

A cross-cultural study of the sports happiness perception among korean, chinese, and japanese elite swimming athletes

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Abstract

While previous research highlights the important value that sports happiness can have for athletes' quality of life, limited research has examined the sports happiness of elite athletes. The purpose of this study was to examine the difference between Korean, Chinese, and Japanese Elite Swimming athletes' sports happiness and, if there was any, how the result was similar and different cross-culturally/nationally. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with total 12 elite swimming athletes. Participants were both males (n = 6) and females (n = 6), who were between 19-23 years old with average 13.9 years of swimming experience. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and were analyzed with a content analysis procedure in which raw meaning units were grouped into salient themes. Athletes' responses regarding happiness derived from this in-depth interview revealed five categories: 1) athletes' perception of happiness. 2) happiness in everyday life 3) happiness in practice and competition situations 4) coach-athlete relationship 5) material happiness. The participants perceived their happiness were associated with a pleasure, satisfaction and in practice and competition situation and most of athletes answered that happiness is when they have good results. But material rewards and benefits given to them cannot be seen happiness but a supporting. Social and cultural processes making these different outcomes are discussed.

Key words: cross-culture, Korea, China, Japan, Sports Happiness

Introduction

Research on happiness has been largely divided into a hedonic view and a self-fulfilling view. The hedonic view is further subdivided into subjective well-being and emotional well-being (Diener, Lucas, Smith, 1999), and the self-fulfilling view is subdivided into psychological

well-being (Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and social well-being (Keyes, 1998). In recent years, there has been research on well-being from a complementary integration perspective, away from the conflicting composition of subjective well-being and psychological well-being. Seeming to support this, the widely accepted theory is that the source of happiness is the pleasure of everyday life (Diener et al., 1991) or a positive interpretation of an experience (Costa & McCrae, 1980), in addition to the temperament of the individual.

Physical activity has been reported to be very closely related to happiness as a representative field that can provide enjoyment or positive experience to individuals.

Submitted : 1 June 2017

Revised : 27 June 2017

Accepted : 30 June 2017

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* This work was done with the sports promotion fund from Korea Institute of Sport Science, Korea Sports Promotion Foundation (KISS-15-A05005).

Numerous studies have found that physical activity, as part of leisure activities, provides pleasure and engagement to the participant and a sense of physical health and psychological well-being from social interaction through competition with others (Ridick & Daniel, 1984).

Then, what is a happy life as an athlete in a competitive sport situation and not as a leisure activity? Additionally, are athletes indeed happy in such a competitive system? Happiness is mainly dealt with from an emotional perspective. Until now, most studies on emotions in sports psychology have focused on anxiety, arousal, stress, and burnout (Kim, 2010). As a result, within sports psychology, the most prominent emotional characteristic of the athletes was considered to be anxiety caused by competition—that is, competition anxiety (Shin, 1988). This trend, even when considering the pressure on athletes from the win-at-all-costs mentality of our society, and the fact that progress in competitive nature of sports and the academic evolution of positive psychology are recent achievements, is regrettable in the sense that there has been more research on the negative psychology of humans than positive psychology.

As a desirable phenomenon, positive and approachable psychology rather than negative or evasive psychology has been gaining popularity in our society in recent years, and the theme of happiness has become the biggest issue of positive psychology. Currently, studies on the happiness of athletes are constantly being published in the field of sports psychology in Korea, and can be classified into three types. First are studies that identify the variables that affect, or are related to, happiness. These studies have found that athletes' happiness is based on their underlying self-esteem, taking into account the social culture (Goeng, Moon, Hwang, & Kim, 2014), and when formed internally in terms of locus of control (Denny & Steiner, 2008), athletes' happiness is also closely related to internal self-motivation (Hwang, Chang, & Kim, 2013), self-management (Lee & Lee, 2011), physical self-concept (Park, 2010), and friend (Park, 2012).

Second are studies that identify what constitutes happiness. In these studies, the factors that constitute the happiness of athletes were reported as exercise achievement,

physical development, positive reinforcement, relationships with peers, and relaxation time (Park, 2012). These studies are meaningful in that they go beyond the existing provisional reasoning of athletes' happiness (Lee, 2001) as the process of experiencing competence while gauging the feasibility of achieving the goals set by the individual or the experience of acquiring the pleasure of competition in sports activities and confirm, to some degree, the essential question of what happiness is.

