

Two Flavors of Aesthetic Tasting: *Rasa* and Savoring A Cross-Cultural Study With Implications for Psychology of Emotion

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A comparative analysis suggested that two indigenous theories of aesthetic emotions, the Indian *rasa* and the Chinese notion of savoring, share in common the two defining characteristics of emotion refinement—detachment and self-reflexivity (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007), but that these two aesthetic traditions differ in ways that correspond to the ontological/epistemological divide between the ancient Greeks (and other Indo-European languages) and the Chinese as predicted by Nisbett (2003). Implications of this investigation for theory and research on emotions are discussed.

Keywords: *rasa*, savoring, aesthetic emotions, conceptual blending, basic emotions versus core affect

This article compares and contrasts systematically for the first time (for a preliminary comparison, see Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007) two time-tested models of aesthetic emotions outside the West—the Indian *rasa* and the Chinese notion of savoring (hereafter “savoring” for short), bringing to bear research in cognitive science and theories of individual and cultural differences. The introduction starts with a general orientation to the history of ideas approach, followed by a working definition of aesthetic emotions. The comparative analyses proceed in three steps: First, the common grounds between *rasa* and savoring are examined within the framework of a theory of emotion refinement (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007); then the differences between the two traditions are compared and contrasted within the framework of cross-cultural differences in ontology and epistemology (Nisbett, 2003); finally, a second round of comparison, by means of an expanded model of knowledge structure (Woike, 1994), is made to give a more nuanced account. Implications of this investigation for psychology of emotion will be discussed.

The History of Ideas Approach

Although *rasa* and savoring are both traditions that are still being followed in contemporary India (Lynch, 1990; McDaniel, 1995) and China (Ye, 2007), respectively, the focus of this comparative study is on the formulations by eminent thinkers in history. As Averill and Sundararajan (2006) point out, history of ideas provides a more comprehensive context—both historical and theoretical—to situate the empirical studies of emotion than is currently the practice. The history of ideas approach (for its application to a cross-cultural history of emotions, see Averill & Sundararajan, 2006) relies on authoritative texts of a tradition, as well as existing scholarship on these texts. The citations of the

texts in this study are for illustrative purposes only; the reader is referred to more detailed information elsewhere.

Literally meaning tasting, the term *rasa* (Higgins, 2007; McDaniel, 1995; Shweder & Haidt, 2000) refers to aesthetic emotions experienced by the person of taste during identification with a dramatic character or situation. According to the Sanskrit literary tradition, the spectator is totally involved in the dramatic event and feels an emotion that is powerful and extraordinary, yet impersonal and generic. The earliest text on *rasa* is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata (3rd century AD?), but the best known and one of the most influential theorists on this subject is Abhinavagupta (10th century; Gnoli, 1956; Masson & Patwardhan, 1970).

Savoring (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007; Sundararajan, 2008) refers to appreciation and extensive processing of personal emotional information that includes, but is not confined, to aesthetic experiences. Savoring can be traced back to Chinese classical texts of high antiquity (3rd century BC, if not earlier), but the earliest and one of the most influential theorists of savoring is the 9th century poet/critic Ssu-k'ung T'u (837–908) (Owen, 1992; Ssu-Kung, 1963; Sundararajan, 1998, 2004).

Aesthetic Emotions Defined

Cupchik (2005; Cupchik & Winston, 1992) has contrasted two modes of affective response to aesthetic materials: reflective versus reactive. Whereas a “reactive” approach searches for aesthetic works that will modify affective states related to pleasure and excitement, a “reflective” approach searches for *meaning* in a complex aesthetic event and relates back to the self—only the latter case is considered bona fide aesthetic experience according to the traditions of *rasa* and savoring. The reflective responses can be understood in terms of mind minding (Bogdan, 2000), which consists of two subtypes: Making the intent known to oneself (minding its mind, or MIM), or making the intent of the other known (minding other mind, or MOM). MIM applies to both *rasa* and savoring, whereas MOM applies to the “shared reality” (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009) between the writer and the audience in both *rasa* and savoring. In *rasa* and savoring, the reflective awareness of emotions can be understood in terms of the

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two major components of emotion refinement (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007)—self-reflexivity and detachment.

Rasa and Savoring: Some Common Grounds

Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity combines two variants of consciousness, distinguished by Lambie and Marcel (2002): second-order awareness, as opposed to first-order experience; and self-directed as opposed to outward-directed attention. Second-order awareness is awareness that can be recalled and reported. Inwardly directed attention constitutes awareness as “my” awareness, a self-reflexive consciousness essential to episodic memory (Wheeler, Stuss, & Tulving, 1997). In contrast to the first-order experience of tasting and liking the flavors of food, savoring capitalizes on the second-order awareness of knowing that one likes the flavors so as to manipulate the experience by prolonging it, making fine discriminations of it, and so forth (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007). The second-order awareness of experience is evident in the following examples of savoring from mainland China, retrieved by Yahoo.Chinese (Ye, 2007):

A. “Pain is like a book. By studying it [*ti-wei*], thinking about it, and digesting it, one will come to have many special feelings about it.” (p. 123)

B. “[Only when you are not in front of me am I immersed in the feelings toward you], and to experience [*ti-wei*] my longing for you in every fine detail.” (p. 123)

The compound “*ti-wei*” is one of the terms denoting savoring. Here “*ti*” (physically experience) is used to modify the root term of savoring “*wei*” (literally “tasting”)—to savor is to experience the experience.

