

# A Study on the Participation of Foreign Students in Local Cultural and Folk Activities in Wenzhou

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**Abstract:** The number of foreign students studying in Wenzhou, China has increased dramatically as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative. Learning the motivations and leisure constraints of foreign students' participation in local cultural and folk activities in Wenzhou is beneficial to promoting cultural adaptation, strengthening Chinese cultural self-confidence, and improving Wenzhou's international image. Based on the hierarchical model of leisure constraints (personal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints), this study has tended to focus on the leisure constraints for foreign students participating in local folk and cultural activities in Wenzhou. A total of seven participants were included in the analysis.

**Keywords:** Foreign Students, Local Cultural and Folk Activities, Leisure Constraints, Personal Constraints, Interpersonal Constraints, Structural Constraints, Wenzhou.

## 1. Introduction

Wenzhou is one of the first coastal open cities in China, with frequent international exchanges. Under the background of the Belt and Road Initiative, Wenzhou University has actively responded to the call of Chinese government and made great efforts to develop its International Education. In recent years, the number of foreign students coming to study in Wenzhou has soared (Zhang, 2020). Foreign students will encounter the culture shock at the beginning of their stay in Wenzhou. Pedersen defines culture shock as “the process of initial

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adjustment to an unfamiliar environment,” applying to “any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social system where previous learning no longer applies” (Pedersen, 1995). The culture shock leads the students to meet leisure constraints. The participation of foreign students in Wenzhou folk cultural activities is an important way for foreign students to understand Wenzhou's local cultural customs, and it can also accelerate their integration into the local learning and living environment. However, all kinds of constraints encountered in learning cultural and folk activities will hinder the enthusiasm and willingness of foreign students to participate, affect the dissemination of Wenzhou culture, and reduce their sense of identity with Chinese culture. This research is conducted on the base of the theory of leisure constraints and takes foreign students in Wenzhou as the research object.

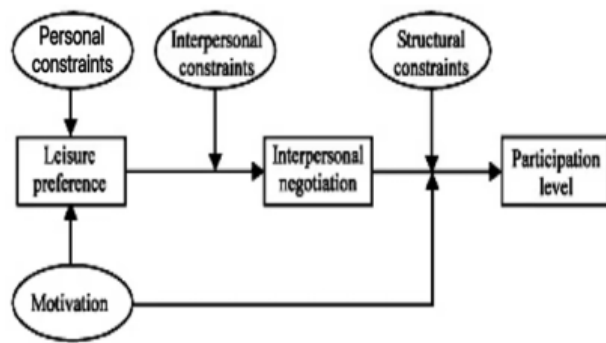
## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Leisure and Leisure Constraint Theory

The study of leisure in the modern sense began in the first half of the 20th century and the development period of this study is in the middle of the 20th century (Pang, 2021). The theoretical research of leisure first involves the definition of the concept of leisure. Henderson defines leisure as an independent or combination of free time, activity, mental state, place, space, or cultural background (Liu et al., 2020). Geoffrey Godbey believes that leisure is a relatively free life freed from the external pressure of the cultural and material environment. It enables individuals to act in the way they like and instinctively feel valuable, driven by inner love, and provides a basis for basic faith (Kang et al., 2000). Susan Horner and John Swabrook pointed out that ‘leisure is time, activity, state, 'all-round' concept, and lifestyle’ (Luo, 2012). Li Weifei, a domestic scholar, said that ‘leisure and gender research shows that pleasure ability exists in games and becomes a person's characteristic’ (Li, 2015).

According to Routledge Handbook of Leisure Studies, Parker wrote in the early 1970s that although work only accounts for a part of human life, their leisure activities are undoubtedly constrained by different factors related to the way they work (Tony Blackshaw, 2020). Leisure constraints research is committed to ‘investigating the factors that limit the formation of leisure preferences or prevent people from participating in and enjoying leisure, which is often obtained by researchers assuming, or through personal perceptive experiences’ (Lin et al., 2009). Studying the causes and factors that restrict leisure can not only enable leisure institutions to adopt an effective approach to various projects to make them more attractive to the public, but also to enable people to have access to leisure, have a deeper understanding of all aspects of leisure, and even generate new insights (Pang, 2021).

