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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hybridization of Sport and Culture in Southeast Asia: The Case of Chinlone

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Abstract

Chinlone is an ancient Burmese ball game that is considered to be the national sport of Myanmar. What makes the sport truly unique is that it is not competitive in nature, and this is a fact that makes it different in comparison to other major ball games. The primary purposes of this paper is to further understand Chinlone's history and how it is differentiated by other kickball games of Southeast Asia. During the colonization of Burma by the British, it began to adhere to the more 'Western idea of sport', something which was nonexistent in traditional Burmese society. Then, in the postcolonial period, it was used as a nation-building tool by the newly independent Burmese government to instill a sense of national pride and unity amongst the people of Myanmar, and it was during this period that the sport truly went through a process of 'gamification' where it was completely changed to resemble a modern sport.

Keywords: Chinlone, Hybrid culture, Sport and culture, Kick ball, Cultural hybridity

Introduction

Chinlone is at least 1500 years old, and it is commonly practiced by the vast majority of different ethnic groups residing within Myanmar's modern borders. It is certainly not a game played exclusively by the Bamar (the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar), and it should not be confused as such. In the present day, the sport is very much confined to Myanmar itself, but there are pockets of migrant workers and refugees from Myanmar who play the sport in other countries around the world. Other than that there are small groups of international fanatics scattered all over the world who have decided to take up the sport and practice it in their own respective countries. To the Western eye, Chinlone might seem like a bunch of people playing 'Keepie-Uppie' with a tiny wooden soccer ball, or it may resemble 'Hacky-Sack': a common leisurely game that you may see college students playing on Western university campuses. Chinlone is much more than that though, it is the national sport of a whole country, whereas Keepie-Uppie and Hacky-Sack are simple casual activities.

Chinlone is typically played in one of two forms, either in a group (known as Wein Kat), or solo (known as Tapandaing). The most common form is Wein Kat which will typically consist of six people standing in a circle. The court is typically marked by a white circular line measuring 22 feet in diameter on the ground. The players pass a handwoven rattan ball back and forth using mainly their feet and knees. Using the hands, however, is strictly forbidden in play. They will continuously walk around in a circle formation rotating around one player standing in the middle. The player in the middle is known as the 'Prince' or 'Princess', and the players will take turns going into the middle of the circle to take on this role. What makes Chinlone truly unique is that it is not competitive, there is no winner and no loser. There is only one team, with every player involved being on the same team. The game has two main objectives, one primary, and one secondary. The primary objective is to pass the ball from person to person without it falling to the ground for the longest amount of time possible. The secondary objective is to

add flair to the style of play, players will typically attempt to execute the most complicated and beautiful moves or tricks that they are capable of doing (Aung-Thwin, 2020).

The solitary version of the game: Tapandaing, is traditionally played only by females, it has essentially the same objectives, except that there are no other players to pass the ball back and forth with. The player will juggle the ball using their feet and knees, and attempt to go for as long as possible while executing tricks. Contemporary videos will typically feature a woman practicing against the backdrop of an ancient Burmese temple while wearing traditional Burmese attire, accompanied by traditional Burmese music. This particular style of Tapandiang is a glimpse into just how culturally important the sport of Chinlone is to the people of Myanmar (Lequan, 2009). Another type of Tapandiang is more similar to what a circus juggler or jester would do, an example of this could be a female juggling a shiny metal ball with one foot, while her other foot is balancing on a glass bottle that is placed upon a stool, and the stool itself is balancing on 4 more glass bottles placed under each leg of the stool, and those four glass bottles are placed upon another stool (Aung-Thwin, 2016). In summation, the solo version of the sport (Tapandiang) is essentially a modern-day performance art that is intended to display either baffling complex skills or ancient Burmese traditional culture, whereas the group version (Wien Kat) is generally viewed as more of a modern-day sport. The group version is highly structured with players wearing uniforms while playing on a specifically designed Chinlone court in front of a large audience of fans cheering them on (Bower-Bir, 2008).

