

Sport and National Character in Asia

亞洲國家的體育特徵

David J. Waters Daniel E. Smith

Physical Education & Sports Science Academic Group,
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, SINGAPORE

水大衛 丹尼爾·史密斯

新加坡南洋理工大學教育學院體育與運動科學組



Abstract

Based on data derived from the International Sport Management Questionnaire (ISMQ) and the National Sport Development Index (NSDI), tendencies are revealed of a nation's development in three domains of sport. These domains (termed Mass Sport, Educational Sport, and Elite Sport) provide insight into national sport culture; low NSDI scores, for instance, divulge a sport delivery system for that domain which is at low level, is de-emphasised, or nonexistent. Data is provided for 14 Asian nations including overall NSDI score as well as the distinct domains mentioned above. From this data, ensuing discussion revolves around a concept of national character of sport for Asian nations such as Japan, China, and Hong Kong, among others.

摘要

根據國際體育管理問卷調查 (ISMQ) 和國家體育發展指數 (NSDI) 的資料顯示，一個國家的體育發展主要表現在三個方面，即群眾體育、學校體育及競技體育。而從這三方面可以了解這一國家的體育文化。例如，NSDI評分低者，體育管理運作系統在這一方面往往處於較低水平，或者不重視，甚至是名存實亡的。這些調查資料涉及 14 個亞洲國家，包括其上述三個不同方面的狀況極其 NSDI 評分。根據這些資料，本文圍繞著日本、中國、香港等亞洲國家和地區的體育特征進行了討論。

Key Words: National character; national psyche; sport development; sport culture.

關鍵詞：國家特徵，國家精神，體育發展，體育文化

Introduction

Comparative educators starting with Sir Michael Sadler, an Englishman, first presented conceptual frameworks of state and national education at the turn of the 20th century. Later, Mallinson (1975) identified dominant and recessive factors that helped determine a nation's identity and character. His symbiotic and dynamic concept of the interweaving of factors, traditions, and conditions (taking into account historical, political, economic, cultural, and social factors) was termed "national character."

Utilising knowledge of a nation's sport delivery systems, historical precedents, present (and future) strategic plans for sport infrastructure, as well as myriad inter-relationships between sport

and factors mentioned above (by Mallinson): can a national character of sport be conceptualised? In a similar way, can this be termed as a national psyche of sport (encompassing spirit or "mind" of a nation)?

Besides the diverse and far reaching impact that sport participation has on individuals that has been well-documented (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, and physical health) elsewhere, the literature has revealed that groups are influenced in many ways by their participation in sport. Here, groups may be deemed as such: families, neighbourhoods, parishes, villages, communities, and ethnic or racial groups.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) determined that cross-cultural differences existed in individual's cognitive orientation. Specifically,

individuals within an Eastern cultural perspective displayed interdependent perspectives of the self (e.g., strive to fit into the social context, affiliate with others, create harmony within the in-group) that is related to a task goal orientation. Conversely, individuals within a Western cultural perspective displayed independent perspectives of the self (e.g., strive to be unique, stand out among others, demonstrate high ability) and an achievement motivation related to an ego goal orientation. Markus and Kitayama's cross-cultural findings within social psychology suggest the need to examine the influence of cultural perspectives on cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of a sport culture.

A most important dimension of cultural difference in social behaviour, across diverse cultures of the world, is the emphasis on individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1985). Individualism-Collectivism (IC) refers to the degree to which a culture encourages, fosters, and facilitates the needs, wishes, desires, and values of an autonomous and unique self over those of a group. Members of individualistic cultures see themselves as separate and autonomous individuals. Members of collectivistic cultures, however, see themselves as fundamentally connected with others. Asian cultures tend to be more collectivist in their orientation. In individualistic cultures, personal needs and goals take precedence over the needs of others. In a collectivistic culture, individual needs are sacrificed to satisfy the group. Triandis (1985) concluded that personality is less evident in collectivist cultures than it is in individualist cultures. These differences may also affect their sport culture.

