



Attitude changes through art and sport

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The question investigated by surveying mainstream Australians in Brisbane was whether studying Japanese floral art or a Chinese martial art changed their attitudes towards Asians or Asian culture. This was tested by an anonymous questionnaire with 44 questions.

None of them began a course because of a special interest in Asia, yet eventually they learned about Asian culture and became interested in learning more. Several visited Asia after taking up their studies and the rest stated they now want to. While an attitude change could not be strongly demonstrated, a significant increase in knowledge about Asia, as well as an interest in Asian culture, was seen. Most were aware of anti-Asian attitudes in Australia's past but few admitted such attitudes themselves, which may reflect the current view that such prejudice is not acceptable.

Respondents indicated that in addition to learning *Ikebana* or *Kung Fu* they had also learned about Japanese gardens, architecture, food, tea ceremonies, philosophy, Buddhism, Japanese or Chinese words, festivals, traditions, history and respect for elders. Things they are now interested in include Japanese theatre, music, fabrics, décor, origami, calligraphy, cooking, art, *feng shui* and dragon dancing.

Minor differences in the results between the two classes might be explained by the fact that *Ikebana* students were older than most of those in the *Kung Fu* class. This is probably also responsible for the fact that all but two of the *Ikebana* students have visited Japan, while none of the *Kung Fu* students have yet been to China.

Keywords: attitudes to minorities; Asian culture; Australian minorities

Attitude Changes Through Art and Sport

There have been a number of studies on the attitudes of mainstream Australians to people of other races or cultures and some studies have taken into consideration such aspects as whether the respondents have Asian neighbors (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, 1986) or close personal knowledge of Asian individuals. The question investigated by this present study was whether mainstream Australians with perhaps little knowledge of Asians—or possibly negative attitudes towards Asians and their cultures—would change their attitudes after studying a Japanese art form or a Chinese sport.

Ikebana, a Japanese floral art, and *Kung Fu*, a Chinese martial art, were selected for various reasons. One is that in both cases the students were likely to have enrolled in a course because they were interested in the specific outcome, rather than because they had an interest in Japanese or Chinese culture. Another reason is that *Ikebana* students in Australia are usually women and *Kung Fu* classes often appeal more to men. In both cases, there is a body of oriental philosophy to which the students are exposed, along with the specific skills taught. Both give students an introduction to certain elements of Asian culture.

Classes surveyed, in October 2003, were both in the Brisbane area. The *Ikebana* class is taught by one of the leading instructors in southeast Queensland and the *Kung Fu* class is one in a school run by a well-known Chinese man, who is also involved in other aspects of Chinese culture such as lion dances.

The *Ikebana* students in the class surveyed were White Australians, including one man, and were mostly middle aged. The instructor indicated that when *Ikebana* first came to Australia several decades ago, the students were generally women of middle class backgrounds, since this pursuit requires both time and funds to purchase equipment and flowers on an ongoing basis. However, that is no longer the case, since as hobbies go, it is no more expensive than many others. There were also two Japanese and one Chinese woman in the class but they were not asked to be research participants.

The *Kung Fu* students surveyed were all White Australians, mostly young, and about evenly divided between men and women. The night of the survey, a *Tai Chi* class was being run by the same instructors and the members were included as research participants, since there is a close relationship between *Kung Fu* and *Tai Chi* and, for the purposes of this study, both have elements of involvement in an Asian culture. In this paper the term '*Kung Fu*' is being used to include both *Kung Fu* and *Tai Chi*. Three young Asian students were not asked to fill in a survey form.

