

Cultures and Sports Preference

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Historical evidence shows that sports and recreational activities are human activities which develop as man evolves through time. If the word "culture," according to MACIVER (1963), refers to the expression of human nature in its modes of living and thinking and its every day activities, then sport and recreational activities must be included in the realm of "culture." Along with the evolution of human civilization, man developed his own form of sports and recreational activities for different purposes. Games, sports, and recreational activities in some societies can play significant roles of providing social intercourse in which group unity is promoted, provide opportunity for groups of individuals to gain prestige and honor through victory in events, highly approved by all, and provide an outlet for excessive emotions connected with the life crises of birth, marriage, and death (DUNLAP 1969). In some societies games and sports have become judicial mechanisms for setting the boundaries of rice fields, means of selecting a mate, demonstration of the prestige and power of a tribal chief, and means of insuring a successful harvest (FREDERICKSON 1969). Games and sports in some primitive cultures have symbolic meanings. For example, the lograces of the Timbira in Brazil was a ritualistic competition with symbolic meanings related to both religious and social institutions (LUSCHEN 1970). Another scholar (FELSHIN 1972) gives her position on the relationship between sport and culture stating that the study of the sociocultural aspect of movement is concerned with the cultural connotation of movement and the way in which movement is understood in society. She argues that the social and cultural setting is a

significant aspect underlying the organization and selection of perceptions related to why and how people move.

Despite the importance of sport in culture, many scholars have commented that the field of sociology has almost missed acknowledging sport as a domain of investigation. The difficulty in acknowledging sport as an important part of cultural history is due to the fact that sport does not function in many of the fields conventionally credited with making important contributions to history (DANIELS 1969). Current sport sociologists now argue that the study of sports and games of different nations provides a touchstone for understanding how people live, work, think, and at the same time provide related data to other facets of political and economic life (COZENS and STUMPF 1969; MORTON 1963). HUNT (1964) has noted an interesting point when he analyzed games and sports as a reflection of the life of people from different cultures around the world. In Africa, as HUNT noted, no team play exists because the major part of life's activities of the people for centuries has been for survival and much of this is on an individual basis. The play patterns of the Far East, as another example, present an overall picture of individual competition in athletics and sports which is different from the effort of competition in the Western world. To illustrate the association of types of games and the social system, ROBERTS and SUTTON-SMITH (1969) systematically classify games into three types on the basis of outcome attributes. The first type, games of physical skill, refers to those games in which the outcome is determined by the players' motor activities. Individual sports are in this category. The second type, games of strategy, refers to games in which the outcome is determined by rational choices among possible courses of action. Team sports are in this type. The third type, games of chance, refers to games in which the outcome is determined by guesses or by some uncontrolled artifact such as a dice or a wheel.

In cross-cultural investigations of these three different types of games as related to basic orientations in the process of socialization, LUSCHEN (1970) found that games of physical skill or individual sports are related to societies that emphasize achievement orientation. Games of strategy or team sports are found in societies where obedience and the value of collectivity is stressed. Games of chance are related to societies that emphasize routine responsibility in the socialization process. Three sociocultural factors that influence social behavior in the sport event are identified as industrialization and technology, Protestant ethics, and achievement orientation. It was reported that countries which won medals in Olympic games were countries that possessed these three sociocultural characteristics.

The information presented up to this point indicates an interdependence between sports and human culture. If culture is constituted by the shared meanings, values, and ideas which develop through social interaction, each social system would then develop a unique cultural phenomenon which differs from the others. This assumption leads to interesting questions, such as "Is the place on the scale of values the same for advanced industrial societies as for the emerging countries" or "Does the status of sports in advanced societies influence the value placed on sports in less advanced societies" (LOY and KENYON 1969, 15). In order to come up with answers to such socio-psychological questions, the author investigated the attitude toward sport, or physical activity, held by people from different countries. KENYON's scale of attitude toward physical activity was used as an instrument for the study. The scale was developed by KENYON (1968b) based on the six subdomains of physical activity identified as 1) physical activity as a social experience, 2) physical activity for health and fitness, 3) physical activity as the pursuit of vertigo, 4) physical activity as an aesthetic experience, 5) physical activity as catharsis, and 6) physical activity as an ascetic experience. The subdomains described in detail by KENYON (1968a, 99-101) are as follows:

1. Physical activity as a social experience. A characterization of those activities whose primary purpose is to provide a medium for social intercourse, i.e., to meet new people and to perpetuate existing relationships.
2. Physical activity for health and fitness. A characterization of those activities in which participation is designed to improve one's health and physical fitness.
3. Physical activity as the pursuit of vertigo. A characterization of those activities or experiences providing, at some risk to the participant, an element of thrill and excitement through the mediums of speed, acceleration, sudden change of direction, or exposure to dangerous situations, with the participant remaining in control.
4. Physical activity as an aesthetic experience. A characterization of those activities which are thought of as possessing beauty or certain artistic qualities such as ballet, gymnastics, or figure skating.
5. Physical activity as catharsis. A characterization of those activities which provide, through some vicarious means, a release of tension precipitated by frustration.
6. Physical activity as an ascetic experience. A characterization of those activities that are conceived of as requiring long, strenuous, and often painful training and stiff competition, and which demand a deferment of many other gratifications.

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EAST ASIAN, SOUTHEAST ASIAN, AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES

The purpose of the study was to compare the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity among adults from six countries, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, and the United States. The subjects were 606 adults from these six countries who had enrolled in classes at eight universities in the United States during the Fall and Spring semesters 1986–1987. These universities are Ball State University, Indiana University, Michigan State University, University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Buffalo, and University of Cincinnati. All subjects were asked to complete a survey instrument consisting of items eliciting personal information and a semantic differential scale to measure the attitude toward each of the six subdomains of physical activity mentioned above (see the instrument in the appendix). The data were analyzed using a discriminant analysis technique to determine if any of the six subdomains of physical activity could discriminate among the groups of subjects. The pooled within-groups correlations between the canonical discriminant functions and the six variables (the six subdomains of physical activity) were calculated to identify which variable was the best discriminator. In what follows I present some of the significant findings.

1. Contrasting the attitude toward physical activity between the subjects from East Asian countries (China, Japan, and South Korea) and the subjects from Southeast Asian countries (Malaysia and Thailand) the following results were observed.

The first canonical discriminant function yielded a Chi-square value of 24.379 at six degrees of freedom which exceeded the required value at the alpha level of .05. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity between the subjects from East Asian countries and the subjects from Southeast Asian countries was rejected.

The pooled within-groups correlations between the canonical discriminant function and the discriminating variables showed that the sixth subdomain (physical activity as an asectic experience) and the second subdomain (physical activity for health and fitness) produced the highest coefficient of .7038 and .5295, respectively. This means that these two subdomains were the ones which most discriminated the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity between the subjects from East Asian and from Southeast Asian countries.

The mean scores showed that the East Asian subjects, i.e. Chinese, Japanese and South Korean students, possessed higher scores than the

TABLE 1

Discriminant Analysis of Attitude toward Physical Activity between the Subjects from East Asian Countries and the Subjects from Southeast Asian Countries

Canonical Discriminant Function	Eigen Value	Wilk's Lamda	Chi-square	Significance Level
1.	.0499	.952	24.379*	.0004
* At six degrees of freedom, P at .05 level of significance=12.6				
Discriminating Variables	Pooled Within-Groups Correlations Coefficients	Mean Scores		
		E. Asian	S. E. Asian	
Social Experience	.2544	44.6562	45.5459	
Helath & Fitness	.5295*	47.7531	49.2432	
Pursuit of Vertigo	-.0829	32.8562	32.4540	
Aesthetic Experience	.2306	45.9312	46.7838	
Catharsis	.1653	44.9219	45.5351	
Ascetic Experience	-.7038*	32.7187	29.4216	
Groups Centroids		-.1696	.2934	

Southeast Asian subjects, the Malaysian and Thai students, in the ascetic subdomain (the mean score of 32.7187 compared to 29.4216). This could be due to the fact that the value of "self-discipline" has been emphasized throughout East Asian society for a long time. The discipline value was stressed in Japanese families in the prewar time. According to FUKUTAKE (1981, 44), once the Japanese child reached a certain age "his discipline quickly became rigid, and it was based on what others approved of or considered appropriate to society." This method of socialization in Japanese families is still being accepted by the present generation. Thus, one can see how the Japanese place high value on self-discipline in every aspect of their life. This value was also reflected in the context of physical activity and sports.