We have evidence of nations who have made their mark through their sport culture—impressions evident even today in the new millennium. For instance nearly 3,000 years ago, ancient Greek sport culture spread throughout the Peloponnesian and the Mediterranean region (Gardiner, 1987). Tribes and city-states based their activities on military preparedness, observed by their choice of running, wrestling, boxing, javelin throwing, chariot racing, and others. *Agon* was seen as a contest or struggle. It can be theorised, then, that a Greek national character arose not only from the conquering of territory and peoples, but also from the systematic passing of Hellenic cultural ideas, philosophies of physical and mental development, as well as the rites and relationships of sport and religion.

Although the Romans emphasised training for war, too, later the Empire left not only their ideas concerning codified law and architecture, but also sport and its physical remnants which can be found throughout Europe in the form of stadiums and baths. Mechikoff and Estes (1998) discussed the enthusiasm and tendencies for spectator sport that flourished in Rome and her territories. They concluded, "sport was imbedded in the cultural fabric of Rome" (p. 81).

Several ethnic groups were documented in an ethnological and sociological report of worldwide play habits by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1980). It was reported that boys' and girls' sport activities in the Ivory Coast were distinct from each other and mirrored divisions in social life. In Laos, games involving family life are very common and the gap between real life and play is regarded as minimal. Further, the sport heritage of Peruvian Indians was found to be imprinted with the Spanish culture of centuries ago. The encroachment of foreign games and toys has supplanted local toys and craft objects (UNESCO, 1980).

Blain, Boyle, and O'Donnell's textbook (1993) concentrated its discussion of national character on 12 European nations and the impact of sport journalism on regional, super-regional, and supra-national identity. For instance, media coverage depicted British men's sport as having "fighting spirit" (p. 65), while women athletes lacked the "killer instinct" (p. 9). It was concluded that the mass media, especially television, had the power to induce integrative, homogenising, or imperialistic tendencies based on its depiction of a nation's sporting "typical personality" (p.17).

Methods and Procedures

In an international and comparative investigation of the role of sport and its relationship to nation building, the International Sport Management Questionnaire (ISMQ) was developed and administered to 197 nations' sport administrators, coaches, and educators. These individuals were employed either in Olympic committee offices or higher education institutions of their representative nation. The overall ISMQ return rate was 27% (53/197). By continent, ISMQ return rates were: Africa, 24% (12/51); America, 23% (10/43); Asia, 28% (14/50); Europe, 34% (14/41); and Oceania, 25% (3/12).

From ISMQ data, respondent nations were assigned scores on the National Sport Development Index (NSDI) developed by Waters (1996). The NSDI (100 points maximum) was employed to systematically examine sport delivery systems across a nation's physical activity and sport continuum. Hence, the NSDI was composed of three equally weighted domains (termed "Mass Sport", "Educational Sport," and "Elite Sport") and eight factor components (objectives, legislation, organisation, implementation, physical resources, research and evaluation, human resources, and contribution to nation building).

For the purpose of this study, NSDI domains are defined as follows:

1. Mass Sport: often called Sport for All, includes opportunities, events, and/or organised programmes (co-operative or competitive) for large groups, including the general population participating in clubs, on playfields, in gymnasiums, community centres, and community recreation programmes.
2. Educational Sport: often termed Physical Education (PE), includes organised sport and physical activity (indoors and/or outdoors) for students in schools or associated educational environments.
3. Elite Sport: includes the organisation of high-level, competitive sport at national, international, professional, and/or Olympic standards for both men and women.

Conceptualised and created with the assistance of several international consultants, the study's instruments were prepared using English as its medium. These assistants, in order to assure accuracy in measuring the designed variables, verified breadth and depth of scope, as well as attended to divergent terminology.

The ISMQ was comprised of 138 questions, for which 33 questions were directed to Mass Sport, 40 questions to Educational Sport, and 35 questions to Elite Sport.

For a more thorough discussion of the methodology involved in construction of the ISMQ and NSDI, as well as a case study using data from the Republic of Singapore, see an article by Waters (1998). A regional perspective of the African continent is presented elsewhere by Waters and Krotee (1998).

Results

Respondents ranged from a small kingdom (Bhutan), a sultanate (Brunei Darussalam), a small island nation (Singapore), larger, more-populated islands (Japan and Taiwan), to massive land areas with billions of citizens (India and People's Republic of China). Representative nations came from west Asia (Middle East), as well as north, south, and east Asia. Table 1 presents comprehensive Asian data (on the 100-point NSDI) based upon the national representative's quality ratings, statements, listings, and reported sport data. High scores represent higher levels of sport development as perceived by the respondent.

