



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF VEGETARIAN CULTURE IN TAIWAN

Shwu-Huey Wang\*<sup>1</sup>, Yu-Ling Pang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Innovative Product Design and Entrepreneurship Management Far East University,  
TAIWAN

\*Correspondence to Shwu-Huey Wang

## ABSTRACT

*The vegetarian culture has existed in Taiwan for a long time. In order to have a healthier life, more and more people started to accept vegetarian. There are numerous kinds of vegetarian restaurants in Taiwan, and consumers take different ways to support their existence. The study describes the development of vegetarian culture in Taiwan and makes brief prediction for the policy makers and practitioners' references.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Vegetarian, Vegetarianism, Vegetarian foods*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The vegetarian culture has existed in Taiwan for a long time. It is because the impact of “health”, “fashion”, and “environmental friendly” goes prevailing in the modern society, the trend goes up gradually in Taiwan so the new concept has become the rage and lasted for a long time. The vegetarian consumers usually select vegetarian for their individual factors, some of them for religion while the others for health. No matter what the reasons are, the trend of vegetarian in the world is irreversible. Therefore, the objective of the study is to explore the development of vegetarian culture in Taiwan.

## 2. THEORY

### 2.1 Definition of vegetarian food and classification

The vegetarian food culture in Taiwan describes a certain historical background. However, there was no such term in the ancient and people in the early times did not realize how to divide meat food and vegetarian food. We then ran into a great difficulty to unify the definition of vegetarian food. In general, vegetarian food is not equal to vegetable food.

Based on the above, the origin of vegetarianism refers to the dining way to make people live vividly (Chen & Jeng, 2009). Therefore, vegetarian food makes people feel energetic and dynamic, that is why the vegetarian population in Taiwan goes higher and higher in the recent years. According to the food consumption year book published in 2014, the vegetarian population in Taiwan has exceeded 10% of the total population, it is about 2,600,000 in the present.

What is “vegan” or “vegetarian”, “Ovo vegetarian”, “lacto vegetarian”, “Ovo-Lacto vegetarian” and “plant vegan diet”? Based on the definition defined by the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Executive Yuan, vegan or vegetarian refers to no eating the foods contain milk, egg, and plant pentacin. Ovo vegetarian means eating vegan or vegetarian and egg-related products. Lacto vegetarian denotes eating vegan or vegetarian and milk-related products. Plant pentacin implies eating the foods that contain plant pentacin-related foods (Ministry of Health and Welfare Department, Executive Yuan, 2009).

In addition, people also classified vegetarian foods into the following five categories: 1<sup>st</sup> is vegan diet or strict vegetarian diet, which expels all of the foods that come from animal; 2<sup>nd</sup> is lacto vegetarian diet, which including all of the vegan foods plus milk and milk-related products; 3<sup>rd</sup> is lacto ovo vegetarian diet which covers all of the vegetarian foods and milk, milk products and eggs; 4<sup>th</sup> is Zne macrobiotic diet, which contains vegetable, cereal soup, animal products, salads and fruits, and deserts; 5<sup>th</sup> is semi-vegetarian or partial vegetarian diet (Chao, 1995).



Table 1 Vegetarian definition of the International Vegetarian Union (IVU)

Terms	Definition
Vegan	The vegans try to avoid using cruel and exploited ways to treat animals to acquire the daily needs such as foods or clothing as much as possible. No eating animal meats ( including domesticated animals, poultry, fish and seafood ) 、 animal products ( including milk and egg products ) 、 usually no eating honey and no using animal products ( genuine leather, silk, wool, and lanolin, etc. ) .
Vegetarian	Full vegetarian. Ovo-Lacto Vegetarian : No eating meats, but sometimes egg or milk products. Ovo Vegetarian : No eating meats and milk products, but sometimes eggs. Lacto Vegetarian : No eating meats and eggs, but milk products.
Pescetarian	No eating meats and milk/egg products, but fish.
Semivegetarian	Eating a little fish or chicken except vegetables and fruits.
Fruitarian	Eating only raw fruits, cereals and nuts. Rarely or even no eating processed foods. No eating cooked foods and deeply believe that eating only cereals and fruits would not be harmful to the lives of plants.

Source : Liao (2013)

2.2 Flexitarianism

The so-called flexitarianism refers to those who insist on vegetarianism, they basically do not eat meat but not mandatory. Based on the environment or personal spirit, they eat meat occasionally. That is the essence of flexitarianism (Wiki, 2013). Actually, vegan has become a new way of eating; it covers consumers' taste, hobby and affection toward foods; for those who select vegetarian as the main eating way should not be regarded as a vegan person (Dwyer, 2006). In the modern era, all of the vegetarian consumers have much more flexible choices in the diversified new vegetarian times than before. And the situation would also be altered along with the change of the consumer's preference. Therefore, the term "flexitarianism" is consisted of "flexible" and "vegetarian". The flexitarianism refers to those consumers who mostly eat vegetarian foods but also have meats occasionally. The flexitarianism consumers usually own three features: first, they took vegetative food as the base and have meat foods according to personal situation; second, the foods that they have are basically fish-related, meat foods are intentionally avoided; third, they emphasize healthy cooking style, and usually center the point on the food and nutrition balance (Chen & Jeng, 2009).

People also pointed that flexitarianism is to obtain the health benefit, but not totally give up meat foods. Therefore, how long or how often can a vegetarian have meat foods? The answer is based on personal needs. The trend of flexitarianism makes people accept healthy diet; they don't have to drastically change their eating habit. Meanwhile, how less meat would have favorable impacts on ecology and personal economy, the answer is also depends on varied situation (Lin & Huang, 2012).