Third, in order to be happy, efforts must be made and the conditions for happiness must be formed.

In other words, an intervention strategy must be attempted in order to be happy, and some studies (Choi, & Shin, 2012) have reported the positive psychological benefits through active intervention strategies for happiness. In this way, studies on athletes' happiness have played a large part in showing the athletes' quality of life and emphasizing positive psychology and, in particular, provide many clues as to why they exercise and what meaning it has for the outcome of the exercise (Hwang, Chang, & Kim, 2013).

In sports situations, it is emphasized that cross-cultural psychology, such as cultural differences in happiness (Goeng et al., 2014), should be considered very important. In fact, in a study by Goeng, Chang, Hwang, and Kim (2013) on the happiness of elite Chinese swimming athletes, the relaxation factor (Kim & Choi, 2006) was removed because the Chinese swimming athletes did not perceive feelings of happiness that Korean athletes feel during their rest from individual training.

Putting together the studies that have been conducted so far, studies of cross-cultural happiness psychology are needed as happiness psychology is an important part of academic history and because there are differences in cross-cultural aspects between countries. Unfortunately, however, there have been no studies in the field of sports that address to what extent these cultural differences are formed, whether the happiness factors of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes can be equally grouped, what athletes need in order to be happy, and what psychological variables are involved.

Furthermore, even in China where, as a communist state, there has been relatively little discussion on the issue of individual happiness, recently pioneering studies (Song, 2013) emphasizing the happiness of athletes have emerged much like in Korea. As the happiness of Chinese athletes was found to be relatively low at present; the psychological well-being of individuals should be improved through intervention strategies such as injury control, social welfare, and psychological health education (Sun & Yang, 2013). Moreover, Zhang (2013) argued that, when Chinese athletes consider psychological techniques for application during match situations in important competitions, the basis should be techniques of positive psychology. In the case of Japan, a study on happiness in terms of life satisfaction through cross-cultural study with Australians examines the cross-cultural aspects of the East and West (Yamasaki, Sakai, & Uchida, 2006). Problem-centered and emotion-centered coping strategies were applied and the results suggested that cognitive correction strategies are more closely related to positive emotions such as individual happiness (Schumaker & Shea, 1993).

Taken together, the necessity of happiness research may begin with the fact that it deals with happiness, the highest human emotion, and understanding the happiness of athletes in Northeast Asian cultures such as Korea, China, and Japan is expected to be an important milestone. In particular, this study is meaningful as it is cross-cultural and considers the cultural differences between countries, which is a research rarity in the field of sports psychology in Korea.

Until now, in light of its importance, there have been few studies on happiness in the field of elite sports. In addition, no studies have investigated the prospect and comparison of sports happiness among elite athletes across countries in the cultures of Northeast Asia such as Korea, China, and Japan. Furthermore, this study is important because it is the first cross-cultural study considering the cultural differences between Korea, China, and Japan in the field of sports psychology in Korea. In particular, it is expected to be an important milestone for identifying the cross-cultural happiness in the field of sports psychology centered around the Northeast Asian cultures of Korea,

China, and Japan.

Therefore, this study ultimately aims to compare the happiness of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes in terms of culture, and more specifically, in-depth data on sports happiness were collected and analyzed for Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes.

Methods

Participants

After the research methodology was approved by an institutional research ethics board in each country, 12 elites swimmers were recommended from the swimming federation in each country (N=12 [i.e. 4 in Korea, 4 in China, 4 in Japan]). All of them were experienced members of the national team or backup national members and they were both males (n = 6) and females (n = 6) who were between 19-23 years old with average 13.9 years of swimming experience.

Table 1. Demographic information of elite swimmers

Nation	Participants	sex
Korea	H00	M
	K00a	M
	K00b	M
China	S00	M
	L00a	M
	L00a	M
	L00a	F
Japan	W00	F
	N00	F
	K00a	F
	M00	F
	K00a	F

Research Tools

Interview guideline

In order to systematically and consistently carry out the

interviews conducted for in-depth information on sports happiness, we established an interview guide based on Patton's (2002) qualitative research method. The interview guide consisted of obtaining the consent of the research participants, in-depth interview questions, and the interview itself. The in-depth interview questions consisted of 5 questions determined through an experts' committee based on the 5W-1H principle developed by Moon and Park (2009). These questions were: 1) What is happiness?; 2) When am I the happiest in everyday life?; 3) In what moments do I feel happy during practice and competition?; 4) When there is a good relationship between the coach and the athletes, is it relevant to my happiness?; and 5) Are material things related to my happiness?.