While it is possible to study either *Ikebana* or *Kung Fu* without developing an appreciation for Asian peoples and cultures, it is not possible for the students to totally ignore the Asian foundations of these courses. For example: *Ikebana* students are given a Japanese name by the Sogetsu School in Japan if they ultimately obtain a teacher's certificate. *Ikebana* qualifications are identified in Japanese terms, such as Teacher 3rd grade being *Sankyū*. *Kung Fu* students are taught to begin their sessions with a formal Asian-style salutation. In both cases students learn respect for their instructor. *Ikebana* students use such Japanese terms as *sensei* (teacher) and refer to the experts in their school in Japan as 'Master'. Chinese-style courtesy and discipline are taught in the

martial arts and students learn Chinese terms of respect for their instructor—the Brisbane school is run by a ‘Master’. Students also learn what style or ‘school’ they are being taught. For example, the *Kung Fu* classes are *Wing Chun Kung Fu* and the *Ikebana* is of the Sogetsu School. Long-term involvement in one of the activities inevitably results in the purchase of Japanese vases and equipment or martial arts clothing.

It might be expected that anyone who is adamantly anti-Asian is not likely to take up one of these activities but if a person is extremely interested in gaining the particular skills it is possible that one could ignore the Asian aspects at the outset. However, any student who continues with one of these courses would inevitably be drawn into some aspects of Asian culture, no matter how minimal. Some, having thus broadened their cultural horizons, go on to develop a greater interest in Asia beyond the base of their studies. This possibility was examined in the survey.

The method used to determine attitudes before and during the time the students were taking a course was for the researcher to take a three-page questionnaire to an *Ikebana* class and a *Kung Fu* class and briefly explain the purpose of the research. The respondents were not asked to put their names on the forms and the two class groups were not to be identified in any published results. Therefore, the students were to remain completely anonymous. Most of the questions required a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer but several required a short open-end explanation to be written out, particularly for some of the ‘yes’ responses. A few questions tested their broader attitudes towards Asians and their knowledge of Asia. Some questions clearly asked about negative views, either currently or previously held, and several were designed to determine possible changes in attitude. The questionnaire contained 44 questions and could be answered in about 10 minutes.

The *Ikebana* teacher, a White Australian, was later interviewed privately to find out about various Japanese cultural components included in her course and how her own views on things Japanese may have changed over the 30 years she has been involved in *Ikebana*. Information on the martial arts school and its Chinese owner was obtained from his website (<http://tomlo.com/kungfutaichi/wingchun/index.htm>), a short telephone conversation and by talking to him at the class.

Ikebana, a floral art that began in ancient China, includes various concepts of oriental philosophy and religion and has its roots in Buddhism (Chan, 1999). Students learn the symbolism of numbers and the three main elements in a Japanese flower arrangement are termed ‘heaven’, ‘man’ and ‘earth’ (Westland, 1999). Students learn the Japanese names for these elements as well as for various floral styles, vases and equipment. Many of them also become familiar with Japanese haiku poetry.

Kung Fu also had its roots in Buddhism and in Taoism (Goodman, 1998). The monks of the Shaolin monastery in China are often given credit for developing this particular martial art. Students are exposed to such Chinese terms and concepts as *yin*, *yang* and *chi*.

Given the results of a number of surveys in Australia it was expected that at least some of the respondents in the two classes would have had negative views towards Asians before taking up *Ikebana* or *Kung Fu*. The ‘White Australia Policy’ was a result of anti-Asian attitudes that were widespread in the community until after World War II

(Jayasuriya & Pookong, 1999). While that policy has not been in effect since 1972, a change in immigration rules has not eliminated all of the racist feelings in Australia as was clearly seen from the popularity of Pauline Hanson's One Nation political movement in 1996. However, despite entrenched anti-Asian attitudes, the country has made much progress towards a multicultural society in the past few decades.

The Chinese, of course, have had a long presence in Australia, going back to the mid-nineteenth century, and it is interesting to note that a UNESCO study in 1948 (Callan, 1986) found that while British groups were rated most favourably by Anglo-Australians, northern Europeans and Chinese gained intermediate levels of favourability, with southern Europeans, Jews and Negroes ranking lower. Over the years, Chinese have been more often mentioned in attitude surveys than Japanese, Vietnamese and others, while many researchers simply asked about 'Asians'. This catch-all category does not provide us with information on whether attitudes towards Chinese or Japanese, for example, are the same as towards Thais, Indonesians or Filipinos.