Chou En-lai, one of the great Chinese leaders, told his people that "we should move a step forward in developing physical culture and sports among the broad masses, effectively strengthen the peoples physical constitution, and heighten our country's physical and sports level" (SEBAN 1976, 306). His view on sport undoubtedly led to hard training and strict discipline among Chinese athletes in order to achieve the goal of winning in sport contests.

As for the South Korean finding, it is common knowledge that athletes from South Korea have demonstrated high physical skills, stamina, muscular strength, and power over athletes from other countries in regional sports tournaments. This phenomenon could be also due to the view of sports as an ascetic experience, a demonstration of

self-discipline, in South Korean culture.

2. The second subdomain (physical activity for health and fitness) was the second variable that differentiated the attitude scores between the East Asian and the Southeast Asian students. It is indicated in Table 1 that the Southeast Asian students had a higher mean score than did the East Asian students (the mean score of 49.2432 compared to 47.7531). Support for this finding comes from the cultural value Southeast Asian societies place on sport. To them sport is a milieu for developing one's physical and mental health. Sport for health comes first; sport for competition is second in importance. This concept is emphasized throughout school life as well as afterwards. Thus, Southeast Asian peoples tend to participate in sports for fun rather than for the purpose of winning. They shun devoting themselves to hard practice because of their view "as long as one participates in the game, that is sufficient." ANDERSON (1982, 173) in her study of Thai children's game-playing behavior in a village in central Thailand also reports that to Thai children "playing together is more important than competition itself." Such an attitude fosters sociability. But in competitive sports in which the ultimate goal is winning, the attitude, should it be carried over, becomes detrimental. One sometimes sees in Thai athletes a weakness in sports due to this lack of strong competitive spirit.

When the responses of the Asian students—the Chinese, the Japanese, the South Korean, the Malaysian, and the Thai—are compared to those of American students, the following findings can be observed.

The Chi-square value of 39.334 at six degrees of freedom exceeded the required value at the alpha level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity between students from Asian countries and students from the United States was rejected.

The pooled within-groups correlations between the canonical discriminant function and the discriminating variables showed that the second subdomain (physical activity for health and fitness) and the third subdomain (physical activity as the pursuit of vertigo) produced the highest coefficients of .6553 and .5816, respectively. Thus, these two subdomains were the ones which most discriminated the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity between students from Asian countries and those from the United States.

The mean scores showed that the Asian students had a higher score than the American students in the subdomain of health and fitness (48.2990 compared to 45.4950); the former put strong emphasis on the value of good health and physical fitness. This finding might be

TABLE 2

Discriminant Analysis of Attitude toward Physical Activity between the Subjects from Asian Countries and the Subjects from the United States

Canonical Discriminant Function	Eigen	Wilk's Lamda	Chi-square	Significance level
1.	.0676	.937	39.334	.000
* At six degrees of freedom, P at .05 level of significance=12.6				
Discriminating Variables	Pooled Within-Groups Correlations Coefficients	Mean Scores		
		Asian	U.S.A.	
Social Experience	.1150	44.9822	45.5644	
Health & Fitness	-.6553*	48.2990	45.4950	
Pursuit of Vertigo	.5816*	32.7089	36.7624	
Aesthetic Experience	-.0168	46.2436	46.1485	
Catharsis	-.2635	45.1465	43.7129	
Ascetic Experience	.0954	31.5109	32.1683	
Group Centroids		-.1161	.5806	

