant theme is traveling as a way to escape (Pearce, 1990). WHMs attempt to break away from their routine or money-driven daily life (Riley, 1988). Such stresses drive them to seek freedom, independence, adventure, and different experiences through travel (Cohen, 2003; Elsrud, 2001; O'Reilly, 2006; Vogt, 1976). WH travels bring a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' to explore foreign countries and cultures, and backpackers then go further, turning their experiences into maturity and adulthood when they return home. Consequently, learning and living in different cultures are viewed as being the key motivations that WHMs consider when participating in the working holiday program (Wattanacharoensil & Talawanich, 2018). A WH brings 'the opportunity of a lifetime', and when they return home, WHMs will further transform their experience into maturity.

2.3 Self-identity

Self-identity is considered a core issue in the research of WHs and the key driving force for WHMs (Yang & Wen, 2016). The concept of self-identity as a central motivation factor has been explored by numerous authors in the context of backpackers (Cohen, 2003; Desforges, 2000; Maoz, 2007; Noy, 2004; Sorensen, 2003) but few have addressed this concept in the context of WHMs. WHMs establish a new temporary identity throughout their WH and become braver and more independent (Currie et al., 2011; Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006). WHMs try to escape ordinary daily life, which is driven by work or money. The pressure drives them to seek freedom, independence, adventure, and different experiences

(Elsrud, 2001; O'Reilly, 2006). A WH brings opportunities that help contribute to identity construction and has an interactive influence on the development of self-awareness, self-development, and self-identity (Wei & Ming, 2019). WHMs can switch voluntarily between different identities as they do various activities. Ho et al. (2014) claimed that WHMs have the potential to reach three types of end-states of identity: utilitarian, such as a sense of accomplishment, competence, and friendship; hedonics, such as fun and enjoyment; and autonomy, such as esteem, self-confidence, self-improvement, development, and self-fulfillment. Wei and Ming (2019) stated that the self-identity of WHMs involves an integral identity, which considers work, travel, production, and consumption as integral processes in the construction of one's identity; a host-like identity, when the WHMs try to make themselves fit the image of the local people and distinguish themselves from regular tourists; and a localized identity, where WHMs reconstruct their self-identity according to different destinations and experiences. As Ooi and Laing (2010) explained, this trip also leads WHMs to self-growth and maturity. This form of exploration is focal to the construction of the self to the extent that a transformation of the self has been performed by WHMs accumulating personal experiences to redefine the foundation of their selfhood and assert a new identity.

2.4 Cross-culture adjustment

Kim (2001, p.31) defined cross-culture adjustment as 'a dynamic process by which individuals upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changing cultural environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments. An individual can experience stress when entering a new environment where old patterns do not work. The major challenge faced by strangers entering and resettling in an alien cultural environment is to learn to live with unfamiliarity and uncertainty (Kim,2005) and 'to choose their acculturation strategies' in an unfamiliar culture (Liu,2007). According to Berry (1997), individuals entering a foreign culture face two challenges: preserving their cultural characteristics and maintaining a good relationship with the locally dominant group. Some strangers positively attempt to reduce the uncertainty by communicating with locals, by actively learning and speaking the language of the host nation and approaching the media in the host culture; inversely, others remain in-group and rarely interact with people outside their cultural community
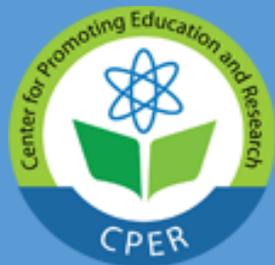
(Laroche et al.,1998). As suggested by Wilson et al. (2009), the cultural distance between the groups plays an important role in the acculturation process, along with the strategies employed to adapt to local customs. In Peng and Hebbani's (2014) research on Taiwanese WHMs in Australia, it was noted that the diverse expression styles and absence of English vocabulary led to Taiwanese WHMs experiencing upsetting situations with their coworkers and customers. This resulted in the WHMs abandoning their previous goal of establishing social communication with the Australian hosts and withdrawing into the local Chinese community. Kim (1988;2001) noted that migrant workers can remain in their ethnic communities to minimize cultural adjustment pressure. This theoretical model is helpful to further explore how Taiwanese WHMs seeking employment cope with cultural and communication challenges in Australia. Communication is a prerequisite for successful adjustment when a stranger enters into a new environment; with time and effort, there is a gradual movement toward adjustment, which is known as the stress-adaptation growth dynamic (Kim, 2001).

3. Methods

3.1 Sampling

Qualitative in-depth interviews were given to people who had participated in a working holiday for at least one year and who had returned to work in Taiwan for at least another year. The data were collected from a sampling framework described as a purposive and snowball sample, in that a deliberate effort was made to include a few WHMs and then approach their acquaintances or companions. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third and so on, thereby promoting trust in the researcher, as referrals are made by acquaintances or peers rather than more formal methods of recruitment. Through snowball sampling, a total of 28 participants were recruited. The primary data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with Taiwanese WHMs in Kaohsiung, Taiwan from January to April in 2019.