The self-reflexive mode is prominent in *rasa* as well. Aesthetic experience is considered an inner perception, which is referred to as “self-knowing” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 66). More specifically, “aesthetic enjoyment consists in the Tasting of one’s own consciousness” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 101, Note). The self-reflexive consciousness is supposedly a source of pleasure: “this Tasting [of one’s own consciousness] is endowed with extreme pleasantness (beauty)” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 101, Note). The pleasure in self-reflexivity makes it possible to savor not just positive but also negative affect as well. For instance, one allegedly finds rest in the heart when tasting “the form of consciousness called sorrow” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 88). It is probably for similar reasons that the Chinese discourse on savoring includes negative experiences, such as loss and bereavement (Sundararajan, 2007).

Lastly, self-reflexivity underscores the agentic aspect of the self. Savoring is a self-initiated action that cannot be done vicariously—one cannot savor the taste or experience of someone else’s, but one’s own. Neither can it be imposed from without—the devil can be made to taste his own medicine, but not to savor it, unless he himself wants to. *Rasa* shares this assumption. Aesthetic experience in the *rasa* tradition entails “an active participation in one’s own self, and thus the absence of the character of otherness proper to cognition of the thoughts of others” (Gnoli, 1956, pp. 101–102). *Rasa*, according to Abhinava, “does not consist in the inference . . . of someone else’s mental state . . . but is a personal experience—

the spectator identifies himself with this mental state and lives it himself” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 97, Note 1).

Detachment

Mental attitudes and experiences vary along a dimension that runs from detachment to immersion (Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Detachment refers to mental distance from experience, and immersion the lack thereof. Mental distance from experience is deemed essential to *rasa*. Thus, we read that despite the strong emphasis on sympathetic identification of the audience with the situation depicted in drama, the audience “does not identify completely; he retains a certain *aesthetic distance*, the name for which is *rasa*” (Masson & Patwardhan, 1970, p. 24). Because the actor is “involved” with the tasks of performing, Abhinava claimed that the actor experiences no *rasa* in contrast to the spectator who is “free” (Masson & Patwardhan, 1970, p. 35), and who alone can experience *rasa*.

Mental distance is also essential to savoring. In a letter to Chi P’u, Ssu-k’ung T’u wrote:

Tai Shu-lun once said: “The scene given by a poet is like the sun being warm on Indigo Fields and the fine jade there giving off a mist—You can gaze on it but you can’t fix it in your eyes.” Such image beyond image, such scene beyond scene—how can it be discussed easily? (Owen, 1992, p. 357)

Here mental distance is suggested by an aerial view of mist and sunlight over bluish soil—that is all there is perceptually; the rest is invisible but can be palpably felt, such as the jade under the ground giving off a vapor of mist, as it is getting toasty warm on a sunny day. Not unlike the fine jade, experiences buried deep in memory can be evoked by poetry and warm up to life in the process of savoring—if only one knows how to gaze from afar, to paraphrase Ssu-k’ung T’u.

Cross-Cultural Differences in Aesthetic Tasting

Central to aesthetic tasting is the notion of flavor, which refers to having an emotional response to perception of the art work, and registering that experience as the work’s “flavor” (Gelernter, 1994). But what is registered as flavor differs across cultures: *Rasa* capitalizes on the flavor of focal and discrete emotions, whereas savoring that of the undulating background moods. To examine these differences, I apply models of individual and cultural differences in ontology, epistemology, and knowledge structure. I start with the most abstract and overarching category, the ontological difference between being and becoming.

Being Versus Becoming

The being orientation privileges a static state, an abiding *essence* that does not change, whereas the becoming orientation puts a premium on the dynamic *process* of change. This ontological difference has far-reaching epistemological consequences in terms of patterns of attention and perception, and habits of organizing the world, differences which are succinctly summed up by Nisbett (2003) in his comparison between the Greek and other Indo-European languages, on the one hand, and the ancient Chinese tradition, on the other:

The ancient Greeks were fond of categories and used them as the basis for discovery and application of rules. They also believed in stability and understood both the physical and social worlds in terms of fixed attributes or dispositions . . . the ancient Chinese were uninterested in categories, believed in change, and understood the behavior of both physical and social objects as being due to the interaction of the object with a surrounding field of forces.” (pp. 152–153)

Entity Versus Process Thinking: Two Orientations of Aesthetic Tasting

Consistent with the formulation of entity versus incremental lay theories by Molden and Dweck (2006), the being orientation is prone to reification, a tendency to treat phenomena, for instance emotions, as entities with an essence at the core. The term *rasa* has many uses that revolve around the notion of essence, such as juice, “the soul or quintessence of something” and “the life-giving sap in plants” (Higgins, 2007, p. 45). In aesthetics, it refers to the “flavor” of emotions experienced in their essence, and as transcendental forms that are implicit in the deepest modes of human experience (Shweder & Haidt, 2000). Drawing a distinction between permanent and transitory emotions, Indian aesthetics insists that only the former can be the object of tasting (Gnoli, 1956). Not unlike the basic emotions theories in the contemporary West, *rasa* privileges stable, discrete emotion states as units of analysis. The eight or nine basic *rasas*—the erotic, the comic, the sorrowful, the furious, the heroic, the terrible, the odious, the marvelous, and the serene—allegedly name as many basic emotion types, or forms of consciousness that “every creature since birth possesses” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 91).