Cultural hybridity theory

Cultural hybridization theory explains cultural change as the patterned production of "in-between" forms under conditions of intensified connectivity, but its most important arguments lie in specifying the drivers and the uneven dynamics of that mixing. Structurally, hybridization is propelled by disjunctive global flows of people, images, technologies, money, and ideas that circulate at different speeds and scales, creating novel juxtapositions and opportunities for recombination (Appadurai, 1996). These flows unsettle inherited cultural boundaries yet rarely dissolve them; instead, they generate situated "third spaces" in which meanings are renegotiated through mimicry, translation, and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994). Against older "homogenization" and "Americanization" theses, Pieterse reframed globalization as long-standing hybridization, emphasizing that mixture is historically normal while also acknowledging its asymmetric conditions (Pieterse, 1994).

Culture is subject to not just the combination and recombination of adaptation from space to space. Robertson argues that culture is adapted to local conditions and understandings, which are then incorporated with aspects of the previously foreign introduction (Robertson, 1995). Robertson's "glocalization" demonstrates how local actors use, purpose, or repurpose foreign culture into local vernaculars, which can be influenced by the institutions and politics of the host culture. Robertson's insights have been utilized by subsequent scholarship in the study of soft power and branding techniques for cities, places, and regions, demonstrating not only cultural diffusion but also institutional utilization for socio-economic and socio-political ends. Wagner's study of local football in America provides interesting insights into how local communities internalized foreign culture and formed an identity based on sport and rivalry in a distinct form (Wagner, 2012).

Numerous conditions create hybridization of culture, including impacts of media and state economic policies, which push culture out of previous zones of interaction into a wider sphere of consumption and practice. International media and the digitization of the production and consumption of media have led to the internationalization of popular culture. The first 'alternative' non-Western example would be Japanese culture and the more contemporary phenomenon of Korean culture (Iwabuchi, 2002). The latter is a more recent phenomenon and is indicative of the power and reach of contemporary media platforms and the diffusion of culture on a global basis, which can then be localized by entrepreneurial actors (Chang, 2015; Shim, 2006).

Nuanced scholarly debates caution against treating hybridity as a celebratory catch-all. Kraidy argues that hybrid forms are produced within transnational media power, branding logics, and regulatory environments; without attention to these material and institutional

dimensions, "hybridity talk" risks banal relativism or overlooks how corporations instrumentalize diversity for accumulation (Kraidy, 2002. Fernandez and Papastergiadis argue that migration flows of persons across borders can account for cultural diffusion and hybridity based on local conditions of the host territory (Fernandez-Kelly & Papastergiadis, 2001). Tanikella argues that embedded within culture are relationships of power that cannot be overlooked when considering which cultures are hegemonic vis-à-vis other cultures (Tanikella, 2003). This mirrors arguments of Anderson and Smith in their studies of nationalisms and how culture as a political tool for empowerment and meaning is used by elite groups to form identity and unify disparate populations under a common cultural understanding (Anderson, 1983, 1998; Smith, 1991, 1996, 2008). Hall argues that identity is a process of integrating or becoming on an individual and social level (Hall, 1990). Culture in this sense is one of contestation and a zone of power relations where some cultures become dominant whilst others become dormant or subaltern. (Ibid).

Inherent in the arguments and studies above is the notion of transnationality in the diffusion of culture and its formations. Ong argues that ownership, loosely understood, of culture is mobilized by elites and migrants through the cultivation of hybrid lifestyles seen in the influence of education, language, and cultural tastes of chosen cultural assets (Ong, 1999). Canclini sees this transnationalism through the lens of economic determinants and consumer cultures, where dominant forces in the production and sale of goods influence profound notions of citizenship and belonging to national communities (Canclini, 2001). They do not argue a linear path of inculcation but rather a highly contested give and take whereby identification of self and community are determined by complex interaction that often includes the interface of state policies. Joseph and Falcous study of hybridization of sport in New Zealand and capoeira is of particular interest as they trace the influences of different strains of martial arts and how they get localized in the context of post-colonial New Zealand (Joseph & Falcous, 2024).

