

## A new Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Test—IV. Cross-cultural comparisons between a Chinese sample from Singapore and an English sample

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**Summary**—The Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Test was applied to 1097 Chinese Ss in Singapore, and to 784 English students and children, in order to study the possible influence of cultural factors. Little in the way of differences was observed, the Chinese sample actually scoring slightly better than the European sample on a test designed in the European tradition. Difficulty levels of the items were similar for the representatives of the two cultures.

Previous work on the Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Test (VAST) has been concerned with the construction and psychometric properties of the test (Götz, Borisy, Lynn and Eysenck, 1979); cross-cultural comparisons between England and Japan (Iwawaki, Eysenck and Götz, 1979); and cross-cultural comparisons between Hong Kong children and adults, and English and Japanese samples (Chan, Eysenck and Götz, 1980). The test consists of 42 items, each item showing the two versions of the same non-representational drawing, one of which is superior to the other on the grounds of harmony, design and 'good Gestalt'. Each S has to judge which of the two items is better in this sense and the number of correct answers is his or her score.

There has been little evidence for cross-cultural dissimilarity, using English and German samples as representative of occidental groups and Japanese and Hong Kong children and adults as examples of oriental Ss. The present study reports a comparison between adults and children of English extraction, tested in Exeter, Sussex and London and groups of Chinese-born Ss tested in Singapore. Conditions of testing were identical with those discussed in previous papers.

The test itself constituted a third version of the original. The original version proved rather too easy for some groups; thus eight groups of German girls 11–18 yr of age had mean scores around 38 (Chan *et al.*, 1980), and a group of tutors of art and design, tested by J. Dawson in an unpublished study, achieved a mean score of 40 (39.72 ± 3.35). A second more difficult version was produced, but was still thought perhaps to be too easy and the present version (VAST-III) was made more difficult still. As it turned out, it was probably too difficult for the groups tested. There is probably no single version which would cover the ground from completely untrained children and adults to professionals in the art field; test items too difficult for the former might be too easy for the latter.

Table 1 shows the results of various groups of children and students from Exeter; ages, number and means scores and standard deviations are given. The  $\alpha$  internal reliabilities averaged around 0.4, which is of course relatively low, and seems to have been due to the difficulty level of the test. As will be seen, the mean scores are only about 3 points above the chance level. There is no obvious difference between the schoolchildren and the students tested at the art college.

Table 2 shows results from testing children in two secondary schools at the age of 15. The results are not dissimilar from those achieved in Exeter, but scores are if anything slightly higher.

Table 3 shows results from Singapore for over 1000 children and students. Mean scores are similar to the English children and students; and surprisingly, the art students do not seem to be superior to the children; if anything they show a slight degree of inferiority! Also the Singapore children and adults have a higher score on the test than the Exeter children and students, which is surprising as the test was of course produced by European artists, and one would have thought in terms

Table 1. VAST scores for an English population

	Schoolchildren			Students
	10–12	13–14	15–17	17+
Age (yr)	10–12	13–14	15–17	17+
Mean (yr)	23.5	23.5	24.8	24.2
SD (yr)	6.57	6.07	6.11	7.71
N	197	179	85	129

Table 2. VAST scores for two English schools

	Sussex	London
	Age (yr)	15
Mean (yr)	29.2	26.2
SD (yr)	4.43	3.96
N	107	87

Table 3. VAST scores for a Singapore population

	Schoolchildren		University students	Adults	Art college
	9–12	15–18	20–25	18–40	18–40
Age (yr)	9–12	15–18	20–25	18–40	18–40
Mean (yr)	26.3	24.3	28.9	27.7	24.9
SD (yr)	4.47	4.35	4.51	4.49	4.52
N	291	443	95	143	125

of teaching and other environmental influences that European children would do better on the test than Chinese ones brought up in a different culture. The  $\alpha$  reliabilities of the Singapore group were slightly lower than the reliabilities of the English groups, but on the whole the difference can hardly be regarded as meaningful.

It is interesting to look at the difficulty level of the items when comparing different European and Chinese groups. Are the hardest items in one culture also the hardest in another? In an attempt to answer this, correlations were computed between the difficulty levels (% correct) of each item in the two cultures. The correlations indicate to what extent item difficulty is a common feature for the two populations. Taking all the groups together, the correlation is 0.53, which is significant beyond the 0.001 level. For individual comparisons of different age groups correlations are a little lower, ranging from 0.33 to 0.44; all these of course are still statistically significant. The correlations are lower than those of earlier versions, probably due to the greater difficulty level of the test; it is obvious that where the range of difficulty levels is smaller, correlations will be proportionately lower. Nevertheless, the data still indicate a great deal of cross-cultural similarity and contain no evidence for cross-cultural dissimilarity.

The data indicate, as have our previous studies, that visual aesthetic sensitivity is little correlated with age or education, and transcends cultural differences as marked as those between European and a Chinese subculture. The data also suggest that this particular version of the VAST has too high a difficulty level, and that perhaps a longer version, containing an additional number of easy items, might give a higher level of reliability than the test as at present constituted.

#### REFERENCES

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