Researchers

In a cross-cultural study such as this, whether a research team that can carry out the inter-country study has been constituted must be considered. A concrete strategy for the integrity of this research is as follows. This research team includes a psychology doctor, who was formerly a swimmer for China and is currently studying in Korea, and as this researcher is almost close to native speakers of Koreans in fluency, there is no language difficulty. In addition, there is no great difficulty in conducting qualitative research because the researcher possesses a certain level of research ability (Goeng et al, 2013; Goeng & Hwang, 2014). In addition, there is no difficulty in carrying out qualitative research on linguistic interpretation and communication through exchanges with an instructor in Japan who was previously a Chinese elite athlete and is fluent in Japanese.

Data Analysis

All data analysis were done by validity committee and the procedure were as follows: Firstly, the interview transcripts were read several times in their entirety to gain a clear meaning of the participants' statements. Secondly, each transcript was categorized into smaller meaning units,

which captured each theme from each interview. Thirdly, the data were transformed, which involved the connection of several similar meaning units with general themes. This stage of the process was principally inductive, in that the meaning units and general themes emerged from the data. At the end of the process, the general themes generated independently by the lead validity committee were discussed. Any discrepancies were considered at length, and five potential general themes were excluded.

Research procedure and Strategy to provide truth value

Before we started the final interview, we had a preliminary interview with 2 university students to bring up interview skills. Then, researchers visited teams and schools in Korea, China, and Japan; conducted interviews based on the interview guidelines; and collected in-depth data for the study. Participants consented to recording the interview, and the researchers conducted the one-on-one and duo interviews. The researcher who is able to communicate in both Chinese and Korean conducted the interviews with Chinese athletes, and a researcher and a Korean professor from the University of Chukuba, who has qualitative research experience and served as the interpreter, conducted the interviews with Japanese athletes. The interviews lasted an hour or more due to language variation. The interviews were recorded, and were transcribed and used for expert committee. All the interviews and raw data were separated through a series of inductive content analyses.

Results & Discussion

1. What is Happiness?: Perception of the word, "happiness," among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimming athletes.

Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmer athletes gave varied answers to the question, "What is happiness?" Some athletes viewed it as a comfortable feeling such as joy, peace of mind, and relaxation, while others viewed it

as the small things in life, self-satisfaction, self-reward, ambition, aiming at goals, and seeing others happy. Most of the Korean athletes answered that happiness is self-satisfaction, joy, and peace of mind. Chinese athletes stated that it is an ordinary life, ambition, subjective self-satisfaction, and working towards one's goal. Most Japanese athletes seemed to think that happiness is the small things in life.

Korean athletes' perception of happiness.

I think happiness is the small pleasures in everyday life. It's nothing grand, but rather the ordinary joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. (Participant 1)

Happiness is different for everyone. It is self-satisfaction. So I think it is subjective. Someone may be satisfied with something and be happy, or may not be. (Participant 2)

Happiness is peace of mind. Even if there are no big changes in life, if you have peace of mind in general, I think that is happiness. (Participant 3)

Chinese athletes' perception of happiness.

Perhaps the understanding of happiness could vary according to age, but first, it's family. For me, time spent with family is the happiest. Second is my future family. Third is my work. I wish my job could be more stable and better, but if not, I am satisfied with just maintaining this situation as it is now. (Participant 1)

Happiness is a sense of honor. I have not had much time to think about myself, because I always lived in other people's expectations since I was a child. Actually, an athlete has to think a lot about himself/herself, and in my case, I thought that how other people view me was important. I think when I see how happy others are to see me excel, such as in their praises and expectations, I am even happier. (Participant 2)

I think happiness is the extent to which one is

subjectively satisfied. Happiness can increase if satisfaction is high. (Participant 3)

For happiness, first there has to be joy, enjoyment, and fun. I think having what I expect and want, having goals in life, and working toward them is happiness. (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' perception of happiness.