Later research (Buchanan, 1976) showed that many Australians in Melbourne had negative attitudes towards Chinese in such matters as having them move in next door and particularly towards marrying their daughters. Of the seven groups under consideration, only Turks and Aborigines fared about the same or worse in terms of negative attitudes on the part of the majority.

A Western Australian survey (Walker, 1994), which was an attempt to develop scaled measurements of attitudes, found that there appeared to be a significant amount of prejudice in the general community against Asians. Questions in the survey included those related to immigration, Australian contact with Asian countries and marriage with Asian people.

Another study (Islam & Jahjah, 2001) reported that among a group of 139 Anglo-Saxon university students there were some negative attitudes towards Asians, although their stereotype views of Asians were more positive than their views of Aborigines and Arabs, while their general attitudes were more positive towards Aborigines. The researchers indicated that attitude change programs should do more than change cognitive aspects of attitudes, such as facts about the other groups, but should also take into consideration such other features as anxiety and distrust.

One of the conclusions reached in an American analysis (Bierly, 1985) of prejudice was that a 'fruitful approach to examining prejudice might be to focus on characteristics of the majority group in a given sociohistorical context rather than on characteristics of outgroups'. While the current survey does not examine the backgrounds of the Australian respondents, it puts more emphasis on *them and their thinking*, rather than on the characteristics of Japanese or Chinese people or cultures. Most studies have looked at current attitudes held at the time of the survey, whereas the present research attempted to get respondents to describe possible changes in their attitudes, over time, while involved in a course on a Japanese or Chinese art or sport.

Results of survey

The questionnaires were handed out in each class by the researcher, who remained in the room while students filled out the forms. To meet Queensland University of Technology Ethics Committee requirements an introduction sheet was attached. It stated:

This is a short survey to determine whether Australians who study Asian arts or sports change their attitudes towards Asian culture and Asian people when they become involved in their study.

The first page of the survey form mentioned prior knowledge, interests and attitudes to Asian people before taking up their study and whether there were any changes in viewpoints after their study.

Members of the *Ikebana* class had been studying from one to eight years; some had previously had another instructor. All were aware that it was a Japanese floral art before signing up for the course, although the instructor mentioned that she did not know it was Japanese 30 years ago when she started. Students were evenly divided between those who signed up for a floral art course and those who were specifically interested in *Ikebana*.

All responded that they had learned some things about Japanese culture in addition to flower arranging. These included Japanese gardens, homes, food, ancient traditions, tea ceremony, Japanese pottery, discipline, attention to detail, high standards and an insight into Japanese people. All were glad to have learned those things. All answered 'no' to the question: 'I would have preferred to learn the floral art without any Asian culture, philosophy or other elements that have come along with my course.' Respondents were evenly divided between those who had almost no knowledge of Asian culture and those who stated they had a good knowledge before beginning the course.

In describing what they liked about *Ikebana*, a few mentioned its simplicity. This would be a direct contrast, in taste, to much Western floral art. In reply to cultural differences, some noted the religious (Buddhist) origins and use of *Ikebana* arrangements in household shrines (ancestor worship) as being different from Christianity. Also a few commented that *Ikebana* was originally done by male Japanese only.

Only one person indicated having negative views about Japan/Japanese culture/Japanese people before studying *Ikebana* and attributed this to World War II and the treatment of prisoners of war. However, that individual indicated that these negative feelings were now gone. Another stated that any previously held negative feelings had since been overcome during visits to Japan and home-stays with Japanese families. One suggested her now deceased father might have held negative views due to the war.