explained by looking at the historical development of games as a form of physical activity. CULIN (1958, 18), points out that games originally "must be regarded not as conscious inventions, but as survivals from primitive conditions." He declare that games in Asia had been originally developed for the survival of primitive social conditions which existed in society. The notation of "survival purposes" of games implies that those games have been used as a vehicle for securing one's physical and mental conditions. Primitive games, as CULIN (1958, 18) argues, "originated in magical rites, and chiefly as a means of divination." This means that the end purposes of the primitive games were to assure one's health and safety, and also good farming productivity. CULIN's view on the development of games in primitive societies is supported by FREDERICKSON (1969). Participation in a physical activity in contemporary society, according to FREDERICKSON, is also for the purpose, of survival that is, to stay healthy and to be able to survive coronary disease. Thus, the concept of survival through games and sport is logically associated with the concept of health and fitness which may still exist to a large extent in Asian societies. On the other hand, modern games, as CULIN (1958, 18) pointed out, "have so nearly lost their original meaning that it is practically impossible to trace their origin." Americans, as representatives of modern society, have practiced modern games throughout their history. Therefore, American society may have placed a higher value on games or sports for reasons other than health and fitness.

3. The third subdomain (physical activity as the pursuit of vertigo) was found to be the next best discriminator between the two groups. It was found that the American students had higher mean scores than did the Asian subjects in this subdomain. This finding could be the best argument to demonstrate the value Americans place on games or sports. Games which involve risks, thrills, excitement, even exposure to dangerous situations, have been invented consciously by American society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Automobile racing, sky diving, rock climbing, hang gliding, to name just a few, have become popular in American society. Some rock climbers have expressed their feelings about participating in the sport as:

No, I don't consider it dangerous . . .

The degree of danger is in a way determined by you.

I like being up and looking down. When I look down, I look at the view, not the danger: I know I'm protected from that.

Climbing may be less dangerous than walking down the street, because I haven't got control over the latter; there are more variables that can't be calculated.

(MACALOON and CSIKSZENTMIHALYI 1983, 360-370)

Games that involve risks, thrills or dangerous situations are rarely seen in Asian countries. Even though there are some games or sports that could be categorized as games of thrill, such as car racing, it is a recent introduction from the West and has not been widely accepted. It is regarded as too dangerous; the risks involved are not worth it.

When comparing the three groups of students (East Asian, South-east Asian, and American) simultaneously, the following findings were observed.

The first canonical discriminant function yielded a Chi-square value of 64.331 at 12 degrees of freedom which exceeded the required value to reject the null hypothesis at the alpha level of .05. The second canonical discriminant function yielded a Chi-square value of 18.693 at five degrees of freedom which also exceeded the required value to reject the null hypothesis at the alpha level of .05. Thus, the significant difference in the attitude toward the six subdomains of physical activity among the three groups occurred in both functions.

The pooled within-groups correlations between the canonical discriminant function and the discriminating variables showed that the three groups were different in the subdomains of health and fitness and the subdomain of pursuit of vertigo in the first function. The three groups were also different in the subdomain of ascetic in the

TABLE 3
Discriminant Analysis of Attitude toward Physical Activity among the Subjects from East Asian Countries, Southeast Asian Countries, and the United States.

Canonical Discriminant Function	Eigen Value	Wilk's Lamda	Chi-square	Significance level
1	.0789	.898	64.331*	.000
2	.0316	.969	18.693**	.002
* At 12 degrees of freedom, P at .05 level of significance=21.0				
**At five degrees of freedom, P at 0.5 level of significance=11.1				

Discriminating Variable	Pooled Within-Groups Correlations Coefficients		Mean Scores		
	Function 1	Function 2	E. Asian	SE. Asian	U.S.A.
Social Experience	.0010	.3474	44.6562	45.5459	45.5644
Health & Fitness	-.7188*	.0666	47.7531	49.2432	45.4950
Pursuit of Vertigo	.5024	.3217	32.8562	32.4540	36.7024
Aesthetic Experience	-.0929	.2166	45.9312	46.7838	46.1485
Catharsis	-.2732	-.0147	44.9219	45.5351	43.7129
Ascetic Experience	.3323	-.6643**	32.7187	29.4216	32.1683
Group Centroids	Function 1		.0023	-.3041	.5496
	Function 2		-.1677	.1859	.1907

second function.