Table 1. National Sport Development Index (NSDI) for 14 Asian Nations.

Nation	Mass Sport*	Educational Sport*	Elite Sport*	Nation Building**	NSDI Total***
Bhutan	1.9	4.0	6.8	1.0	13.7
Brunei Darussalam	16.2	18.9	22.4	1.0	58.5
China, People's Rep.	23.1	21.3	24.0	1.0	69.4
Hong Kong	17.6	21.0	24.8	1.0	64.4
India	20.1	18.0	0	1.0	39.1
Iran, Islamic Rep.	15.6	21.5	22.4	1.0	60.5
Israel	23.6	24.5	19.9	1.0	69.0
Japan	25.6	30.9	22.2	1.0	79.7
Korea, Rep. of	19.4	23.4	23.9	1.0	67.7
Kuwait	15.5	10.1	13.7	1.0	40.3
Lebanon	16.5	5.0	20.5	1.0	53.0
Singapore	17.2	25.2	12.9	1.0	56.3
Taiwan	3.4	12.7	4.0	0	20.1
Tajikistan	14.9	14.6	0	1.0	30.5
<u>M</u>	16.5	18.7	15.5	0.9	51.6
<u>SD</u>	6.7	6.9	9.2		19.9

Note. * Maximum 33 points for these domains

** Maximum 1 point for this factor component

*** Maximum 100 points total for NSDI

Resultant NSDI scores varied from 13.7 (Bhutan) to 79.7 (Japan) with a mean of 51.6 and a standard deviation of 19.9. The highest score for the Mass Sport domain was 25.6 (Japan) and the lowest score was 1.9 (Bhutan). The Educational Sport domain varied from 4.0 (Bhutan) to 30.9 (Japan). For the Elite Sport domain, the scores varied from 0 (India and Tajikistan) to 24.8 (Hong Kong).

Building a Case for a National Character of Sport

Based on sport development data for Asia above, signs of a national character of sport are evident. While not every nation's national character will be described some pertinent inferences are summarised. For instance, both Taiwan and Hong Kong received their lowest scores on provision for Mass Sport. Each, though, may be at a disadvantage when it comes to developing its Mass Sport domain. Taiwan's geography consists of 60% mountainous terrain—thus forcing people into its few, cramped cities. Hong Kong, for instance, is reclaiming land from the sea (2600 hectares since 1945) (Far East and Australasia, 1994); however, it is primarily being utilised for housing, factories, and projects such as the fine arts centre, convention centre, and the new international airport (completed in 1998). Potential places for the creation of sport facilities for its citizens is, therefore, lessened.

Thus, these two highly populated and land scarce places perhaps forge ahead to try and create a national psyche devoted to Educational (e.g., institutionalised) Sport and/or Elite Sport. Indeed, Taiwan has increasingly emphasised school competitions at all levels from primary to tertiary and youth baseball, in particular. The National College of PE and Sports was established in 1987 to train educators and elite athletes, too. They are also finding regional and international successes in archery, golf, taekwondo, and weightlifting. Two, fully-manned Elite Sport training centres are located in Taoyuan, as well as Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Meanwhile in 1996, a Hong Kong sailor garnered the first Olympic Gold medal for the autonomous region. The Hong Kong Sports Development Board (HKSDB) and its elite training centre, the Sports Institute in Shatin, New Territories, houses upcoming and select individuals and teams. There are thirteen ifocus sports that receive assured and technical support (HKSDB Website, 2000). Sport development in Hong Kong (*Sport Scene*, 2000) was featured in a periodical that promoted athletes, teams, and administrators from all sport domains, as well as the increased marketing and sponsorship of numerous events (pp. 42-45).

Though a national character of Elite Sport has been apparent in recent years in Hong Kong, its efforts at displaying its Elite

Sport prowess were thwarted, however, with its defeat in bidding to host the 2006 Asian Games. Acknowledging that it did not have the political or financial clout for the bid, representatives of the autonomous region have termed it an invaluable experience to draw on for the future ("Honourable Defeat," 2000). Prominent officials are determined that the government be committed to work together with the sport community to promote sport development in the long term; a new world-class stadium with a capacity of 75,000 is planned for completion by 2006 to aid in long-term enhancement of sport standards (SARs Asian Games, 2000).