This study will utilize cultural hybridity to argue that Chinlone, while being associated with modern-day Myanmar, is not a 'Burmese' sport in the sense of national establishment. Rather, Chinlone is the product of extensive cultural interaction beginning with Cuju from China and extending through the period of colonization. The post-colonial version of Chinlone, while bearing similar characteristics, emerged with a different form and end goal of the game, indicative of a competitive form. Included in the post-colonial form of Chinlone was a political determinative of nation-building and collective identity formation as a particular productive goal. The success or not of this is outside of the scope of this study. Instead the study will analyze the similarities and differences of Chinlone from its regional variations of similar character with different names, such as Takraw, shuttlecock, and Sipa.

The article surveys the prevailing literature and articulates that the modern form of Chinlone is a hybrid of different historical forces. However, Chinlone in its modern version, while sharing many similar characteristics with other regional variants of kickball, in its original form was distinctly Burmese as understood in its play, purpose, and artistic form. A method to articulate this is the SEA Games format of games being defined by host countries in accordance with IOC regulations. Chinlone, it is argued, should have its own category in competitive games and can gain this through differentiation and inclusion into SEA games as a platform. Progressive naming and differentiation of Chinlone can allow for the diffusion of Chinlone as a hybrid sport for consumption and diffusion globally.

The article attempts to answer two important questions: Is Chinlone a distinct game of Myanmar? If no, then what factors have influenced Chinlone in its contemporary form? Second, if Chinlone is a hybrid game, how can it be differentiated in sport competition? The article is a qualitative study which will draw on secondary literature to form an historical basis of inquiry to answer the first question of distinctness. Historical inquiry will be periodized to articulate an argument that Chinlone is a hybridized game influenced from China during the Tang Dynasty and is representative of cultural diffusion yet distinct in its localized form. The article will also analyze the contemporary form of Chinlone from the theoretical perspective of cultural hybridization which posits a diffusion of culture and local indigenization of cultural practice. The article will then draw on the previous to articulate how Chinlone can be differentiated at the regional level of Southeast

Asia through the SEA games architecture and sport competition.

Review of the literature and field

There are limited academic literature produced in English about Chinlone. The most important documents that are easily found regarding this subject have been written by Maitrii Aung-Thwin. He delves into the connection between the sport and how colonial/ postcolonial powers used it for their various objectives such as domination over the Burmese in the case of the British, and nation-building in the case of the newly independent postcolonial Burmese government. He talks a great deal about how these events changed the sport and the various new rules and standards that were applied to it.

His work provides a great deal of insight into a lot of the history and what took place to make Chinlone what it is today. He covers a lot of what we can consider to be 'the second in a series of four segments' of the story of Chinlone. The second segment, though rather brief, is arguably the most important part of the sport's history (Wood, 2014). This second segment in the story of Chinlone could be referred to as ' Its Premodern History' and he details the intense changes it went through during the period. What Aung-Thwin doesn't talk much about, however, is what we could consider the First, Third, and Fourth segments in the story of Chinlone. Essentially he has covered the development of the sport in the periods of Colonial occupation and Postcolonial independence, which would roughly be about 100 to 150 years or so total, starting when the British arrived in Burma in 1824 to the middle of the 20th century when the newly independent Burmese government utilized the sport as a nation-building tool. The first, third, and fourth segments in the story of Chinlone, would be as follows. First: its ancient history, Third: its recent history, and Fourth: its future. Aung-Thwin speak to Chinlone's ancient history as he notes evidence to suggest Chinlone is possibly more than a thousand years old, notably he mentions an Ancient 'replica of Chinlone ball' found in a 7th century CE Pyu civilization settlement:

"Contemporary tourist brochures, popular magazines, government websites and newspapers trace the origins of chinlone as far back as the Pyu civilization (first to eighth centuries), considered by historians to be the first political culture of ancient Myanmar. In 1926-1927, a French scholar reported that he had uncovered a silver replica of a chinlone that dated back to the seventh century." (Aung-Thwin, 2016).

Aung- Thwin also briefly talks about how historically variations of the game were played throughout all of Southeast Asia and the notable different names that it was called in these places. He then goes on to briefly mention one account of a Burmese king being gifted a Chinlone ball from a Siamese visitor in the Thirteenth century:

"Another reference to chinlone established its origins during the 'classical' kingdom of the thirteenth-century Bagan, where a king was presented an ivory chinlone by a 'Siamese' sculptor upon his ascension to the throne. The story goes that he was so pleased with the gift that he ordered it made in cane so that young men at the Royal Court could play it." (Aung-Thwin, 2016).