In sharp contrast is Ssu-k’ung T’u’s categorization of 24 moods or modes of experiencing poetry (Sundararajan, 2004): The grand, the unemphatic, the ornate, the grave, the lofty, the polished, the refined, the vigorous, the exquisite, the spontaneous, the pregnant, the untrammelled, the evocative, the well-knit, the artless, the distinctive, the devious, the natural, the poignant, the vivid, the transcendent, the ethereal, the light-hearted, and the flowing mode (Ssu-Kung, 1963). These poetic moods are not done justice by the “basic” categories of emotions, such as “happiness” or “sadness.” Rather, they are the amorphous undercurrents of feeling states too subtle and nuanced to carry any conventional label. Of note, an empirical study of musical emotion scales arrived at a similar conclusion about aesthetic emotions in music (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008).

The differential emphasis on focal, discrete emotions versus background moods is reflected in the food analogy. Bharata compared the aesthetic experience to eating: “the permanent emotion in drama is spiced with transitory emotions and literary ornaments, to be enjoyed by the connoisseur” (McDaniel, 1995, p. 47). Transitory emotions are ornamental in status, probably because of their lack of stability: “The transitory emotions . . . appear and disappear within the permanent emotions as waves appear and disappear in the ocean, contributing to its excellence” (McDaniel, 1995, p. 47). Izard (2007), a basic emotions theorist, also argues by analogy that “the case for basic emotions as natural kinds is similar to that for the four basic tastes” (p. 261).

The complete opposite argument was made by Ssu-k’ung T’u, who used food analogy to make a case for the variability and

combinatorial freedom of feeling states. In a letter to certain Mr. Li, Ssu-k’ung T’u wrote,

[I]n my opinion we can adequately speak of poetry only in terms of making distinctions in flavors. In everything that suits the palate in the region south of Chiang-ling, if it is a pickled dish, then it is indeed sour—but it is nothing more than sour. If it is a briny dish, then it is quite salty—but nothing more than salty. The reason people from the north, when eating such food, simply satisfy their hunger and then stop eating is that they recognize it somehow falls short of perfect excellence and lacks something beyond the distinction between “the merely sour” and “the merely salty.” (Owen, 1992, p. 351)

The ideal poet, according to Ssu-k’ung T’u, is one who is able to make subtle discriminations beyond the emotional equivalent of saltiness or sourness. The proposal to go beyond prototypes is predicated upon the importance given to experience and process, which in cooking is a dynamic flux of blending and combination of flavors, resulting in endless gradations of nuances even though the ingredients may remain the same.

Of course, blending is also true of *rasa*. But, in sharp contrast to the process orientation of savoring, *rasa* is interested in the end result of blending, a product orientation that also holds sway in the creativity research in psychology (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). Writing with an analytical rigor reminiscent of the componential analysis of emotions in psychology, but completely alien to classical Chinese aesthetics, Bharata stated, “*Rasa* is produced from a combination of determinants, consequents, and complementary psychological states” (Higgins, 2007, p. 45). To Bharata, the end product of blending is unity that stems from the achievement of a permanent emotion. In this respect, he shared with Aristotle the emphasis on unity as a criterion of success for the work (Higgins, 2007).

Another permutation of the entity versus process theme is the transcendent, true self (*Atman*) in contrast to the temporal self awash in the process of becoming.

The Transcendent Versus the Temporal Self

The ultimate goal of the aesthetic experience in *rasa* is transcendence: “it [the spectacle] has the power of abolishing the limited personality of the spectator, who regains, momentarily, his immaculate being not yet overshadowed by *māyā*” (Gnoli, 1956, pp. 53–54, Note 3). In contrast is the Chinese tradition of savoring that celebrates practically everything *rasa* leaves out in the soul’s solitary flight to *Brahman*—the transient, the concrete, the particular, and the individual.

The self that is celebrated in savoring is not the eternal *Atman* but a temporal being. There are two important temporal markers in savoring: “evaluation of (current) flavor” (*pin wei*), and “savoring in retrospect” (*hui wei*). “Evaluation of flavor” entails slow, prolonged processing to better appreciate and discriminate the ongoing experience in its multifarious nuances. *Hui-wei* means literally retasting, which refers to “a recollection in the mind of a previously encountered flavor” (Eoyang, 1993, p. 230). For instance, this term is used in the expression: “recall and ponder [the happy moments of] one’s childhood” (Ye, 2007, p. 117). Retrospective savoring can also be applied to the present moment—this is achieved by time travel to the future so as to render the present a past to be savored. A case in point is Liu Xiang, the men’s 100-m

hurdle champion at the 2004 Olympics, who made the following statements in response to journalists' questions after the event: "To be able to achieve this result is enough for me to savor retrospectively [*Hui-wei*] for a long time the memory of this experience" (adapted from Ye, 2007, p. 117).