The recent vegetarian population in Taiwan has significantly increased; however, the consumers in the present stage are all flexitarian except some for the religious factor. Most of the vegetarian consumers go for the needs of environmental friendly, health, and fashion. Therefore, flexitarian are classified into "environmental friendly type", "health type", and "fashion type". It is described as the following: the vegetarian population in Taiwan in the recent years has significantly increased, the consumers in the present stage are all flexitarian, most of the flexitarian consumers go for environmental friendly, healthy, and fashionable demanding. Therefore, the flexitarian consumers are divided into "environmental friendly", "healthy", and "fashionable" three types. Please refer to the following for the details of the three types ( Chen, 2010; Suiis , 2010 ) :

2.2.1 Environmental friendly type

The flexitarian who pay attention to environmental friendly have the highest activity power in the present. They have higher demand in meat substitutes and are the main consumption group of mock meat products. It is estimated that if the campaign of "Vegetarian one day a week" is keeping lasted, the population of flexitarian would highly increase. And possibly because of the diversified vegetarian products, rich food flavors and popularity of supply points, the vegetarian usage frequency is then gradually lifted.



### 2.2.2 Healthy type

The flexitarian consumers who consider health important don't have much demand in full vegetarian. The healthy type vegetarian consumers do not present significant difference in the vegetarian ingredients but pay more attention in the health concepts like "whether the foods are mixed with high fiber, low cholesterol and low additives", or if the foods are diversified to increase the attraction of eating.

### 2.2.3 Fashionable type

The fashionable flexitarian consumers show higher difference with the ordinary consumers. They have more clear and typical personality, therefore, it is suggested that "celebrity endorsement marketing" would be the most effective when promoting to the group. It is because they have the demand to follow the fashion, the novel and cool vegetarian products are more appealing to them. (suiis, 2010) ◦

**Table 2 Features and types of flexitarian consumers**

Features of flexitarian consumers
1. Plant-based diet plus animal foods according to individual situation (averagely once a week, but no more than three times a week).
2. The edible animal foods are mainly fish- based, avoid meat products.
3. They pay attention to healthy cooking style, balanced ingredients and nutrition at the same time.
Types of flexitarian consumers
Environmental friendly type: The group is with the most powerful activity in the present; they have higher demand for meat substitutes and are the main consumption group of meat-less products.
Healthy type: Their demand for pure vegetarian is not so high and present not significantly in the ingredients and strictness of pure vegetarian. They concern more about the concepts of "high fiber, low cholesterol, and low additives", or whether diversified selection would be available.
Fashionable type: The features of the group present higher differences in typical and personalized products than the usual customers. Hence, they have the demands for following fashionable products. When promoting to the group with vegetarian products, it is suggested that celebrity endorsement marketing would be the most effective way. The novel and cool vegetarian products would be more appealing to them.

Source: Chen & Jeng (2009); suiis (2010)

## 2.3 The flourishing situation of vegetarian in Taiwan

Based on the reports entitled : "1993-1996 Nutrition And Health Survey in Taiwan" issued by Taiwan Food and Drug Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, there is one full vegetarian out of ten who aged between 19-44 . Accordingly, it is estimated that there are a total of two million vegetarian population in Taiwan.

Presently, consumers had broken away the sake of religion, therefore, the pan vegetarian population has reached up to about two million. It is significantly increased in a short time, it is visible that vegetarianism is pretty prevail in Taiwan. If the factors like fashion, environmental friendly, ethic, and health are added, it is expected that the vegetarian population in the future would go higher and higher. And the amount of customer that is willing to consume at vegetarian restaurants would be even more. 如

As the increasing of vegetarian population, Taiwan gradually holds the leading position in Asia in vegetarian technical development and market volume (Lin, Tsai, & Yeh, 2006) . The highly diversified vegetarian food in Taiwan mainly attributed to the great amount of vegetarian population. And the reason why the amount of vegetarian population goes significantly higher is because there is a lot of flexitarian population, but not for their consumption, the vegetarian population would not be increasing all the time. In the past, vegetarian was regarded as the diet of specific religion; while nowadays, vegetarian foods could be found from street food vendors, buffet, chained restaurants or even some famous vegetarian restaurants. It is evident that vegetarian culture is prevailing in Taiwan.



As the standard of living goes up and for citizens' health and safety, government in Taiwan spared no effort to promote the "meatless Monday" campaign. Though it is not mandatory, one can realize from the intensive support and response of governmental organization and non-governmental organization that it's not just a slogan but solid action.

Hence, the air of vegetarian culture would definitely drive more and more consumers to join under the great efforts paid by the groups of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The expected increasing vegetarian population in the future would make the entire vegetarian market be more diversified. It is documented that the proportion of vegetarian population in India is the highest in the world, however, the 10% of vegetarian population in Taiwan plus the ratio of flexitarian population turns to be even higher than that of India. Accordingly, the vegetarian consumption experiences in Taiwan are definitely pretty referential for the practitioners.

It is because governmental organization and celebrities from all walks of life positively responsive cooperation, the vegetarian culture in Taiwan could be flourishing in a more wonderful way; the other reason is because consumer awareness has greatly looked up in the recent years, especially some of the consumers typically pay attention to keeping good health and environmental friendly awareness. Therefore, no matter how big the scale is, the vegetarian food stands or restaurants in Taiwan all care about the concepts of health and environmental friendly pretty much.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The study reviewed the development of vegetarian industry in Taiwan. In the authors' opinion, the developing process of vegetarian culture is actually a miniature of human being's improvement in food selection. The popularity of vegetarian culture provides evidence that people have more advanced knowledge in healthy diet. Vegetarianism not only improves our health but also significantly reduce emission, which is a great contribution for our healthier life. It is expected that vegetarian industry would become more and more popular in our foreseeable future. Practitioners could keep on the investment of the industry to catch the needs of vegetarian consumers so that the market sales would go up and up.

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