Cuju, which was played in China. Also known as Tsu-Chu, Cuju was an ancient Chinese sport known to originate some 2000 years previous during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). It eventually ceased to be played at some point between the 14th and 17th centuries during the Ming dynasty period (Cho & Leary, 2012). Chinlone is also an ancient sport, although according to the historical record, it is not quite as old as Cuju (Boucher, 2008). Due to the proximity of Myanmar to China, however, there is a strong likelihood that Chinlone is directly descended from Cuju. It is highly likely because ancient Myanmar and ancient China have had relations stretching as far back as nearly 2 millennia ago (Sangermano, 1833). Considering the fact that many other Southeast Asian countries have some sort of similar game to both Chinlone and Cuju, it can be theorized that all versions of these similar Southeast Asian sports could all be directly descended from Cuju. Aung-Thwin talks about these other similar sports and says:

"...Sixteenth century sources suggest that versions of the game were played in Siam, Cambodia, Southern Vietnam, and Indonesia." (Aung-Thwin, 2020)

One can gain insight into the deeper relationship between all these ancient Asian sports from further understanding them individually, as well as their similarities and differences to each other. We can also suggest that there is a lot of significance in the

relationship between Chinlone and Cuju, not only because Aung-Thwin didn't cover it, but also because of the recent acknowledgment by FIFA that Cuju is considered to be the first officially recognized version of Soccer or Football, which is the world's most popular sport.

The third section in the story of Chinlone would be the recent history to the present. This would cover a period of a bit more than a half-century from the 1970s (just after the postcolonial nation-building era talked about by Aung-Thwin) to the 2020s in the present day. One documentary that Aung-Thwin does make mention of, however, is *'Mystic Ball'*: a very spiritual documentary created by a Canadian man named Greg Hamilton who tells the tale of how he found Chinlone and fell in love with the sport (Hamilton London, 2006). Speaking of the documentary, Aung-Thwin says:

"Audiences were treated to stunning footage that portrayed the 'sport' of chinlone being performed on temple grounds, in tournament play and in the back-alley streets of the city. Mystic Ball presented chinlone as an enduring element of Burmese culture, challenging conventional definitions of sport by presenting chinlone as a manifestation of cooperation, non-competitiveness, community and spiritual ideals." (Aung-Thwin, 2020).

One easily accessible reference depicting how Chinlone has progressed in the recent past, however, is the inclusion of Chinlone in the Southeast Asian Games. Chinlone has been included in the SEA Games 3 times now in 2013, 2017, and most recently in 2023. At its inaugural inclusion into the SEA Games in 2013 it was met with criticism by many who claimed it was unfair because the Myanmar team seemingly had the upper hand as it was their national sport. Regardless of the criticism (which will be addressed later in the essay), The inclusion has shown the progression of the sport as a whole and its potential to expand internationally, and this point leads to the fourth segment in the story of Chinlone: its Future (The Nation, 2023).

JoAnn LoSavio makes virtually no mention of Chinlone, yet her work is still relevant because it focuses on the use of sport in the nation-building of postcolonial Myanmar. LoSavio's relevance is to located in analysis of the postcolonial nation-building period that essentially shaped contemporary Chinlone. LoSavio analyzes how the postcolonial Burmese nation-builders wanted to escape from the legacy of colonial stereotypes placed upon them. An example of one of these stereotypes would be them being labeled as 'physically inferior' by the British (LoSavio, 2021). She mentions that one of the ways they achieved this was by using activities that were introduced to them by their colonial rulers, such as Western sports, to overcome their supposed 'physically inferior' image. She says:

"Participation in games communicated Burma's sovereign status to other states and demonstrated a commitment to the global community. Simultaneously, transnational sporting events were liminal spaces to disrupt continued colonial perceptions which positioned Burmese as physically inferior. Burmese athletes disputed the material 'truths' on which racist attitudes relied: the physical incapacity of Asian bodies to match Western bodies and exoticized notions of time and place that rooted Burmese in a primordial past, lacking intellect to absorb modern technologies." (LoSavio, 2020)

It was during this period that these same Burmese postcolonial nation-builders used a similar mix of pro-Western and anti-Western tactics to develop Chinlone into its modern form today, this is something that LoSavio barely talks about, but Aung-Thwin goes into great detail on. Chinlone is not exceptional in this regard as many other sports have been influenced by colonial interactions as evidenced in kick ball sports in South America, Europe and globally through variants of football (Alvarez, 2025; Schläpfer, 2024; Spaaij & Schaillée, 2020).