In a later conversation the instructor said that the husbands are often very supportive of wives doing the course and are also changed by their involvement. She mentioned, in particular, one Australian husband who had been a prisoner of the Japanese in

Singapore during World War II. She indicated that he cheerfully associated with Japanese people through his wife's *Ikebana* activities.

In answer to the question: 'Do you believe the study of Asian culture helps to improve understanding between Australians and Asia/Asians?' all gave a positive reply. Their expansions on this question included such points as 'better understanding is an important ingredient for world peace', 'can help to heal the past', 'we can all learn something good from each other' and 'it gets past any cultural, political or religious differences'.

Only one indicated no interest in Asia prior to studying *Ikebana* and all indicated they are now more interested in Asian culture than before. Among the Asian things they are now interested in are Japanese tea ceremony, theatre, music, fabrics, décor, origami, food, pottery, painting, tea, calligraphy, language, history and art. One indicated a prior interest in Buddhism and another was previously interested in Japanese architecture. All but two have visited Japan and those two indicated a desire to do so. Two had visited prior to taking up *Ikebana* and the rest had gone to Japan while studying *Ikebana*. All but two felt it is necessary to know something about Asian ideas and concepts in order to do well at *Ikebana*. In response to whether they might study any other Asian activity, all but one said 'yes' and included bonsai, brush painting, cooking, calligraphy and art.

All were aware of the former White Australia Policy and were aware of widespread negative attitudes towards Asians at various times in Australia's past history. All but one believed we should forget the past but that one said, 'People must understand what the reason behind the Japanese attitude to the rest of the world is.'

All respondents stated that they have some close Asian friends. In the case of half of them the friendships dated from prior to taking up *Ikebana* and in the other half it was after joining a class. When asked to indicate which of a list of 19 named Asian countries they would be comfortable having friends from, three named all, while one listed only China and Taiwan; another mentioned Japan and Singapore; and two were selective, leaving out places like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Mongolia and Tibet. Some of these choices may reflect lack of knowledge about some countries on the list.

Several had difficulty in responding to the question which asked them to state something positive about an Asian country, although some came up with such things as Japan being clean and having friendly people and Thais being peaceful. They did not have much negative to say either, although three made comments about Muslims or Muslim countries that perhaps reflect the current world situation. All stated a belief that it is important for Australians to understand their Asian neighbors and be comfortable with their culture; and all believe *Ikebana* is the world's greatest floral art.

It was learned from the instructor that from time to time she and some of her students have contact with the Japanese community on formal occasions such as the Emperor's birthday. Sometimes this has been through the Japanese Consulate or such organisations as the Australia-Japan Society. She sends an invitation to the Consulate when the class holds an *Ikebana* exhibit. The University of Queensland invites the class to Japanese movies and they are sometimes invited by various organisations to meet visitors from Japan. Their Sogetsu Master comes from Japan every few years and the students get to meet the Master at demonstrations and various other functions.

Involvement in *Ikebana* has not directly resulted in the students meeting Japanese who are permanently resident in Australia, except for a few who study *Ikebana*.

Members of the *Kung Fu* classes had been studying from a few months to 7 years and the *Tai Chi* students ranged from 4 months to 18 months. They were all aware of the Chinese background to their sport before signing up. Almost all of them were interested in a martial art in general, not just *Kung Fu*. Only one was primarily interested in exercise when signing up.

Several indicated that during the course they had also learned something about Chinese philosophy, respect for elders, some Chinese history, some Chinese words, New Year and Moon Festival traditions; three had learned lion dancing. All were glad to have learned those things and only one would have preferred to learn the martial art without any of the Asian elements that are included in the course. Six stated they had a good knowledge of Asian culture before starting their course, while eight said they previously had almost no knowledge. Twelve said a general interest had now developed into a greater interest in Asia or Asian culture and one said a previous general interest had remained the same.