There are differences in the degree of happiness, but I feel various types of happiness, from the small things to the big things in my daily life. (Participant 1)

Even if it's not particularly big, I think happiness is the joy I feel when I go to school, to practice, do laundry at home, and finish doing these things. (Participant 2)

In my current situation, I think I am happiest when I'm swimming and when I'm eating after exercise. (Participant 3)

I think happiness is the small things of everyday life that I usually picture in my mind. (Participant 4)

In response to what happiness is, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers did not differ greatly, but still gave a variety of answers. The responses that were common across athletes of all three countries were the small things in life and self-satisfaction. One interpretation is that the small things in everyday life seem precious because elite athletes do not have much interaction with family due to collective living with other athletes (Seong, 2010).

For self-satisfaction, as elite athletes usually live in practices and matches, satisfaction is also related to practice and competition. This can be interpreted as a sense of accomplishment, such as the satisfaction when one works hard for the day's goal and finishes the workout, when one feels successful while exercising, and when one has good results (Kim & Hong, 2015; Moon &

Park, 2009).

The difference in perception of happiness among the three countries' athletes was that Korean athletes perceive joy and peace of mind in daily life and also in practice and competition situations as happiness, while Japanese athletes see good results from a competition as self-rewarding and try to strengthen their bodies by eating. Elite athletes develop their physical fitness and try to maximize their physical condition for a good competition. Japanese athletes try to strengthen their bodies, indicating that self-management is very important to them (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Here, the Chinese athletes had more diverse perceptions. They saw happiness as seeing others happy, working towards a life goal, and honor. These results show that Chinese athletes have a more varied and positive interpretation of happiness compared to Korean and Japanese athletes (Goeng, et al., 2013).

2. Happiness in Everyday Life: When or what makes Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes happiest in everyday life?

The answers to when and what makes the athletes the happiest in everyday life included relaxation time, spending time with family or friends, attaining practice goals, and consuming food post-exercise.

Korean athletes' happiest in everyday life

I am happiest in my daily life, after training before I go to bed. Going to sleep at the end of the day after hard training is the happiest moment in my day. (Participant 1)

I think I am happiest when I am with my family, before going to bed in the evening, and when resting for a while. (Participant 3)

I am happiest when I am with family. I am happy when I'm relaxing as well, but also uncomfortable because, when I wake up the next day, the happiness is lessened. (Participant 4)

Chinese athletes' happiest in everyday life

I am perhaps the happiest when I'm going home after the day's work. The fatigue that had built up all day disappears, my body is relieved of fatigue, I can do what I want to do, I just like to take a walk. These things make me very happy. And when I cook for people, and see them enjoying the meal I cooked for them, I am even happier. And when someone needs my help, when someone wasn't able to solve something on their own and comes to me and I help them, I am needed ... I think these thoughts lead to a sense of achievement and I'm happy. (Participant 1)

I am happiest relaxing. Because I'm not just relaxing, but I'm doing the things I want through the time off and achieve my goals through my efforts, so that's when I'm happiest. (Participant 2)

I am happiest in my daily life when I am with my family. And I'm happiest when I focus on something and see the results. (Participant 3)

I am happiest when I achieve what I planned during my usual training. I am also excited and happy when organizing my luggage before going to a match from the anticipation and curiosity about the new environment of the competition hall. (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' happiest in everyday life

In my daily life, I feel happy when I have a meal with my friends or when I am with my family. (Participant 1)

I am happiest when I finish everything I have to do outside, finish all the housework, and feel the satisfaction. (Participant 2)

Since I have practice in the evenings, I feel happiest when I'm eating after practice. I think I need to eat because I need to be stronger. (Participant 3)

I have been in school for about half a year now. I used to live with my parents but now I live alone. Now that I live alone, I think happiness is the small things like eating a meal cooked by my mother with my family. (Participant 4)