Chinlones origins likely lay in diffusion from China and Cuju but were adapted to royal courts in what would become modern day Myanmar. While there were different forms of play in Cuju, Chinlone is a unified form of game which was non-competitive in nature. This was transformed a large way by colonization and the introduction of a 'gamification' or competitive play which is instructive of Western sports. The current form of Chinlone is a hybrid form of the original Cuju in some respects while retaining its Myanmar form and is played in competitive form as will be seen later. The hybrid form of Chinlone is indicative of cultural diffusion and localization and contextualization of games to local customs and practices.

Heritage of Chinlone: Shared, similar or distinct?

Chinlone has its origins in the ancient Pyu civilization of modern-day Myanmar, it is not very clear whether the inhabitants of the ancient Pyu civilization created the sport themselves, or derived it from similar ancient Asian games (Crowther, 2007). The latter is certainly a more reasonable hypothesis. To further understand the essence of Chinlone, it is important to learn about the various similar Asian games with which it has a shared heritage. There are a multitude of different ancient games which are very similar to Chinlone which can be found throughout the various nations of East and Southeast Asia. Some of these include Sipa of the Philippines, Da Cau of Vietnam, Cuju and Jianzi of China, Sepak Raga of Indonesia, and Takraw Wong of Thailand. While some of these games use the aforementioned wooden rattan ball (sometimes referred to as a Cane ball in English), other variations use something that could be described more as a birdie or shuttlecock, similar to what is used in modern-day Badminton (Guillain, 2004). Regardless of whether they use a cane ball or a type of shuttlecock, all these games are extremely similar stylistically in their techniques, movements, and rules (Mabborang et. al., 2022; Pham Viet Tieu Thanh, 2021; Sedykh et. al., 2020; Suratman Esa, 2017).

In many of these Asian nations, the game has developed into a hybrid net game, akin to volleyball or Badminton. Sepak Takraw is the most popular version of these hybrid net games and it is essentially a mix of Chinlone and Volleyball, it even still uses the same exact hand-woven wooden rattan cane ball (Oh, 2011). These hybrid net games, however, seem to be much more recent and probably were developed sometime in the past 100 years or so, while the original versions of the games are a great deal older with some potentially even dating as far back as the 9th century BCE (Yang, 2017). It should be mentioned that one of these original versions of the games (Cuju) did sometimes use a net as well, but it used the net in a very different manner, with the net being hoisted much higher up (Wertmann et. al., 2020). Furthermore, the players would attempt to kick the ball through a hole in the net, as opposed to over it. It is not clear whether other ancient versions of the games used a net as well, but in any case, the use of nets seems to have fallen out of favor more than 500 years ago. So it can be said that for the past 500 years, these similar Asian kick-ball games have been flourishing all over the continent, and had developed into a standard that did not use nets across the board.

As previously mentioned, all these Asian kick-ball games likely originated from the ancient Chinese sport known as Cuju (sometimes spelled 'Tsu-Chu'), and this of course includes Chinlone. Cuju is well documented in the historical record and was played in mainland China possibly as far back as the 9th Century BCE, which makes it nearly 3000 years old. FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) which is the modern governing body of the world's most popular sport: Football (also known as Soccer), officially recognized Cuju as the original version of the world's most popular game.

"On July 15th, 2004, Mr. Blatter, the president of FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) officially announced in the 3rd session of Soccerex Fair, that football originated in Zibo, the capital of Qi State during the Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China" (Liu et al., 2018).

In China, Cuju stopped being played around the 17th Century, but it has since undergone somewhat of a revival in the 21st century with many history buffs dressing in traditional attire and playing the sport in a sort of historical reenactment show, not dissimilar to what has occurred with the resurrection of Jousting in Europe and 'Ulama' the Mesoamerican ball game in the Western Hemisphere.