Based on the data in Table 1, an elevated score for Elite Sport on the NSDI revealed greater levels of sport development in high-level sport, resulting in a skewing of its national psyche towards Elite Sport. Evidence of this is shown in data from Brunei, People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea. In fact, all have been recent hosts of large-scale international games of regional or international importance: Brunei (1999 Southeast Asian Games); China (1990 Asian Games and 2008 Olympic Games); and South Korea (1986 Asian Games, 1988 Olympic Games, and 2002 World Cup co-host).

The Asian nation with the "highest sport development," according to results of the NSDI, was Japan. While presenting efficacy in all domains, a recent look at its broad sporting character can be inferred from a national newspaper's sports pages (*The Asahi Shimbun*, 2001). That day's edition reported on Sapporo's international half-marathon, a national *sumo* wrestling analysis, a baseball series played between the United States and host Japan's collegians, the advancement of the number one Japanese player in England's Wimbledon tennis tournament, and the loss in a title match for World Boxing Association lightweight champion Takanori Hatakeyama. Additionally, that same edition detailed Japan's home defeat of Paraguay in the Kirin Cup at the newly opened Sapporo Dome (attended by more than 39,000 spectators), the Japan Golf Tour Championship with a 24 million yen first prize (Iiyama Cup held at Nishinasuno), that week's Pacific Rim Rugby Championships in Tokyo's Stadium, and finally home grown baseball stars' performances in America's major league baseball.

However, growth in a nation's distinctive character of sport may come with a price. Moffett (2001) reported that Japanese citizen's groups are raising issues with the boom in sport stadium construction for these high profile games, matches, and competitions. He asked the pertinent question of how much enjoyment will people get out of these "hardware triumphs" (p. 18)? Later in the same article, Moffett implied that the 25 billion yen Oita

Big Eye Stadium, for 40,000 spectators, in southwest Japan may be filled only once a year and is a "luxurious and wasteful public works project" (Moffett, 2001, p.18).

Conclusion

Must a nation's psyche of sport be easily defined, stereotypical, or even a commercialised version? Ross (1990) described efforts to combat sport colonisation in schools and communities that promoted and preserved indigenous sport in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Although each of these countries is an active, participating member of international (the International Olympic Committee or IOC) and regional sport organisations (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN), local culture is being carefully maintained through advancement of traditional sport. Examples in these countries are *sepak takraw* (rattan ball game), kite flying, top spinning, and unique forms of martial arts. Summarising that sport in modernising societies is a necessity, Riordan (1986) has suggested "a mixture of indigenous games and Western sports modified and adapted to suit local conditions and national culture" (p.299) as the best way to move a society forward in its push toward development, recognition, and dignity.

Coakley (1998) discussed the variability in the nature and extent of government involvement from one community and society to the next. It is apparent, especially in developing countries, that governments actively nurture and manipulate the national character of sport—and for various reasons and desired outcomes. Burnett and Hollander (1999) observed "a conflict of interest in the objectives of the governing bodies and community members as end-users of sport" (p. 248). In conclusion, they called for human development through sport, rather than just sport or politics. Hence, the national psyche (national character) of sport may conjure up unique meanings for different individuals and interest groups. A rational, systematic plan for development of a national character is warranted, taking into account various levels and types of groups from grassroots to larger society. The fact that a majority of these countries have collectivist as opposed to individualistic cultural orientations may not allow for the generalisation of this data to other cultures.

Besides this investigation's earlier-acknowledged limitations (e.g., English-language-only questionnaire, one respondent per country), the questionnaire was completed by an individual who might have greater information on one domain at the expense of lack of information on other sport domains. While a study of this type is preliminary in nature, the author welcomes collaborative research projects of an international and comparative nature in the distinct disciplines of physical education and sport.

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Correspondence:

Dr. David J. Waters
Nanyang Technological University,
National Institute of Education,
1 Nanyang Walk,
Singapore 637616
Email: davidw@nie.edu.sg

Tel. 65-6790-3704
Fax. 65-6896-9260