With regard to the moment when Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers feel happiest in daily life, all three countries had relaxation time, family, and friends in common. The Chinese athletes also responded that their happiest moments are during leisure time in everyday life and in achieving goals set during practice. The elite athletes try to find peace of mind by meeting their family and friends, and try to relax by taking vacations, etc (Seong, 2010). However, in order to overcome the daily stresses, Chinese athletes recognize the importance of leisure activities and try to participate in various types of leisure activities for different purposes (Kim & Hong, 2015). Campbell (1981) also suggested that motivation for leisure activities is necessary. Because of such awareness and motivation of leisure activities and the positive effects of participating in such activities, athletes can attain sports happiness by relieving their individual stress. In this context, it is considered that the athletes' relaxation, rest, etc., will lead to greater happiness through leisure. We anticipate that the athletes will experience better lives and happiness by enjoying leisure time instead of just relaxing and resting. In addition, achieving daily practice goals helps the elite athletes to reach their goals. Athletes perceive such achievement as happiness, and this is regarded the most important factor in sports happiness (Lee, 1999).

3. Happiness in Practice and Competition Situations: The happiness that Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmer athletes feel during practice and competition situations.

In practice and competition situations, most of the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes answered that

happiness is when they have good results. They stated that they feel happy when they are praised by the people around them, when they go up to the podium, when the match goes well, and when others are happy.

Korean athletes' happiness during practice and competition situations.

I think it's the happiest moment when I finally touch the last touch point and see good results when I look at my records. (Participant 1)

There are times when it is good or bad in matches, but basically I feel happiness when my personal record is good, regardless of my rank. (Participant 2)

I'm the happiest when I touch the touchpad or break my personal record. When I'm in 3rd place, I think that I should work harder. When I'm in 2nd place, I think should push a little harder to reach 1st place, and when I'm in 1st place, I think, "this is it." (Participant 3)

I am the happiest when I have a good ranking and when I'm going up the podium. I think it's because of a sense of achievement. (Participant 4)

Chinese athletes' happiness during practice and competition situations.

I'm not happy at all when I'm practicing. Practice is completely gruesome. In match situations, I feel happy when I see my time board as soon as the match ends and I've broken my personal record, or get better results. It feels as if all hard things like muscle aches, not being able to breathe, etc. disappear. And I am happiest right before I go up to the podium. When I go up to the podium, I enjoy it when all the [reading of the] results are about to end and it's time to go up to the podium. (Participant 1)

I am happiest when I achieve the goal I expected. It really feels like a dream come true. Although the match

is tough, I'm happy if I get good results. (Participant 2)

I was the happiest when I won the gold medal. I feel happy especially when I get good records and see the results, and when my teammates cheer me on before the match. I also feel happy when my team has good teamwork and atmosphere. I think I feel happiness often, and if I had to pick one, I feel the happiest when I break my personal record. And when I see my record after the game, I'm more excited than happy. I am the happiest when I'm going up the podium. (Participant 3)

When I'm practicing. I am happiest when I get better results than I expected during practice, when the coach praises me, when I achieve good results in a match and other people praise and congratulate me, and when I become the center. But to think of it again, I am happiest when I achieve what I seek rather than how others view me. I'm also happy when I see my record after the match. It's because at that moment of seeing the record, I can predict what will happen next. I can go up the podium, be praised, and there is a new opportunity (qualification to enter a bigger competition). (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' perception of happiness.

I feel happy due to the self-reward when I get good results at a match. (Participant)

I'm the happiest when the competition turns out as how it played out in my mind, and when my friends are happy when I achieve a good record. (Participant 2)

I am the happiest when I have good results, and when I am standing on the podium and my name is called. (Participant 3)

I think that happiness during practice is about the fact that I am able to swim and that I am in such an environment, and the situation I am in now. I also feel

happy for my parents who cheer me on. I have never won 1st place in a big competition so far. I won for the first time in the Japan College Competition (big national competition) in September of this year, and everything around me seemed different and I was extremely happy. (Participant 4)

In responses of when they feel the happiest in match and practice settings, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers all answered that they are happiest when they attain their goals and achieve good results in both match settings and practice settings. As an elite athlete, what is most important above all is achieving good results.