Jianzi: another Chinese adaptation of Cuju is very popular and is a common pastime for many people in China. Instead of a ball, it is played with something very similar to a badminton shuttlecock, which is made from goose or turkey feathers which are tied to a roll of copper coins as a counterbalance. Jianzi can be observed in public parks in the afternoon and is a relatively low-intensity sport so it is something you may see even elderly people participating in as a way to stay active during old age. Quite similar to Chinlone, players walk around in circles while they are playing and pass the shuttlecock back and forth. Due to the slow speed at which the shuttlecock flies through the air, the game is much more observable, meaning it is much easier to see clearly which movements and maneuvers are being used. It is basically Chinlone in slow motion, which makes it very age-inclusive. Another aspect that slows

the game down (and differentiates it from Chinlone) is the fact that the bottom of the shuttlecock is flat, this allows the player to literally catch and balance the shuttlecock with the tops of their feet effortlessly. This changes the dynamic of play considerably: In Chinlone the wooden rattan ball immediately springs off of the player's foot upon impact, speeding up the pace of the game, but in Jianzi, the players can retain the shuttlecock for as long as they please with the tops of their feet. It is not uncommon to see players balancing the shuttlecock for 5 to even 10 seconds before releasing it and continuing the flow play (Li et. al., 2022).

Two other examples of ancient Asian games that use a shuttlecock-like object in play are 'Sipa' of The Philippines and 'Da Cau' of Vietnam. It can easily be theorized that these two sports have their direct origins in Jianzi and Cuju. This is evident when analyzing Da Cau, which is very popular in Vietnam. There is not much to say about Da Cau though, because it is essentially the same thing as Jianzi, and it is obviously descended from Jianzi. This is because China and Vietnam famously have such an intertwined history, with the Vietnamese people being directly descended from the southern Chinese Yue people. The few differences between Jianzi and Da Cau in the modern day are as follows: Firstly, the shuttlecock used in Da Cau tends to be a bit heavier than the one used in Jianzi. Secondly, while both sports have some version of both net and circle play, Jianzi favors circle play and Da Cau favors net play. Lastly, Jianzi tends to be more casual and 'freestyle' in play, while Da Cau tends to be more structured with lots of rules and competition (DeMarco, 2017).

Regarding Sipa of the Philippines, what is not entirely clear is when or how the exchange of sporting culture took place from China to the Philippines. Sipa was officially recognized as the official sport of the Philippines up until the very recent past when this distinction was lost to Arnis, a traditional Filipino martial art using wooden sticks for self-defense.

"When former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo approved Republic Act 9850 — an Act declaring arnis as the national martial art and sport of the Philippines on Dec 11, 2009 — many people reacted negatively, questioning the change. Sipa had occupied a place in the subconscious of Filipinos as a people, that it has become the automatic answer whenever Pinoys enumerate the national symbols." (Lozada, 2012)

Sipa, in the Philippines, is very loosely defined, it can be found in many different forms which range from over-the-net versions similar to Sepak Takraw to circular stylistic play more akin to Jianzi and Chinlone. It mainly uses a shuttlecock very similar to Jianzi, which is said to be typically crafted of metal washers and old cloth, as opposed to the more elegant goose feathers and shiny coins that are used in making Jianzis. Sipa can commonly be seen being played in the streets by Filipino youngsters who deploy an interesting technique to control the shuttlecock: they flip their sandals upside down and use the flat sole on the bottom of the sandal to make an impact with the shuttlecock. The flat surface of the sole of the sandal is the perfect landing area for the type of shuttlecock that Sipa uses, which is similar to Jianzi in that it is also flat on the bottom due to the flat metal washers used to make it. What makes Sipa unique compared to the other similar sports previously mentioned, is that it also sometimes uses the wooden rattan ball as well, therefore it is probably the only sport amongst the ones previously mentioned which is known for being played with the shuttlecock and the wooden rattan ball (Lozada, 2012; Guillermo, 2021).