In order to understand leisure better, various theoretical models are proposed. Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey proposed a model that includes three leisure constraints: personal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints. Personal constraints are very similar to the concept of preemptive constraint proposed by Henderson, Stalnaker, and Taylor in 1988. It refers to factors that affect personal hobbies that will lead to a lack of interest in a certain leisure activity. Interpersonal constraints are an interventional factor that arises when interacting with others. When individuals interact with others, certain factors may affect the level and quality of their participation in their favorite activities. Structural constraints are an interventional factor unrelated to others. It reflects the contradiction between interest in an activity and actual participation in that activity (Pang, 2021). They also pointed out that the three constraints are gradually working, and interpersonal and structural constraints will be overcome only when personal constraints are overcome.



(Lin et al, 2020)

Jackson and other experts also divided people into three types according to their reactions to leisure constraints: people who do not participate in the activities they want; despite the constraints, people who do not reduce or change their participation attitudes; and those who participate but change the way they participate. The importance of this classification is that they clearly negate the assumption that these leisure constraints are insurmountable constraints to people's participation in leisure activities (Luo, 2012). It can be seen that we can overcome constraints and achieve leisure purposes by studying the leisure constraints of different groups of people, formulating plans or proposing methods for them.

Another study from Shintaro Kono and Eiji Ito (2021) shows that the leisure enjoyment was negatively associated with constraints and positively with constraint negotiation (Kono et al., 2021). That's to say, some kinds of leisure constraints and constraint negotiation could bring pleasure to humans.

## 2.2. Foreign Students' Participation in Cultural and Folk Activities

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, with the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and international status, the number of foreign students has continued to increase (Zhang, 2020). Now few pieces of research on the participation of foreign students in folk cultural activities have been done, while many scholars have conducted research

on foreign students and traditional Chinese culture. The culture and folk contained in traditional Chinese festivals epitomizes the life of the masses in Chinese society. As an important node in Chinese daily life, the festival is subtly perceived, accepted, and participated in by foreign students as a form of living culture (Gao, 2020). Gao Shuhui, a scholar, pointed out in the "Recognition and Experience Survey of Chinese Traditional Festivals for Foreign students" that many foreign students in China are very enthusiastic about participating in traditional Chinese festivals. For example, many foreign students want to have an authentic "Chinese New Year". This shows that foreign students have a high desire to understand traditional Chinese culture and are willing to participate in folk cultural activities. However, due to a series of constraints such as cultural background and facilities, they cannot really participate in the activities.

## 2.3. Leisure Constraints of Foreign Students

Relevant studies by foreign scholars on the leisure constraints of immigrants show that the shocks experienced in the initial stage of immigration, impure language skills, separation from family and friends, the need to regain economic stability, local social isolation, and lack of social networks may become constraints on immigrants' participation in leisure activities. From the perspective of immigration in a broad sense, foreign students can be regarded as sojourners (Li, 2015).

Junhyong Kim's leisure research results on the cultural adaptation of elderly immigrants in South Korea pointed out that cultural factors have a certain impact on participation in leisure activities. The study shows that due to cultural differences and dependence on adult children, female participants are more restricted in leisure. From a cultural perspective, it embodies Confucian values, and daughters-in-law support their mothers-in-law in various ways (such as doing housework and providing food). This cultural

value has been reversed after immigration, leading to cultural conflicts between elderly female participants and daughters-in-law (Kim et al., 2019). In the study of leisure preferences and constraints of Kyrgyz in Sui, it is pointed out that the leisure barriers of foreign students in Kyrgyzstan in Sui are mainly: lack of familiarity in life and language obstruction; lack of supply and demand for economic consumption; tight learning and lack of time; and different living customs. The leisure constraints of Kyrgyz businessmen in Guangzhou are: tight time; age limit; and family care (Aigerim, 2015). Therefore, we can find that people of different ages and status encounter different obstacles to participating in leisure activities.

In her study on the role of sports in the cross-cultural adaptation of foreign students, Cao Lu found that the nationality, length of study abroad, and gender of foreign students are all factors affecting their participation in sports and leisure activities. It will be of great use to create all possible conditions to remove constraints to participate in the movement to promote cultural integration (Cao, 2016). Taijiquan, as one of the traditional Chinese cultures, has a certain propaganda foundation abroad. Scholar Tian Xixiang and others' research on the dissemination of Taiji culture among foreign students shows that teaching facilities and language communication are important factors for their participation in learning Taijiquan. Scholars suggest that schools should integrate traditional national sports into the management of foreign students, so that students can learn and experience. Foreign students can understand traditional Chinese culture in the process of experiencing Taijiquan. Teachers for foreign students can carry out management and education work in combination with traditional sports culture (Tian et al., 2015).