The sample consisted of 15 female and 13 male participants. This gender imbalance may be due to the compulsory one-year military training required of all Taiwanese males; hence, more female than male Taiwanese WHMs went to Australia. Most participants were aged 22-30 years. The average length of stay in Australia was 14 months, with a range of 5-24 months. The WHMs were generally well-educated, with nearly 90% have completed a bachelor's degree.

3.2 Research design

To explore participants' insights regarding cross-cultural adjustment and self-identity, structured interview questions were developed as shown in Table 1. Eight open-ended questions were included in the list. The first few questions mainly focused on the incentives, expectations, and post-arrival feelings of Taiwanese WHMs, while the rest of the questions were focused on the cultural differences and communication differences associated with participants' employment experiences. Two experts tested the content validity of the items included in the list. Some changes were made in light of the experts' valuable comments, suggestions, and recommendations.

Before recording, oral permission to record their responses was obtained from the interviewees. The participants of the study were requested to give honest, fair, and precise responses. They were also given directions to answer the questions in detail for the open-ended items included in the structured interview protocol. All participants were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of the data they provided. Furthermore, participants were also assured that no identification would be exposed during the data analysis or to any other person without their permission. The interviews of the participants were recorded on a personal mobile phone using a digital flash memory voice recorder.

3.3 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis, which is a method 'often used in a common-sense way to refer to patterns in the data that reveal something of interest regarding the research topic at hand' (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.149). Patterns are categorized and coded into themes. Deciding on what constitutes a 'theme' involves the researcher in making choices about what to include, what to discard, and how to interpret the words of participants. Themes that are included by the researcher are often directly involved with the research questions or topics. Ultimately, specific themes and patterns were identified, constituting the findings of the study.

4. Findings

4.1 Participating motivations

There were many reasons why participants went to Australia under the WHM program. Participation motivation could be divided into the three categories of influence from a *reference group, high pay,* and *policy leniency*. Participation motivation was not merely a single factor; it was usually multi-factored. Reference groups
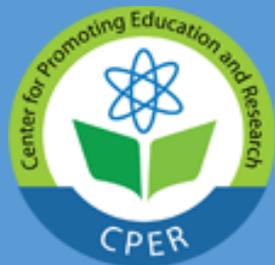
are an important motivating factor for participants to join the WHM program. For most WHMs, working in Australia is a life challenge and the psychological aspects require them to seek peer support. As a result, the support of friends and relatives, and having a partner join the WHM program at the same time, made participants more willing to go to Australia for a working holiday, as the following participant described:

Most participants chose Australia as their destination due to recommendations from a reference group, such as experiences shared by their friends and family.

My friend told me that he got a WHM visa and was ready to head to Australia. At that time, I had almost finished military service. I chose Australia for my working holiday because I knew my friend would take care of me. (Participant M3)

Japan was my priority choice for a working holiday. My classmates strongly recommended Australia as the perfect country because the living expenses, traveling, and working was better than in Japan. (Participant F12)

From participants' testimonies, motivation has positive effects on the WHM destination choice and the destination choice has positive effects on behavioral intentions. The moderating effect of perceived risk has a strong influence on the relationship between motivation and destination choice. Other participants mentioned that the main reason for them to consider being WHMs was an attraction to the high wages so that they could save some money while they were young. WHMs' statements provided clear support for this view:

The pay in Australia is incredible. Yes, the cost of living is higher, but I made more money in one week at my job in Sydney then I made in a month at my much-less-glamorous job back in Taiwan. (Participant M7)

The minimum wage is triple than what it is in Taiwan. I made three times more an hour at my job in Australia. Who will deny it? (Participant F11)

Regarding the policy leniency of Australia's WHM program, several participants applied to Australia because it has fewer limitations; no financial aid documents are needed. The less-restrictive policies of the Australian government towards international working holidays confirms the view of Reilly et al. (2018). This effect is also manifested in participants' motivational factors, as stated by participant F6:

It's easy to apply for an Australian WHM visa, I heard that the rate of denials is very low. You only need to provide your ticket and minimum living expenses. (Participant F6)

4.2 Self-expectations before departure

The effects of participating in a working holiday can be viewed from several perspectives: improved language abilities; enhanced abilities to deal with people and situations; increased decision-making skills; and changes in life attitudes.

