

CULTURE CONSTRAINTS ON LEISURE THROUGH CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

Leisure constraints “limit the formation of leisure preferences and ... inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 1991, p.279). Crawford and Godbey (1987) identified three major types of constraints to leisure, which was later followed by the development of a hierarchical model of leisure constraints by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991)(figure 1). These are intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints which have been well-accepted by leisure researchers in North America. While three categories of leisure constraints have been tested in a variety of studies (Lansing and Blood, 1964; Crompton, 1977; Blazey, 1987; Norman, 1995; Tian, Crompton, and Witt, 1996), culture has not been directly examined as a constraint category. However, culture is humanity’s great enabler. With it, human beings compensate for lack of specialized physical tools, such as great speed, size, or strength, protective coloration, claws, or wings, which members of other species use to make their livings. The flip side of enablement is constraint, however. While human beings are enabled by cultures, human beings are also constrained by them. Therefore, based on these two features, what is available or acceptable in some cultures may be unavailable, or unacceptable in others.

Culture has been defined by many researchers many times. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) catalogued 164 definitions of culture and many more have appeared in the last forty years. Nearly all of these have common threads that culture is information (often described as beliefs and values) that is learned from and shared with others. These systems of information about what people should and should not do are superordinate to individual agency and interpersonal relationships. In this light, these three constraint categories seem too individualistically oriented. Human beings, after all, are highly social animals and our social groups have systems of laws, rules, guides, and so on – cultures, to be more precise – that guide both intra and interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, this study attempts to examine whether or not culture impacts on leisure participation and nonparticipation. This study also focuses on exploring how culture plays prescribe and proscribe roles in leisure participation and nonparticipation. Finally, since the great majority of studies of leisure constraints have been conducted in North America, our study addresses constraints in Japan and China in order to highlight constraints in a cross-cultural context.

Method

Purposeful sampling strategies are commonly used in qualitative and ethnographic research. We used snowball sampling, which is one of typical strategies for purposeful selection of cases and individuals, events, or processes (Patton, 2002). Six Japanese and Six Chinese couples who ranged in age from approximately 20 – 80 years are selected for this study. We chose couples instead of individuals because couples may be more constrained by family responsibilities than single people. We selected Tokyo and Yokohama, in Japan, and Beijing and Dalian, in China, as appropriate sites for the study

in the view of their large populations, abundant recreational facilities, and reputations as tourism sites.

All interviews were tape recorded with permit and later transcribed verbatim. We asked about informants' life styles in their homes, their family and work, and their leisure activities. In addition, participants also were asked to talk about what factors constrain their leisure activities and how they overcome these constraints. All of interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Since the researcher is fluent in both Chinese and Japanese, Chinese speakers and Japanese speakers were interviewed in Chinese and Japanese respectively. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, interview transcripts were reviewed by participants. All participant observations were recorded by the form of field notes. A Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998) is utilized to analyze qualitative data and to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action. Therefore, this coding strategy aims at finding whether or not culture influences leisure participation or nonparticipation in Japan and China.

Result

The findings of this study indicated that informants in China and Japan are constrained by interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural factors defined and verified in North America when they want to participate in leisure activities. However, we also found some constraints items which do not obviously belong to any of categories defined by Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991). These constraints items decided by culture appear to be a type of constraint that is not easily subsumed by the intrapersonal, interpersonal, or structural categories. The findings of the study verified culture proscribes and prescribes human behaviors. In the following paragraphs, several excerpts from interviews are selected to indicate other constraints that clearly involve culture. For example, in Japan, traditional Japanese culture proscribes women's leisure activities and emphasized women should "be at home" to take care of their children.

"I live in a traditional Japanese residential area. Most people who live in this area are old people. They think women should stay at home to take care of their kids and do housework. So traditional Japanese culture constricts my leisure activities and makes me give up some leisure activities. (Japanese businessperson, female, 50s)"

In China, as a tradition and obligation, grandparents should give up their leisure activities to take care of their grandchildren if they are retired.

"We have to take care of my grandchildren every day. In traditional Chinese culture, mothers should be responsible for taking care of their grandchildren. We are very old and we also have chronic illnesses, but we have to do this. This is an obligation. (Retired Chinese male, 70s)"

On the other hand, leisure participation is also prescribed by culture. For example, in China, while everybody knows playing firecrackers is a dangerous leisure activity for children, Chinese culture suggests that people should do it during the

traditional festivals and special events because firecrackers can bring fortune and get rid of evils.

"I do not like firecrackers because it is dangerous leisure activity for everybody during the traditional festivals such as Spring Festival (Chinese lunar year). However, people have to do it during the Spring Festival because Chinese traditional culture prescribed firecrackers can bring fortune and get rid of evils. (Chinese female, 30s)"

In Japan, while Pachinko (a type of gambling) is banned by many other countries, it still is viewed as a "pleasure-seeking" leisure activity by Japanese people regardless age and gender.

"My leisure activity is playing Pachinko. Pachinko game shop can be found everywhere in Japan and Pachinko game is a legal and favorable leisure activity. Usually, I bet 5000~8000 Yen every time. Sometime I won, sometime I lost. But it is my most favorable pleasure-seeking" leisure activity. I got relaxed from the activities. (Japanese male, 40s)"

The informants themselves used the terms "culture" and "tradition" to describe constraints on their leisure. We feel that there is virtue in using their own categories to classify constraints if we want to understand how they believe their leisure is constrained.