Among international and domestic students, Dongwook and Taryn (2018) found that international students consistently possess higher intramural and competitive sport leisure constraint levels when

compared to domestic students.

Through the discussion above, we can find that the theory of leisure restriction at home and abroad has done a relatively comprehensive study, but the discussion of foreign students' participation in local cultural and folk activities is relatively lacking. Foreign students have a high enthusiasm for learning traditional Chinese culture, but due to various constraints, their learning aspirations cannot be met. Therefore, based on the theory of leisure restriction, this study is very necessary to study and make suggestions on the restriction of foreign students' participation in cultural and folk and leisure activities.

### 3. Research Design

In order to fully understand the current situation of foreign students participating in local folk cultural activities in Wenzhou, through the collation of relevant literature, and according to the content and purpose of this study, the author designed an interview outline and in December 2021, conducted in-depth interviews with seven foreign students in Wenzhou University and they are from four countries. As for the perspective of Chinese proficiency, they are all in a beginner state.

Name	Nationality	Major
Malanie	French	International trade
Jennie	American	Robotics
Ilyas	African	
Princessa	African	Art
Lenka	Czech	Chinese language
Felicia	Korean	
Elsa	African	

In order to fully understand the current situation of foreign students participating in local folk cultural activities in Wenzhou, through the collation of relevant literature, and according to the content and purpose of this study, the author designed an interview outline.

The questions are as follows

Q1. What's your name? Where are you from?  
How long have you ever been in Wenzhou?

Q2. Do you know anything about Wenzhou culture and folk?

Q3. Do you want to participate in some folk cultural activities? Why?

Q4. What are the constraints/difficulties to participating in the study/activities of culture and folk?  
(e.g.: time, chance, facility, physical condition, money, friend)

Q5. Has our university carried out any folk cultural activities? Do you have any suggestions for our university?

Through interviews, we can understand the willingness of foreign students to participate in folk cultural activities and leisure barriers.

#### 4. Major Findings and Discussion

##### 4.1. Leisure Preferences of Foreign Students in Wenzhou

After interviewing seven foreign students, the author found that overseas students in China have a strong enthusiasm for participating in local folk cultural activities in Wenzhou. They really want to understand Chinese culture, and Wenzhou folk customs, and integrate them into local life. Melanie, a student from France, says that I've always been interested in Chinese. Once she saw a very interesting performance of Shaoxing opera. And Jennie, a student from America, says that I'd like to experience some of the local culture and folk which is very different from our culture. She reveals that China has a long history and many different customs, which are very attractive to her. She would like to learn more and experience more different customs if she has the chance.

However, in daily activities, these foreign students prefer to participate in some sports and other leisure activities than local cultural and folk leisure activities. The things they often do in their spare time are playing video games, sports and cooking. Ilyas,

an African majoring in robotics, says "I always play computer if I have free time, or sometimes I do some sports such as running." Princessa, a girl who has been in Wenzhou for five years, says that she likes painting or cooking some hometown dishes when she has leisure time.

##### 4.2. Leisure Constraints of Foreign Students in Local Cultural and Folk Activities

The research found that foreign students show great interests in Wenzhou culture and folk activities, but due to various leisure constraints, they cannot frequently participate in local cultural and folk activities.

###### 4.2.1. Short of Opportunity and Time

For foreign students, most of them are undergraduates or postgraduates, and they need to spend a lot of time studying. After class, they have to spend more time learning Chinese and completing their homework, so they don't have time to participate in folk cultural activities, although they like it very much. Ilyas says that he has to finish many projects for his master's degree, so he doesn't have much time to learn or participate in the local folk cultural activities. Lenka, a girl from the Czech Republic, says that she didn't have the chance to participate in the local folk cultural activities because she doesn't know when or where the activities will be held. Jennie says, 'To tell the truth, it is difficult to come across these activities, and there are few sources of information about them.'