Among those Asian things the students are now interested in, or might like to study, are philosophy, art, Buddhism, calligraphy, history, ceremonies, holidays and festivals, the dragon dance, *yum cha* (and other Chinese foods), weapons, bonsai, brush painting, Chinese authors and language. Some are also interested in *feng shui*, although it should perhaps be noted that their Master is a *feng shui* consultant.

None of the students have visited China but all of them said they would now like to. Nine believe it is necessary to know something about Asian ideas and concepts to do well at *Kung Fu*, while five said they do not think so. Only three people mentioned self-defense as the aspect of the sport they liked the most.

None of them stated that they had held any negative attitudes about China or Chinese people or culture prior to taking up this sport and five stated that they had an open mind or tolerant attitude toward other cultures and people of other ethnic backgrounds. All but one said that the study of Asian culture helps to improve understanding between Australians and Asia/ Asians. A few said this would reduce racism and others indicated that it brings about acceptance of other cultures, tolerance and understanding and also helps to bring the world together. Two mentioned that it is educational or enlightening to learn about other countries.

All but two stated that they were aware of widespread negative attitudes towards Asians at times in Australia's past history. Most believed the past should be forgotten, while one said, 'forgive but don't forget'; another said that we should remember the past and learn from it. Unlike the mentions of Japan and World War II, nobody referred to the specific negative attitudes towards the Chinese in Australia's past.

All but two said they have some Asian friends. In the case of four students their friendships with Asians pre-dated their study of *Kung Fu*, while in the case of six of them friendships with Asians began either after starting the course or at about the same time. Nine of the students said they would be comfortable having friends from any or all of the 19 Asian countries listed. Three made a selection of about eight countries.

When asked to mention something positive about a particular Asian country two picked Japan, two picked Thailand, and one each mentioned something nice about Singapore, Indonesia, China and Vietnam. In saying something negative about an Asian country one mentioned Japan and World War II, two mentioned Korea's nuclear program, one mentioned Pakistan's conflicts with India, another mentioned the Muslims of Pakistan and one said that Indonesians 'tend to dislike Australians'. All stated a belief that it is important for Australians to understand their Asian neighbors and be comfortable with their culture; and most believe *Kung Fu* is the world's greatest martial art.

Conclusions

Although the survey was somewhat limited in number of respondents and scope, it clearly shows a trend, in at least in these two Brisbane classes, of a measurable change in knowledge and interests, and possibly attitudes, on the part of students studying an Asian art or sport. This would appear to have implications for multicultural Australia in that exposure to specific aspects of particular Asian cultures can result in a positive change in viewpoint toward Asian people and Asian nations. This might also be the case with exposure to other non-Anglo-Saxon-Celtic minority cultures in Australia. While taking such classes broadens horizons and helps people gain new skills and interests, in some cases this exposure can also help to overcome previously held prejudiced stereotypes.

Since it is not currently considered acceptable to be prejudiced towards other ethnic groups, there is some doubt as to how truthfully the negative questions were answered. Therefore the measurement of attitude change may not be as accurate as the results with regard to newly acquired knowledge and interests, which clearly showed positive changes. Members of both classes appear to have developed a respect for Asian culture as a result of exposure through their studies.

There are some minor differences in the results from the *Ikebana* class, as compared to the *Kung Fu* class, which might be explained by the general differences in age. Nobody in the *Kung Fu* class appeared to be old enough to remember World War II. The fact that none have been to China, as compared to the several *Ikebana* students who have been to Japan, is probably related to the stronger economic position of the older people in that class.

In both classes the percentage of those with prior knowledge of Asia is about the same. It is interesting to note that there are people in both classes with an interest in Buddhism and people in both classes, perhaps reflecting current world trends, who made negative comments about Muslims or Muslim countries. The general impression provided by the survey forms is that those studying *Ikebana* might be slightly more likely to follow through with other Asian interests, although this could be due to so many of them having been to Japan. The number of Asian cultural elements that the students in both classes are now interested in is, however, impressive.

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