By contrast, the emphasis in *rasa* is to go beyond the personal and the particular instances of the experience. Empathy with others can help us transcend ourselves to some extent, but *rasa* entails a more radical breakthrough—we need to be able to contemplate on the universal. Higgins (2007) explains: Adults, who observe the child's emotional expressions, may be reminded of memories of their own childhood. These reactions "may be limited to a sense of sharing" (p. 48) with another, which is not *rasa*. But it is possible to go further—the reactions "might also prompt reflection on the emotional repertoire and trajectory of human beings generally" (p. 49)—"If the adult moves on to this more general reflection, he or she is close to the type of contemplation that precipitates *rasa*" (p. 49). According to Higgins (2007), this is only the first of the two "breakthroughs" associated with *rasa*: The second and "most important breakthrough possible in a human life [is] that of spiritual liberation, or *moksa*" (p. 43).

This completes the first round of comparison in broad strokes, which may have missed out certain nuances in the indigenous traditions. In the second round of comparison, an expanded model of knowledge structure is applied to cast a finer net.

Cross-Cultural Differences in Knowledge Structure

Individual and cultural differences in knowledge structure have been found by Woike, Gershkovich, Piorkowski, and Polo (1999), and others. According to Woike (1994; Woike et al., 1999), knowledge structure refers to the general ways of organizing information. She proposes two such ways of organizing information—differentiation and integration—the former was found to be preferred by agentic (or independent) individuals, whereas the latter communal (or interdependent) individuals. "Differentiation involves perceiving differences, separateness, independence, and opposition, whereas integration involves perceiving similarity, connection, interdependence, and congruity" (Woike et al., 1999, p. 601). Expanding on Woike et al.'s (1999) work, Sundararajan (2002; Sundararajan & Averill, 2007) proposed a cultural model based on the intersection of two axes of mental operation—involvement and discrimination. This model translates Woike et al.'s (1999) terms—differentiation and integration—into a combination of two dimensions: Differentiation entails the combination of high discrimination and low involvement, whereas integration entails low discrimination and high involvement.

As shown in Figure 1, Discrimination, the horizontal axis, is anchored at the high end by emphasis on differences and at the low end by similarities. Involvement, the vertical axis, is anchored at the high end by participation and at the low end by separateness. This model predicts that the East (Quadrant 1), such as China, structures the world in terms of high involvement (participation) and low discrimination (similarities), whereas the West (Quadrant 3) as exemplified by India in the present context, low involvement (psychological distance), and high discrimination (differences). Quadrant 2 names a blended space (Fauconnier, 2001; Turner, 1996) high in both involvement and discrimination, to be explained later, whereas Quadrant 4 a mental space deficient in both

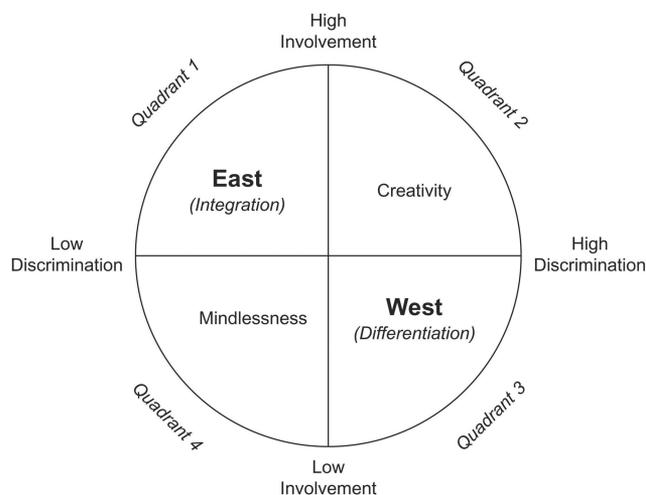


Figure 1. Cross-culture knowledge structure.

involvement and discrimination and will not be considered here. Quadrants 1 and 3 can be illustrated by two key notions—harmony and purity—in the Chinese and Indian traditions, respectively.

Purity Versus Harmony

Purity is a paradigmatic case of the Indo-European preoccupation with essence. The knowledge structure of purity may be understood in terms of low involvement (psychological distance from the impure) and high discrimination (differentiation and exclusion). Purity works by elimination, a rationality buttressed by the exclusionary logic of either/or. By contrast, the principle of harmony may be understood in terms of a knowledge structure high in involvement (privileging the inclusive, relational configuration of things) and low in discrimination (the principle of complementarity and its both/and logic).

Uniformity versus multiplicity. The Indian notion of basic emotions is based on a model of the melting pot in which the parts are subsumed under the whole. To wit, permanent emotions "transform other emotions into themselves, even as the ocean transforms the waves into itself" (Sinha, 1961, p. 175). Harmony, in contrast, is like a bowl of tossed salad, in which as Lu (2004) points out, "the individual is not eliminated by the whole" (p. 143). This point can be illustrated by the different math used in the cooking analogy across cultures. In the Indian context, the math is from many to one: $1 + 1 = 1$. The parts disappear into the whole—a unity that abrogates. Just as the end product of cooking is a unitary flavor into which the ingredients disappear, so is emotion, said a store owner in India: "*Bhāva* [emotion] is when different parts of the person come together, as when cooking Kashmiri chicken. Different spices are blended together to create a taste" (McDaniel, 1995, p. 43).