###### 4.2.2. Lack of Companion

For foreign students, it is very difficult to participate in local activities alone. When they are alone, they prefer to stay in the dormitory rather than participate in some strange cultural activities. Many foreign students come to Wenzhou alone to study. They have no friends here, so no one will go out with them to participate in activities, which has also become a leisure obstacle for them to participate in local folk cultural activities and other leisure activities. Ilyas says that when I want to go out to

do some sports, such as football, no partner could accompany me, let alone participate in completely strange folk cultural activities with me. He says, “My friends are all in my hometown, so I spend more time playing games with them in the dormitory, and no one will accompany me to participate in local activities in Wenzhou. And Melanie also says ‘I don’t really know many Chinese friends, so I don’t have lots of chances to come into contact with these traditions.’ Felicia, a girl from Korea, says that she didn’t have the chance to participate and she didn’t have any friends who could take her to join in. Most foreign students have this leisure constraint.

#### 4.2.3. *Language Barrier*

Wenzhou is a coastal developed city where most people speak Mandarin and Wenzhou dialect. For foreign students, they don't have acquaintances in Wenzhou, and can't speak Wenzhou dialect or even Mandarin, so even if they like local folk cultural activities in Wenzhou very much, language barrier stops them from participating in it and makes them unable to understand the local culture well. Besides, their inability to communicate with locals also prevents them from participating in folk cultural activities. Princessa says that she has participated in a lot of folk cultural activities because she wanted to chase every chance. But she always cannot clearly understand why people hold this activity and what it actually is due to language difficulties. And Jennie just has the same problem with Princessa. ‘There is a language problem, which makes it almost impossible to communicate with the locals, especially the older people. This also makes it difficult for me to participate in these local folk cultural activities.’ The language barrier has become a major leisure constraint for foreign students to participate in local folk cultural activities.

#### 4.2.4. *Different Climate*

Different cultures and folks of various ethnic groups will affect foreign students' understanding of

local culture, which also makes it difficult for foreign students to join local cultural and folk activities. Elsa, a girl from Africa, says that she always feels sad because they cannot celebrate their festivals happily here due to the lack of atmosphere. Therefore, she doesn’t want to learn and participate in local cultural and folk activities.

Different climate is also a major leisure constraint for foreign students. Ilyas claims that it is too hot in summer and too cold in winter in Wenzhou. So he prefers to stay in his dormitory, unwilling to participate in any other activities.

#### 4.3. *Discussion*

The constraints on the participation of foreign students in local cultural and folk activities found are included in these three constraints namely, personal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints. Language difficulties and cultural differences are personal constraints. Foreign students' inability to speak Mandarin and understand Mandarin leads to their lack of interest in local cultural and folk activities and their reluctance to participate in these activities. Different cultures make it difficult for foreign students to understand the significance and process of local cultural and folk activities in Wenzhou, and it is difficult for them to participate in these activities.

Lack of companionship is an interpersonal constraint. Some activities may require the participation of companions, or individuals may not be willing to participate in these activities alone, like dragon boating. In the absence of friends, foreign students may refuse to participate in these local cultural and folk activities. Lack of time, opportunity, and weather differences are structural constraints. Lack of time and opportunity will prevent or reduce the participation of foreign students in local cultural and folk activities. Because of failing to get used to the local weather, foreign students will feel uncomfortable participating in these activities, which will lead to a



low level of leisure enjoyment.

### **5. Suggestions to Overcome the Constraints**

According to survey of the participation of foreign students in Wenzhou in local folk cultural activities, we can know that foreign students are very interested in local folk cultural activities and show great willingness to participate in these activities. Foreign students participate in cultural activities to learn more about Chinese culture, familiarize themselves with local customs and habits, and accelerate their adaptation to life in Wenzhou. However, they are confronted with the leisure constraints. However, short of time and opportunity, lack of companion, language barrier, and different weather and culture prevent foreign students from meeting their leisure preferences. However, these common constraints can be overcome.

Based on the results of the above investigation and research, the author puts forward the following suggestions for eliminating leisure constraints for foreign students to participate in local folk cultural activities in Wenzhou.

#### **5.1. For Foreign Students**

Students are always provided with free transportation, meals, and events. The Wenzhou Foreigners Volunteer Organization is assisting in raising funds for students to join a local sporting organization called the Wenzhou Spartans Rugby Team to help with uniforms, travel for outside games, and other expenses.