The mean scores indicated that the students from Southeast Asian countries possessed the highest score in the subdomain of health and fitness (49.2432). The students from the United States possessed the highest score in the subdomain of pursuit of vertigo (36.7024).

The students from the East Asian countries and the students from the United States possessed about equal scores in the subdomain of ascetic, while the Southeast Asian students possessed the lowest score in this subdomain. Therefore, it could be concluded that

1. the students from the Southeast Asian countries preferred the health and fitness subdomain more than did the other two groups,
2. the students from the United States preferred the pursuit of vertigo subdomain more than did the other two groups,
3. the students from the East Asian countries and the students from the United States preferred the ascetic subdomain more than did the students from the Southeast Asian countries.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the above study indicate that different societies place different values on physical activities or sports. The Southeast Asian respondents (students) showed great concern for the health aspect of

sport. Thus, their preferred sport or physical activities were those activities which contribute to their health and well-being. Popular sports among the Southeast Asian, the Malaysian, and Thai, are those games without body contact such as badminton, tennis, *sepak-takraw* (a traditional sport). Walking and jogging have become widely practiced among Thai people in the last ten years. For Thai people the phrase "walk or run for your health" is becoming a slogan for staying healthy.

The American students showed their preference for the subdomain of pursuit of vertigo. This is supported by the fact that they love sports or physical activities with a high risk or thrill. American Football, one of the favorite sports in contemporary American society, can be cited as the best example of the American love for the vertigo game. The Indianapolis 500 car race, another example, is one of the biggest sports event of American society because Americans love to see how fast man can move on the track. Many risk sports, one can observe today, have originated in the United States, but these activities, in contrast, are rarely seen in Asia.

The East Asian respondents have placed high value on the ascetic aspect of physical activities. This is due to the fact that they deeply believe in the value of self-discipline. For East Asian society, self-discipline is a requirement for achieving intended goals. In the sport context, this value leads them to commit themselves fully to strict training in order to become champions in tournaments. Athletes from the East Asian countries, as one can see, are among those on the front line in the world of sports today.

APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ATTITUDE SCALE

PART I: BACKGROUND: Please mark "X" in the provided spaces that best describe you.

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: 18-22, 23-27, 28-35, 36-40, 41 and over
3. Nationality: American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Thai

PART II: AREAS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity (or sport) has been reduced into six areas:

1. Physical activity as a social experience

AREA 3

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A THRILL BUT INVOLVING SOME RISK

Physical activities providing, at some risk to the participant, thrills and excitement through speed, acceleration, sudden change of direction, and exposure to dangerous situations.

- 1. good ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ bad
- 2. worthless ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ worthwhile
- 3. pleasant ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unpleasant
- 4. sour ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ sweet
- 5. nice ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ awful
- 6. sad ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ happy
- 7. clean ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ dirty
- 8. relaxed ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ tense

AREA 4

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS THE BEAUTY IN HUMAN MOVEMENT

Physical activities which are thought of as possessing beauty or certain artistic qualities such as ballet, gymnastics or figure skating.

- 1. good ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ bad
- 2. worthless ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ worthwhile
- 3. pleasant ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unpleasant
- 4. sour ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ sweet
- 5. nice ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ awful
- 6. sad ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ happy
- 7. clean ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ dirty
- 8. relaxed ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ tense

AREA 5

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TENSION

The participation (or watching others participate) in physical activities to get away from the problems of modern living to provide a release from "pent up emotions."

- 1. good ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ bad
- 2. worthless ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ worthwhile
- 3. pleasant ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unpleasant
- 4. sour ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ sweet
- 5. nice ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ awful
- 6. sad ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ happy

7. clean ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ dirty
 8. relaxed ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ tense

AREA 6

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS PROLONGED AND STRENOUS TRAINING

Physical activities which require long periods of strenuous and often painful training; which involve stiff competition and demands that the individual give up a number of pleasures for a period of time.

1. good ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ bad
 2. worthless ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ worthwhile
 3. pleasant ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unpleasant
 4. sour ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ sweet
 5. nice ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ awful
 6. sad ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ happy
 7. clean ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ dirty
 8. relaxed ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ tense

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