In sharp contrast is the Chinese stir fry, in which the ingredients blend without losing their integrity and crispness. Here the math is from many to many: $1 + 1 = 3$. Harmony names this process from many to many—from the dialectic relationship between two ingredients a third element emerges, a new flavor different from those of both ingredients: "Harmony is like soup," said Zen Tsu

(died 493 BC): “The salt flavoring is the other to the bitter, and the bitter is the other to the salt. With these two ‘others’ combining in due proportions and a new flavor emerging, this is what is expressed in ‘harmony’” (Fung, 1962, p. 108).

Nonrelationality versus mutuality. Purity with its basic thrust toward unity is nonrelational. A case in point is the unity of consciousness, in which consciousness relates to nothing else but itself: “Everything that exists is reposing in the consciousness, but the consciousness does not repose in any other thing different from itself, it is reposed in itself” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 56, Note c). Harmony, by contrast, is a dynamic structure of multiplicity that requires a relation of mutuality in order to function properly. The relational configuration of things conducive to harmony is governed by the principle of keeping things in due proportion, known as the golden mean (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). *The Doctrine of the Mean* (1971) stated: “All things are nurtured together without their injuring one another” (p. 427). Hsu (1990) also claims that conflicts such as “emotions that strive against inextricable ties and inexpressible pains” contribute to the making of a “mild and gentle disposition” with “sincere and deep emotions” (p. 448).

This positive spin on the conflicting affects forms a sharp contrast to the notion of purity that attaches a negative connotation to conflicts and contradictions. The state of unity in *rasa* is characterized by the “absence of any cause for contradiction” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 70). As McDaniel (1995) points out, aesthetic emotions may blend smoothly—or not. When they conflict with and inhibit one another:

This conflict is . . . understood to result in a semblance or imitation of a true emotion. It is a damaged, inferior, or incomplete sort of emotion, tainted by . . . some inappropriate source . . . [for instance] the clash between parental and erotic love . . . They are called “compound emotions” when several transitory emotions arise in quick succession, especially when some are inhibited by others. (p. 47)

It is against the backdrop of purity and harmony that we may appreciate the complexity of *rasa* and savoring—how *rasa* may stress unity but is not unitary; essence but not essentialist; purity while endorsing blending—similarly, as we shall see, how savoring privileges integration without excluding discrimination. To better understand these phenomena, we turn to conceptual blending.

Rasa and Savoring as Blended Space

A major advantage of the expanded model over the original knowledge structure of Woike et al. (1999) lies in the provision of a “blended space” (Figure 1, Quadrant 2) that allows for combinatorial freedom of the basic themes (for an application of conceptual blending to cross-cultural analysis of hope, see Averill & Sundararajan, 2005). The notion of conceptual blending is developed by the cognitive scientists Fauconnier (2001) and Turner (1996) to explain how two (or more) concepts combine to form new ones. Let A and B stand for the original concepts or “input spaces.” For A and B to combine, Fauconnier (2001) postulated two additional mental spaces, a “generic space” and a “blended space.” The elements that A and B have in common are projected into a generic space. A creative synthesis of A and B, based on their common as well as unique properties, is then selectively projected into a fourth or blended space. Conceptual blending

gives rise to emergent qualities that are not found in the original input spaces.

In Figure 1 it was postulated that creativity (Quadrant 2) entails a “blended space” (Fauconnier, 2001; Turner, 1996) that is high in both discrimination and involvement, with due cultural variations. Figure 2 gives more details of this blended space.

As Figure 2 shows, A and B are two input spaces of *Differentiation* and *Integration*, respectively—the former is inhabited by purity, and the latter harmony. C refers to generic space that consists of elements that A and B share in common, namely the components of discrimination and involvement, from which selective combination of features give rise to D1 and D2—the blended spaces of *rasa* and savoring, respectively.

Rasa as Purity-Based Involvement

As a conceptual blend, *rasa* is predicted to be high in both discrimination and involvement—but with a purity bias. High involvement is evident in the emphasis on sympathetic identification or immersion:

Born in the heart of the poet, it [this state of consciousness] flowers, as it were, in the actor and bears fruit in the spectator. All three, in the serene contemplation of the work of art form in reality a single knowing subject, fused together by the same sensations and the same purified joy.” (Gnoli, 1956, p. XXVIII)

Corresponding to high involvement is the low discrimination of fusion, characterized by the “annulment of every distinction between one’s own Self and the Self of other people, and the actuation of a generalized state of consciousness” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 69).