There are many organizations and government offices in Wenzhou that can help you learn about culture and folklore.

Wenzhou Daily hosts monthly events where students can participate in cultural activities from their home countries and share them with locals and other foreigners.

Therefore, foreign students could overcome leisure constraints. First of all, they should strengthen Chinese learning and take the initiative to

communicate with others, so as to break through the difficulties of language. Secondly, foreign students should actively learn Chinese culture, values, and customs, as well as Wenzhou's local culture and folk with an open vision and an inclusive mentality. In addition, foreign students should arrange their time reasonably and participate in local folk cultural activities after study to promote adaptation to life in Wenzhou. Foreign students can also organize and invite Chinese to participate in their own cultural activities and promote Sino-foreign cooperation and exchanges, establish friendships.

#### **5.2. For Universities**

In order to create more convenience for overseas students in Wenzhou, the school can compile a manual on Chinese culture and Wenzhou culture and folk. In order to make it understandable to every foreign student who comes to Wenzhou, the text of the manual can be written both in English and Chinese. Its content includes the history, significance, and practices of various traditional festivals and folklore activities.

In addition, colleges and universities should actively provide foreign standard life service measures based on respecting students' cultural practices, and provide foreign students with space to carry out some cultural activities in their own countries. At the same time, the annotations should adopt a bilingual design in Chinese and English to reduce the psychological constraints caused by communication among foreign students, make them better integrated into the school, and generate more interests in Wenzhou culture.

In terms of curriculum design, universities should first pay attention to the needs of foreign students and strengthen Chinese language education at the beginning of enrollment so that they can improve their Chinese proficiency. Secondly, the school should increase elective courses on Wenzhou culture and folk, set up culture and folk interest classes, and organize more culture and folk activities. For example, they can set up Ou embroidery courses for students, introduce

and interpret Ou embroidery in class, and teach students how to do Ou embroidery.

By organizing associations, the school provides more opportunities for foreign students to understand Wenzhou culture and folk. It is advisable that the government establish a culture and folk community for foreign students, attract more foreign students to actively participate in various activities, increase the contact opportunities between foreign students and Wenzhou local cultural and folk activities, and promote exchanges between Chinese and foreign students.

### 5.3 For Government

Wenzhou government can organize municipal-level culture and folk activities and set up a volunteer team to translate for foreign students. At the same time, the government can encourage residents to strengthen interaction with foreign students, and organize boarding family activities, so that foreign students can go deep into Wenzhou's local life and experience the local culture and folk first-hand.

For instance, several government offices and other organizations have provided a variety of cultural activities in recent years.

Wenzhou Foreign Affairs Office, Exit/

Entry Bureau, Wenzhou People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Communities, Wenzhou Foreigners Volunteer Organization, and Wenzhou Daily all provide a variety of cultural activities for the international student population, with translators available.

### Conclusion

This study is of profound significance for foreign students to overcome the leisure constraints of participating in local folk cultural activities, but there are still limitations. Due to the epidemic, the number of people participating in the interview was seven, and the sample size was not large enough to conduct classified research on subjects in different regions and genders.

This study put forward some solutions to constraints of Wenzhou foreign students' participation in folk cultural activities. The author hopes that in the future, more research can be carried out on this topic, deeply investigate the factors of leisure constraints, put forward better suggestions for them, help foreign students understand Wenzhou culture and folk, and thus improve their sense of happiness when studying in Wenzhou.

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### Supplementary Material

The interview outline:

Q1.What's your name?Where are you from?How long have you ever been in Wenzhou?

Q2.Do you know anything about Wenzhou culture and folk?

Q3.Do you want to participate in some folk cultural activities?Why?

Q4.What are the constraints/difficulties to participating in the study/activities of culture and folk?(e.g. time, chance, facility, physical condition, money, friend)

Q5.Has our university carried out any folk cultural activities? Do you have any suggestions for our university?

Name	Nationality	Major	Interview Time	Interview Way
Malanie	French	International trade	2021.12.15	Face to face
Jennie	American		2021.12.20	Online
Ilyas	African	Robotics	2021.12.20	Face to face
Princessa	African	Art	2021.12.22	Online
Lenka	Czech		2021.12.26	Online
Felicia	Korean	Chinese language	2021.12.22	Online
Elsa	African		2021.12.28	Face to face