Additionally, Chinese athletes answered that they are happy before they go onto the podium and when others are praising them, while Japanese athletes answered that they are happy when others are happy. This indicates that Chinese athletes feel a sense of accomplishment through a positive relationship with other important people, such as peers, coaches, or parents (Barrera, 1986; Fredricks Eccles, 2007; House & Kahn, 1985; Poczwadowski et al., 2006; Sarason & Pierce, 1990). In fact, a number of previous studies have reported a positive relationship between factors such as team cohesion, team satisfaction, internal motivation such as partnership between peers, and parental influence. Moreover, a positive relationship with major people has a significant impact on an individual's sense of achievement (Kim & Park, 2008; Kim, 2006; Kim, Hwang, & Choi, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2007; Chung, 2007m 2004; Balaguer et al., 2002; Eys et al., 2007; Sullivan & Gee, 2007).

4. Coaches and Players' Relationships: What Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers think of the coach-athlete relationship and happiness.

To the question of whether they feel happiness when the coach-athlete relationship is good, Japanese athletes mentioned that the coach-athlete relationship and happiness are related when there are good results. On the other hand,

although some Korean and Chinese athletes view their happiness as related to the coach-athlete relationship, there are some that do not.

Korean athletes' coach-athlete relationships and happiness.

I think a good relationship between the coach and the athlete is more than 50% related to happiness. Not just individuals, but when the atmosphere of the whole team is good, I try to do more and if it's not good, we don't acknowledge each other's work. (Participant 1)

It's more than 50% relevant. I think it's easier to achieve goals with peace of mind if the coach and the athletes are close. (Participant 2)

I don't think my happiness and coach are related. Happiness is perceived subjectively, so it does not seem to have much to do with others. (Participant 3)

I do not think the coach has a big influence on my happiness. If I'm happy, I'm happy. I don't care much about others. (Participant 4)

Chinese athletes' coach-athlete relationships and happiness.

This... I do not think the relationship with the coach is affected by happiness, but it is somewhat related to the relationship with other athletes. With another athlete of the same sport, there is some competition. This competitiveness is more intense with athletes under other coaches, but it might be different depending on the situation. Some people are my competitors during the match but good friends in daily life. Of course, some people do not think so. For me, I am a competitor during the match and a good friend in everyday life. But when people are younger, I think they think of everyone as a competitor, both during a match and in everyday life. (Participant 1)

I think it's related to my happiness when the relationship between the coach and athletes is good. But

I always work on interpersonal relationships and have a good rapport with coaches and the other athletes, so if my relationship with someone isn't good, I think it's their problem and not mine. (Participant 2)

Yes, they're related. I think you have to cooperate well with the coach in order for everything to go well. When this happens, of course happiness goes up. I also feel happy when I have a good relationship with the other athletes without conflict. (Participant 3)

I think they're related. When the relationship with other athletes is good and when our goals are aligned with the coach's, this is usually when we have the best performance. So I think they're all related. (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' coach-athlete relationships and happiness.

I feel happy when I get good results in the match and the coaches are happy for me. I think a good relationship between the coach and the athlete is more than 50% related to happiness. Not just individuals, but when the atmosphere of the whole team is good, I try to do more and if it's not good, we don't acknowledge each other's work. (Participant 1)

I had the same coach throughout middle school and high school. I feel happy when I talk to the coach and keep practicing as if we are one, and achieve good results. It's more than 50% relevant. I think it's easier to achieve goals with peace of mind if the coach and the athletes are close. (Participant 2)

Since we always practice together, I am delighted when other athletes get good results. I feel very happy when we (with the coach) set a goal and achieve it, when we feel good together and work hard toward the next goal, and when we see good results. I don't think my happiness and coach are related. Happiness is perceived subjectively, so it does not seem to have much to do with others. (Participant 3).

I feel happy when I practice hard and see good results at a match, and when my coach and friends are delighted for me. I do not think the coach has a big influence on my happiness. If I'm happy, I'm happy. I don't care much about others. (Participant 4)

Chinese athletes' coach-athlete relationships and happiness.

This... I do not think the relationship with the coach is affected by happiness, but it is somewhat related to the relationship with other athletes. With another athlete of the same sport, there is some competition. This competitiveness is more intense with athletes under other coaches, but it might be different depending on the situation. Some people are my competitors during the match but good friends in daily life. Of course, some people do not think so. For me, I am a competitor during the match and a good friend in everyday life. But when people are younger, I think they think of everyone as a competitor, both during a match and in everyday life. (Participant 1)

I think it's related to my happiness when the relationship between the coach and athletes is good. But I always work on interpersonal relationships and have a good rapport with coaches and the other athletes, so if my relationship with someone isn't good, I think it's their problem and not mine. (Participant 2)

Yes, they're related. I think you have to cooperate well with the coach in order for everything to go well. When this happens, of course happiness goes up. I also feel happy when I have a good relationship with the other athletes without conflict. (Participant 3)

I think they're related. When the relationship with other athletes is good and when our goals are aligned with the coach's, this is usually when we have the best performance. So I think they're all related. (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' coach-athlete relationships and happiness.