Discussion and potential applications

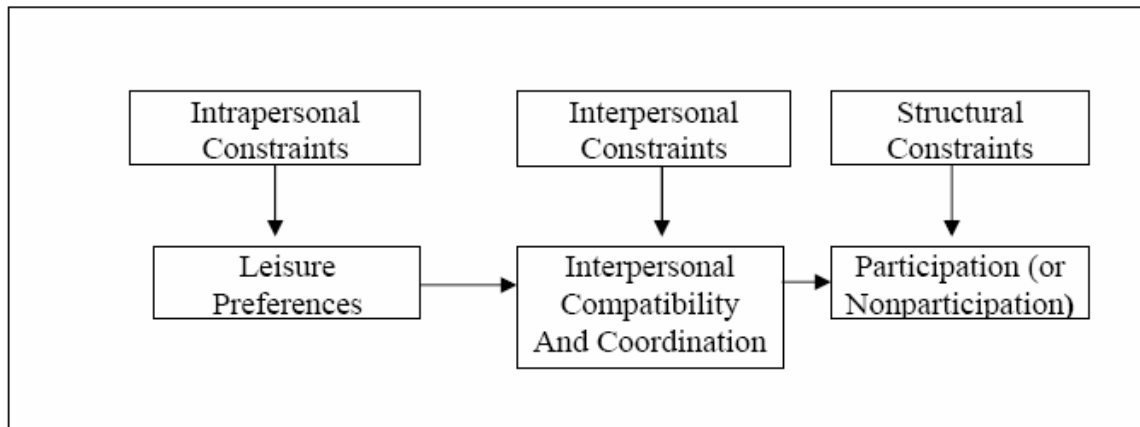
While the findings of this study indicated that leisure constraints categories established in North America such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints, also exist in two societies outside of North America, Japan, China, the results of the study verified our contention that culture, as a constraint factor, also influences leisure participation and nonparticipation. Our studies verified that culture both prescribes (people should do certain things) and proscribes (people should not do certain things) intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior differently in different cultures.

Therefore, we feel that both intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints should be subordinate to culture. Furthermore, we believe that present leisure constraints theory in North America, which has been regarded as monocultural, has led to a disregard for culture as a variable. However, cross-cultural data expose the weakness in such a perspective. In sum, leisure constraints theory must be refined on the basis of cross-cultural research and culture itself is a constraint category that may substantially enhance leisure constraints theory via cross-cultural research. Therefore, in our revised model, we add cultural constraints to the hierarchical model and place cultural constraints prior to individual level (intrapersonal and interpersonal) constraints (see Figure 2). We feel that the model, thus configured, offers a better way of understanding constraints to leisure for scholars and practitioners in cross-cultural or multicultural contexts.

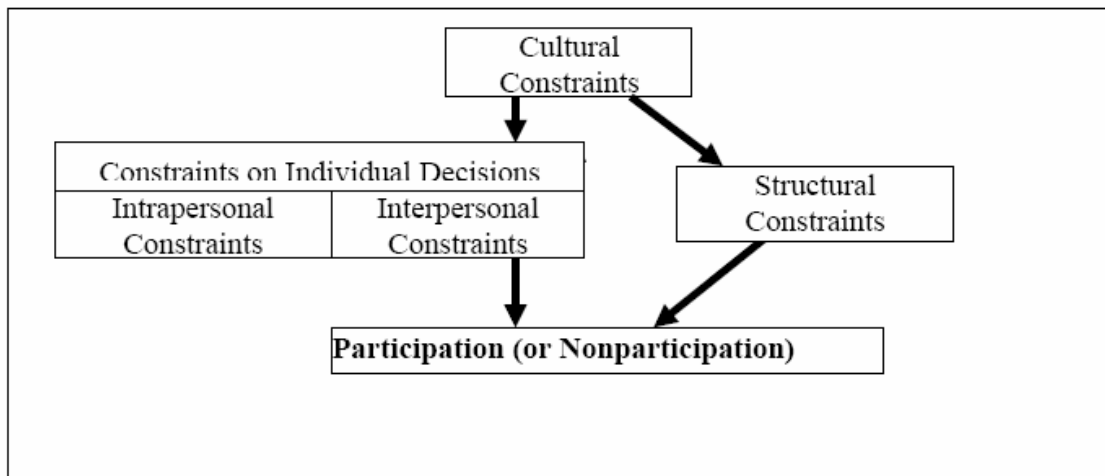
Limitations of the study and further research

While this study provides preliminary data to help us understand how culture, as a constraint factor, influences leisure participation, we have to admit limitations of the study. First of all, the present study only employed qualitative approach as a pilot study.

Further research might conduct quantitative approach based on the pilot study. Second, this study is completed in urban areas in both countries and all informants are from urban regions, further research might adopt rural informants to compare how culture differently influences urban people and rural people. Last, while gender differences are not found in the pilot study, further research might compare rural and urban informants to explore whether or not gender differences exist in different societies with a large sample size.



A Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints (Figure 1)
(Crawford, Jackson and Godbey, 1991)



Refined Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints (Figure 2)

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