WHMs can use their work salary to pay part of the cost of living and can use non-work time (leisure time) to make their arrangements for tourism activities, experiences, and integrations into local life. For WHMs, this is a way to accumulate life experience. Overseas internships for students can be rewarding experiences that dramatically change their perspectives on globalization and visions. This is the main reason why most WHMs chose to join this program, as described by several WHMs participants:

My job at the farm was awesome. I learned a lot of new things and enjoyed what I was doing. Not only did I gain some great experience, but I gained some great farm work experience, which is never a bad thing. (Participant F4)

Before I departed for Australia, I had already decided that one of my goals was to travel around the southern hemisphere within my valid WHMs visa period. On the work holiday visa, you can work as little or as long as you want (up to six months per employer), at as many jobs as you want. So as soon as you've saved some money, you can quit your job and go traveling! (Participant M1)

I definitely will try bungee jumping in Australia. That is the only country where I can experience exciting activities I have never tried before. That's how life should be. (Participant M11)

4.3 Cross-cultural adjustment

As per Ward and Kennedy (1996), cross-cultural adaptation refers to the reconsideration and adjustment of behaviors and ideological criteria to better match another culture. During cross-cultural adaptation, individuals will experience various feelings or physical and psychological changes. According to past research, potential problems and challenges presenting on arrival among WHMs in host nations mainly lay in culture, the adjustment process, language, homesickness, local contacts, employment circumstances, and stress (Chen et al.,2009; Clarke,2004;
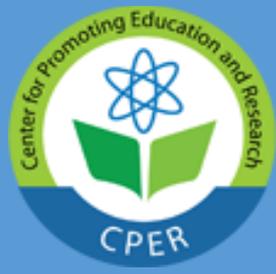
Horikawa, 2002). Two themes were developed from participants'transcriptions: *sociocultural adjustment* and *psychological adjustment*.

The first challenge overseas workers encountered was a cross-cultural adjustment. Although the life experiences provided by different cultures were important to WHMs, if the culture clash was too strong it could lead WHMs to consider abandoning the program (such as participant F15). However, for the vast majority of WHMs, the adjustment challenges caused by cultural differences were viewed positively. For example, the views of M5 and F10 on the socio-cultural environment:

> *To me, the biggest culture shock with working is that Australians never work late or overtime, even their employer is willing to pay higher rates. That is a very different situation in Taiwan. When I worked in Taiwan, if your employers wanted you to work overtime, you didn't have any choice. (Participant M5)*
> *The first week I came to this country, I found out that most stores close very early. It is hard to find a grocery store open after 5 p.m. At that time, I felt my country was convenient for living. You can find a 7-11 open 24 hours, and they are located everywhere. But… after a while, I got used to it. No nightlife. (Participant F10)*

When facing cultural adjustment in everyday life, psychological adjustment is an important aspect. The past experiences of most WHMs have included sleep difficulties and other unpleasant feelings. Participants were asked to think about how they felt over the year they were WHMs. The following responses were given:

> *I admit that my English was not good enough. Every day when I went to work, I was filled with fear of working with other employees, because I was afraid of chatting with them. I tried my best to remain quiet. I think my co-workers felt that I was not an easy person to be with. (Participant M6)*
> *Honestly, after I came to Australia, the first week was so much of a struggle for me. Different time zone, different food tastes, didn't know many friends. I cried every night after my roommates fell asleep. I wanted to go home and give up everything. All these situations got better after I got the job. (Participant F15)*

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to discuss Taiwanese WHM experiences, including participation motivations, expectations before heading to Australia, the cross-culture adjustments during the journey, and the reflection after returning to Taiwan. The findings offer insights into the experience and the cultural adjustment of Taiwanese WHMs in Australia. Overall, the factors motivating participation that were identified in this study echoed the findings from previous studies on WHMs (e.g., Ooi & Laing, 2010; Paris & Teye,2010). Additionally, the employment experience was affected by the nature of the participant's stay in Australia, low English proficiency, and perceived discrimination. Moreover, participants could not be too selective when choosing jobs since they needed wages to pay their living expenses. WHMs located themselves in the Australian-Chinese job market, as managers in the Australian-Chinese community were willing to offer WHMs job opportunities regardless of their English proficiency this was a fast and easy way to gain employment. The practice of illegally giving low wages with no job security is an open secret. From participants' perspectives, they were hired by Australian-Chinese managers as they were 'cheap labor', more obedient, and easier to communicate with.

The findings of this study are limited by several considerations, such as a small sample size. Future studies could take a longitudinal approach to track participant experiences from the pre-migration stage to the time of return to Taiwan. Interventions provided before, during, and after the WH would also provide a range of interesting possibilities in both theoretical and methodological terms. In the future, the findings of this study can be compared to previous studies, as well as to additional novel findings, to provide significant information for decision making concerning WH schemes.

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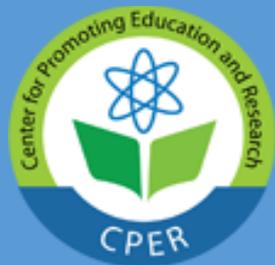
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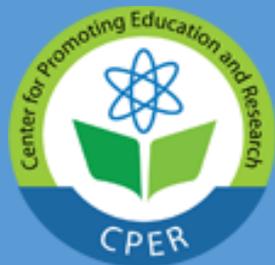
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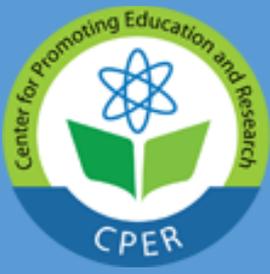
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