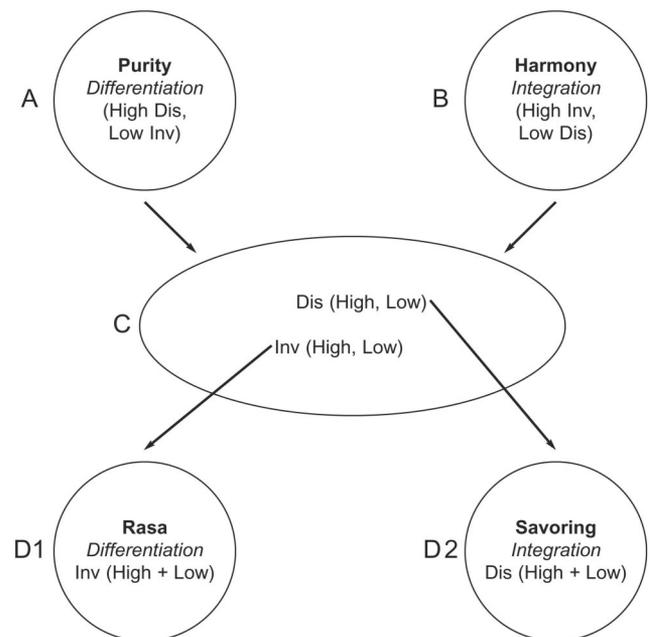


Figure 2. Conceptual blending in savoring and *rasa*. A, B = input space; C = generic space; D1, D2 = blended space; Dis = discrimination; Inv = involvement.

However, the knowledge structure of immersion or fusion in *rasa* is complex. Because of its deep roots in the rationality of purity, sympathetic identification in *rasa* exhibits not simply the usual high involvement–low discrimination of fusion, but also the low involvement–high discrimination of an either/or logic. The prominence of the either/or logic is evident in the sharp distinction drawn between sympathetic identification and everyday cognition, such as inference and recollection (Masson & Patwardhan, 1970, p. 28). An equally sharp distinction is drawn between aesthetic immersion and personal desire: “Aesthetic experience postulates, of necessity, the extinction of every practical desire and, therefore, the submersion of the subject in the aesthetic object to the exclusion of all else” (Gnoli, 1956, p. XXII). Note the constant refrain of “to the exclusion of all else.” This exclusionary thrust of purity is further manifest in the emphasis on high-focus attention as prerequisite for immersion/absorption, in contradistinction to the low-focus attention supported by the both/and logic of harmony, to be examined later. “The mind of he who tastes must be absorbed in the object of the tasting to the exclusion of all else. On the contrary, he who eats . . . can also think of other things” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 66, Note 4).

In the final analysis, the neat dichotomy between immersion and detachment drawn by Lambie and Marcel (2002) no longer holds in the *rasa* context—immersion is the means as well as expression of transcendence. Immersion in the aesthetic experience entails liberation from the mundane reality. The audience is immersed “neither in the time and space of the actor as such (and therefore in the time and space connected with his practical life), nor in the time and space of Rāma as a real person” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 104), but in a transcendent reality, the enjoyment of which is “of the same order as the Tasting of the supreme *Brahman*” (Gnoli, 1956, p. 56). The rare insight of *rasa* lies in the realization that what hinders spiritual liberation is neither emotion nor experience per se but the ego, such that immersion in the transpersonal reality of aesthetic emotions can give one a (fore) taste of *moksa*. For instance, in the medieval devotional (*bhakti*) movements, the believers attain *moksa* (liberation) when they lose their personal identities by taking up the roles of lover, mother, friend, or servant of God, with corresponding emotions of longing, nurturing, and so forth (Lynch, 1990). It is this paradoxical combination of high involvement (immersion in the aesthetic emotions) and low involvement (transcendence beyond personal identity and the everyday world) at once that gives the aesthetic immersion in the *rasa* tradition a very unique flavor.

Savoring as Harmony-Based Discrimination

Another conceptual blend is savoring, which is predicted to be high in both discrimination and involvement, except that it has a harmony bias. High discrimination in the context of savoring may be understood in terms of what Gelernter (1994) refers to as “emotional acuity”:

(1) that you are able to register subtle or nuanced emotions—to experience subtle emotional reactions—where less acute people would have no emotional reaction at all; and

(2) that you are able to distinguish many elements in a subtle emotional palette, where a less acute person would distinguish the emotional equivalent of red, green, blue. (pp. 89–90)

Discrimination in savoring is an expression of inclusiveness and participation (high involvement), contrary to its transcendent (low involvement) thrust in *rasa*. Keen discrimination of emotional nuances in savoring is pursued not for the purity related purposes of elimination and separation, so much as to enhance stimulus features, and to arrive at a fuller, more holistic picture of the situation. This point is borne out by the emphasis in savoring on low focus attention (Sundararajan, 2004), in sharp contrast to the high-focus attention privileged by *rasa*.

Low focus or defocused attention is associated with low arousal state and openness to subtle stimuli in the environment (Simonton, 1999). A case in point is the situationally attuned approach to emotions known as protonarratives (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007; Sundararajan, 2008). Protonarratives are what Turner refers to as “small stories,” background events that are seemingly neutral in affect, such as “The wind blows clouds through the sky, a child throws a rock . . .” and so on (1996, p. 13). These seemingly uneventful occasions that are not yet emplotted into the narrative of the so-called “basic” emotions are nonetheless pregnant with meaning when the potential for savoring is open to them. Consider a protonarrative of poetic moods by Ssu-k’ung T’u: “Like that balmy breeze of spring,/Pliantly changing in one’s robes./Consider the tones in fine bamboo—Lovely indeed, return [home] with them” (Owen, 1992, p. 306). Transient moods, such as those associated with the gentle breeze that frolics in one’s robes and rustles in the fine bamboo, have no ready-made emotion labels. In capturing such fugitive phenomena, reliance on stored, internal representations, such as the basic emotions categories, are not as helpful as meticulous attention to subtle changes in the environment. Thus, savoring, as demonstrated by the protonarratives, is a unique type of discrimination, which consists of a paradoxical combination of high discrimination and low discrimination at once—keen discernment or emotional acuity (high discrimination), on the one hand; and an all inclusive openness (low discrimination) to information from the internal as well as the external environment, on the other.