I feel happy when I get good results in the match and the coaches are happy for me.
(Participant 1)

I had the same coach throughout middle school and high school. I feel happy when I talk to the coach and keep practicing as if we are one, and achieve good results. (Participant 2)

Since we always practice together, I am delighted when other athletes get good results. I feel very happy when we (with the coach) set a goal and achieve it, when we feel good together and work hard toward the next goal, and when we see good results. (Participant 3)

I feel happy when I practice hard and see good results at a match, and when my coach and friends are delighted for me. (Participant 4)

As to whether they feel happiness when there is a good relationship with the coach and other athletes, half of Korean and Chinese athletes answered that they do, whereas Japanese athletes perceive a positive effect of the relationship only when there are good results in a match. Faith, trust, and interaction with coaches and other athletes are very important. The athletes emphasized the importance of the relationship with peers, coaches, and parents, and the findings that athletes want to find happiness through unity and trust with each other for a good match supports this.

5. Material Happiness: Happiness of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers from a material aspect.

Most of the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes gave the same answer. They answered that series of material rewards and benefits given to them cannot be seen as happiness because the achievement they have now is

from working hard, and the material things have been provided as a reward for such achievement.

Korean athletes' material happiness.

Rather than happiness, it just eases worries, like equipment support. I think if I can get support without spending my own money, I can concentrate more on swimming. (Participant 1)

They're not unrelated. It's easier to exercise without having to worry if I can afford to, because then all I have to do is swim well. (Participant 2)

They are related. Receiving prize money is nice. I feel that about 30% of my happiness is from material things. (Participant 3)

I think it would be more helpful to receive than to not receive. Whether it's a competition or just daily life, it would ease my mind. (Participant 4)

Chinese athletes' material happiness.

In a way, I have it, and in another way, I don't have it. Of course I feel good when I get a bonus from good results in a match. But then again, is this not something I should get, regardless? Because I put that much work in to it, I don't feel that happy about rewards. I think it's something I deserve anyway. (Participant 1)

Compensation is good. It can increase happiness. The compensation in our country (China) is good these days, but it wasn't that common a long time ago, so I used to not care. We used to buy equipment out of our own pocket, but I think the country should support athletes with equipment. Our country has been scientific only for a few years. Compensation (money) is good. But if young athletes think of compensation first, their faith (belief) can falter, so they should prioritize their goals, and if it works out, compensation will follow. (Participant 2)

Material things are important, but not very important to

me. My rate during the time I've been swimming isn't that high. I think it's natural for me to be compensated, because I've worked that much. (Participant 3)

I think they're related only to some extent. Around 30~40%. Because it's hard to just exercise without support. You have no motivation. But more than material things, there is a greater expectation for the future. For example, I have to work hard in order to have a good job in the future. When I think these things, it makes me happy. (Participant 4)

Japanese athletes' material happiness.

While I was in graduate school, not from a team, since it was corporate sponsorship, I was receiving some support for that rather than receiving financial support. Financial support as a working person after graduate school is the biggest. When I was in college, I received support in other ways than financial support such as tuition exemption and equipment like swimming suits. I wasn't aware when I was a student, but when I came into society after college as a graduate school student; only the top-level athletes get paid to swim. I thought that if that happens, I would be able to just concentrate on swimming. So I'm very happy now. I'm happy that I can swim while receiving financial support. I'm happy that I can make money by just swimming and not having to do other work. (Participant 1)

I feel happiness from material things too, but more from the achievement that it was "possible." I'm more grateful than happy. I've never received financial support. But I am thankful for receiving equipment support like swimming suits and caps. I'm more thankful than happy. (Participant 2)

Because swimming itself is my job, I'm compensated quite well. So of course I'm happy. (Participant 3)