Implications for Theory and Research on Emotions

The contrast between *rasa* and savoring has a margin of overlap and affinity with the basic emotions debate. The parallelism can be explored along two registers: (a) difference in cognitive style in terms of entity versus process thinking, and (b) the universality of emotion categories. Concerning cognitive styles, Lynch (1990) has made the astute observation that emotions in India “are more likely to be objectivized or substantialized than somatized as in China, or internalized, as forces, drives, or instincts as in the West” (p. 22). One caveat to be added is that just as we have seen a subdivision of Asian East (China) and West (India), the European West may not be a unitary phenomenon either. Plotted along the entity versus process thinking divide, *rasa* and Basic Emotions Theory (BET) (Izard, 2007) would fall on the same side of entity thinking. Both share in common the tendency to reify emotions into entities, except that there is a subdivision of external and internal representations—the Indian objectification is external, as evidenced by representing emotions through tangible objects such as food (Lynch, 1990), whereas the Western objectification of emotion is internal, such as brain mechanisms (Panksepp, 1998). By contrast, China and Core Affect Theory (CAT) (Russell, 2003) both emphasize the process aspect of emotion,

with a similar subdivision of external and internal representations—somatization, such as a headache, is a physical representation of the online processing of emotion, whereas the core affect of feeling good or bad is a mental, internal representation of the same.

As for the universality of emotion categories, although the identified basic emotions in *rasa* do not coincide exactly with the list proposed by BET (Shweder & Haidt, 2000), both believe in the existence of an invariant set of primary emotions common to all humans. CAT (Russell, 2003) and savoring, by contrast, claim that it is the atypical rather than the prototypical that best describes emotions in real life. This contrast is also reflected in the role of the narrative. In the basic emotions paradigm, emotions are objectified into purpose-built causal entities (Russell, 2006), with multiple components tightly woven into a canonical narrative, featuring not infrequently the knights and dragons of emotion regulation (Gross, 2007). The tradition of *rasa* has a different cast of characters drawn from the Hindu pantheon, but the centrality of the narrative remains the same. Savoring and CAT (Russell, 2008), by contrast, are antinarrative in orientation, as both seek to go beyond the conventional scripts of the emotional life, in order to capture the momentary feeling states not yet recruited and yoked by the narrative *telos* (Sundararajan, 2008).

More glaring, however, are the differences between these indigenous traditions and mainstream psychology of emotion.

Toward a Reflective Approach to Experience

Experience is generally approached as qualia in psychology. But *rasa* is not qualia, says Higgins (2007): “*rasa* is not a faculty, as is Western “taste”; it is literally the *activity* of savoring an emotion in its full flavor” (p. 45, emphasis added). This perspective on *rasa* (and by extension, savoring) shares with Noë (2009) the contention that consciousness is not “something that happens inside us like digestion,” but rather “like a work of improvisational music, is achieved in action, by us . . .” (p. 186). It is along the divide between the two approaches to experience—one as an automatic, prereflective process akin to digestion; the other as a conscious, reflective process—that we may find a major difference between the indigenous and the mainstream psychology of emotion.

Both *rasa* and savoring celebrate the reflective life. Both have also differentially endorsed the experiential self-focus, but not the analytical self-reflection in which the self is the object of critical evaluation—the former, and not the latter, has been found to be associated with psychological well-being (e.g., Watkins & Moulds, 2005). As a countervailing argument against automaticity that holds sway in mainstream psychology, *rasa* and savoring call attention to the importance of emotion as secondary response; that is, as response to one’s own response. Barefoot and Straub (1974) showed that the same nude models that the experimenter had caused to be preferred by fake heartbeat sounds were still preferred later without such sounds. This may not come as a surprise to scholars of Chinese poetics who believe that “only when the heart/mind is moved, can one savor the text” (Li, 1993, p. 336)—or the nude for that matter. As second-order responses, *rasa* and savoring capitalize on the insight that affective information is experienced, not inferred or simulated, through one’s own response to it (Reddy, 2008).

Skills to Learn From Experience

Rasa and savoring signify a paradigm shift from qualia-based account of emotions, prevalent in mainstream psychology, to skill-based account of the same.

As Noë (2004) points out rightly that “Experience is realized in the active life of the skillful animal” (p. 226), savoring is a pleasure process that is based on emotion processing competence rather than the valence attributes of the stimuli (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007). One particular skill to be considered here is learning through one’s own responses. In the tradition of *rasa*, “the breakthroughs involved in aesthetic experience facilitate spiritual aspiration by offering a *taste* of the achieved aim” (Higgins, 2007, p. 43, emphasis added). A foretaste of the goal also plays an important role in the attainment of harmony. *The Doctrine of the Mean* (1971) stated that:

It is said in the Book of Poetry: “Happy union with wife and children is like the music of lutes and harps.” When there is concord among brethren, the harmony is delightful and enduring. Thus may you regulate your family, and enjoy the pleasure of your wife and children. (pp. 396–397)

How to achieve harmony in the family? The recommendation is “*enjoy* the pleasure of your wife and children.” Enjoyment (Sundararajan, 2009) is a form of savoring, in which the object of one’s pleasure is one’s own experience, rather than the stimuli per se. What is savored is apparently harmony, as evidenced by the allusions to music, and experiences of concord seemingly “delightful and enduring,” and of “pleasure.” The argument seems to be circular—one attains the emotional goal, such as harmony, by having a foretaste of the same. But the circle is not necessarily vicious, if one knows how to follow one’s nose in savoring.

Future Research Questions

The nonsuppressive and nonavoidant regulation strategy used in *rasa* and savoring is different from the mechanisms of self-control, which may entail global deactivation of both action schema and its underlying intentions. For instance, in delay-of-gratification situations (Mischel & Mischel, 1983), consummatory ideation (“yumminess” and “chewiness” of the marshmallows) is discouraged in favor of task-oriented ideation (“I am waiting for the marshmallows”). By contrast, in *rasa* and savoring, consummatory ideations guide action by giving one a foretaste of the emotional goal. Given the ego depletion and other costs of emotion regulation (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), it is worthwhile to explore empirically the potential benefits of *rasa* and savoring as alternative emotion regulation strategies. How about the existing alternative approach of mindfulness (Brazier, 2001)? Will it fill the bill of *rasa* and savoring? Not likely. The study of Nielsen and Kaszniak (2006) found that long-term meditators were not as sensitive to subtle emotional feelings as nonmeditators. More empirical studies are needed to tease out the differences and similarities among these indigenous approaches to emotion regulation.

Lastly, although CAT shares with *rasa* and savoring an invested interest in experience, its focus is on the prereflective, raw experience (Zachar, 2006). There is accumulating evidence (e.g., Philippot, Baeyens, Douilliez, & Francart, 2004) on the importance of the processing mode—whether emotional information is processed

automatically, as is characteristic of core affect, or generatively, that is, deliberately and strategically, as is characteristic of *rasa* and savoring. This raises the question as to whether variability in emotional experience, for instance the 24 poetic moods savored by Ssu-k'ung T'u, may have different health consequences depending on levels of processing—whether the experience pertains to affective reactivity at the moment characteristic of core affect, or stems from a reflective, second order awareness characteristic of *rasa* and savoring. As can be expected, variations in core affect were found to be positively correlated with psychopathology (Barrett, 2006; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2009), whereas perceived capacity to savor the moment was found to be negatively correlated with psychopathology (Bryant, 2003; Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Empirical studies that directly compare core affect and savoring are needed to settle this question.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, two potential contributions of this study can be adumbrated.

Toward a More Nuanced Cross Cultural Analysis

This study suggests that differences between *rasa* and savoring seem to fall along the ontological and epistemological divide between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, as predicted by Nisbett (2003) and others. This finding, if confirmed by future research, raises the question as to whether conventional cultural models have masked some important differences among collectivistic cultures, such as India and China. The feasibility of a more nuanced analysis of cultures is demonstrated by an expanded model of knowledge structure that, while consistent with other cognitive models of individual and cultural differences, underscores the uniqueness of indigenous concepts, above and beyond their validation of the Western models. The notion of blended space suggests further that cultures and individuals are inherently creative, such that there will always be wrinkles created by conceptual blending that defies the neat dichotomies of the theoretical models.

New Insights on Emotions

Lynch (1990) speaks for savoring as well, when he points out that contrary to the “Western devaluation of emotion in the face of reason, India finds emotions, like food, necessary for a reasonable life, and, like taste, cultivable for the fullest understanding of life’s meaning and purpose” (p. 23). One insight driven home by *rasa* and savoring is the idea that emotions are not passive processes like digestion, but rather constitute active engagement with the world. While attunement to the world is salient in savoring, it is not so apparent in *rasa*. The transcendent world that *rasa* gravitates toward may be understood in terms of what Clark (2008) refers to as “designer environments in which to think, reason, and perform” (p. 59)—such a world demands complex skills the training regime of which is *rasa*. Although less apparent, the poetic moods savored by Ssu-k'ung T'u also pertain to ideal worlds or modes of poetry (Sundararajan, 2004). As Clark (2008) points out, “We do not just self-engineer better worlds to think in. We self-engineer ourselves to think and perform better in the worlds

we find ourselves in” (p. 59). Consistent with this perspective, virtual reality has been used productively in the training of athletes, who are taught to imagine themselves successfully performing the desired feat and thereby to create a “neuromuscular template” that controls future performances (Newton, 1996, p. 114, note 1). The same applies to aesthetics, where emotions are cultivated (i.e., refined, see Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007) not simply for coping in the here and now, but more importantly for the making of a future self and world.

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Received April 7, 2009

Revision received October 20, 2009

Accepted October 21, 2009 ■