I'm not being paid, but I receive material support such

as swimming suits when I enter national competitions. I don't know if I'll ever become a swimmer that makes money, but I'm just happy I can receive something financial. It makes me think that I should work harder. (Participant 4)

While Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers answered similarly to the question of whether material things are related to happiness, a detailed analysis shows that their answers are slightly different. Material things cannot be seen as happiness because they are a direct reward for their achievements from hard work. Korean athletes answered that material things are somewhat related to their individual happiness, while Chinese athletes answered that all external rewards are natural. For Japanese athletes, some are satisfied with and appreciate financial support, while others see financial compensation as part of their achievement. +

Although Deci and Ryan (1985) stated that material things are also motivation as external rewards, elite swimmers in this study perceived external rewards as natural compensation for their work rather than motivation. As there has not yet been a study on the happiness of elite athletes from a material perspective, this finding is meaningful.

Acknowledgments: This work was done with the sports promotion fund from Korea Institute of Sport Science, Korea Sports Promotion Foundation (KISS-15-A05005).

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study compared the happiness of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese athletes from a cultural perspective, and collected and analyzed in-depth data on sports happiness. The conclusion of the study is as follows. Overall, the results presented in this study introduced and explained the content of happiness, based on in-depth and diverse cases of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers' happiness. Although these nationalities fall within the Asian culture, there is a difference in the perception of happiness among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers.

First, this study secured data from Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers about what happiness is. Korean athletes perceive happiness as seeking peace of mind, while Chinese athletes perceive it as the small things in life, and in relation to their goals in life and to other people. Japanese athletes mainly perceived happiness as something that changes based on the results of a match, and the small things in life, similarly to the Chinese athletes.

Table 2. Happiness comparison between Korea, China, Japan

Happiness	Korea	China	Japan
athletes' perception of happiness	pleaseure self-satisfaction peace of mind	satisfaction honor joy, enjoyment, fun	Joy small things
happiness in everyday life.	sleep family	going home relaxing family	friends family eating
happiness in practice and competition situations	good results breal records good ranking	break records achieve goal good results	good results goodrecords 1st place
coach-athlete relationship	related to happiness not related to happiness	related to happiness	related to happiness
material happiness	related with money not related	not related related with compensation	financial support not related

Second, relaxation time is the happiest moment in daily life for Korean and Japanese athletes, while for Chinese athletes, it is not just about relaxation but also seeking a different kind of achievement by using the time well. Moreover, Chinese athletes also feel happiness about achieving individual day-to-day practice goals.

Third, in practice and competition situations, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers all perceive happiness as something that changes depending on the results of the match. In addition, Chinese athletes felt happy when they were about to go onto the podium and when others praised them, while Japanese athletes felt happy when they saw others being happy.

Fourth, in regard to whether they feel happy when there is a good relationship with the coaches and other athletes, half of Korean and Chinese athletes said the good relationships are related to happiness, while others said there is no relationship between them. Japanese athletes perceived them to be related because the coaches are happy or give them praise when they achieve good results in a match.

Fifth, there is varying opinion among the athletes from three countries with regard to whether material things and happiness are related to each other. Korean athletes perceived material compensation to be about 30% related to their happiness, whereas Chinese athletes perceived all compensation to be a natural reward of their hard work and good results. Japanese athletes are satisfied with and thankful for the material things and regard them as part of their achievement.

This study established and presented content of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers' happiness through the in-depth and diverse experiences of these athletes, but it is necessary to organize these results more specifically. Although they belong to the same Asian culture, as Korean, Chinese, and Japanese elite swimmers have different perceptions of happiness, it is necessary to develop a sports happiness scale tool for sports players that can be applied across all of Asia. In addition, there was much difficulty in data collection as this study was conducted with elite athletes from three countries. In

follow-up studies, we expect that researchers will be able to focus only on the research itself with the cooperation of the organizations between countries. In addition, although these studies are not likely to be conducted on the frontline, it is necessary to reexamine the variables related to happiness and sports of the athletes in Korea, China, and Japan, the most representative countries of Asia. On the other hand, it was not possible to conduct research on a wider range of items due to a lack of administrative support and special circumstances between countries. In follow-up studies, it is necessary to expand the number of items. We hope this study will serve as an indication of sports happiness in Asian swimmers.

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