Sepak Raga is a well-documented Southeast Asian kick-ball game that has been played throughout Malaysia and Indonesia for centuries. Due to the massive amount of different islands and regions throughout Maritime Southeast Asia, the game is played in a multitude of different varieties which all fall under the umbrella of 'Sepak Raga'. The dominant version of the game played in the modern era is indeed Sepak Takraw, and which certainly does fall under the umbrella of Sepak Raga as well in these regions. Please note that from now on when 'Sepak Raga' is mentioned, this strictly refers to the various non-net circular versions of the game, not Sepak Takraw (Minerva, 2019).

In general, Sepak Raga in Indonesia and Malaysia uses the same exact wooden rattan cane ball as Chinlone, Sipa, and Sepak Takraw. Furthermore, it has the same essential goal as Chinlone, which is keeping the ball aloft for as long as possible. The court markings and the style of play however are very different when compared with Chinlone. The players do not walk in circles while playing, they form a stationary circle with

each player standing still, and there is no player in the center (Lozada, 2012). The main technique used seems to be a horizontal straight-forward shot which is directed at the player opposite the one kicking. This maneuver is achieved by raising the knee up to waist height and bending the leg to form a 90-degree angle, then the top of the foot is used to make an impact with the ball and shoot it directly forward with a lot of power to the player opposite the one performing the maneuver. This also kind of adds another dimension of play to the game which Chinlone doesn't really have because essentially the purpose of this powerful straight-forward shot is to make it difficult for the player opposite to receive the ball, control it, and continue the flow of play without the ball touching the ground. So Sepak Raga is unique in the way that it contains a form of internal competition, while still retaining the overall goal for all players to work together and keep the ball aloft for as long as possible (Zhao et. al., 2017). In addition to this difference, another key distinction is that Sepak Raga's moves are much less graceful, there is much less flair added to the style of play when compared to Chinlone (Leyden, 1821). Whereas Chinlone mainly utilizes unnecessary and impractical but stunning displays of complex skill, the maneuvers in the most popular version of circular Sepak Raga are purely functional. It seems that Sepak Raga has always had this emphasis on control, a passage from a famous historical text which was written in the Malacca Sultanate known as the Malay Annals in the 15th century refers to Sepak Raga and says:

"The Moloco Prince was very skillful at football, and all the young nobles set about learning it from him. A hundred times he would receive the ball on his foot, and keep it up without falling, and when he was to deliver it to another, he would send it directly upon the who was to receive it. When he sat down in a chair, after this exercise, all the young nobles would run to fan him, and when the ball was returned to him, he would send it up to the top of the hall, and following it up there, he would keep it up on the top of the hall as long as one would be eating a luncheon, and then he would bring it down and deliver it to another. Such was his skill at football." (The Malay Annals, n.d.)

It should be noted that in this particular English translation of the Malay Annals, the word football is being used but there is no doubt about the fact that what is being described here is the traditional Malay sport of Sepak Raga. This is the earliest mention of Sepak Raga, but there are other important descriptions of Sepak Raga in the historical record including some Dutch colonial accounts, furthermore, it can also be speculated that Sepak Raga may have even been played as far back as the time of Srivijaya Empire, which occupied much of what would later be referred to as the 'East Indies' by the Dutch and other colonial powers.

Sports and cultural rivalry in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian Games rules allow for the host country to introduce, include names of sports within the sport categories approved by the IOC and OCA (Council of the SEA Games Federation, 1978 Rule 34). A recent example of this cultural rivalry between Southeast Asian nations are the disputes over the proper practices and origins of the various Southeast Asian martial arts (Winichakul, 2000). Preceding the commencement of the 2023 SEA Games it was announced that:

"Thailand will boycott the kickboxing competition at this year's Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in protest against hosts Cambodia using the sport's local name of Kun Khmer rather than Muay Thai. The National Olympic Committee of Thailand (NOCT) announced on Tuesday that no Thai athletes will compete in kickboxing at the regional games, hosted by Phnom Penh from May 5-17." (The Nation Thailand, 2023)

This was demonstrated in 2013 with disagreement over names in the 2013 SEA games as demonstrated by:

" Several countries, including Thailand, were frustrated by the list of sports at the 2013 SEA Games, which ended yesterday. They complained that there were too many traditional sports, such as Chinlone (a Myanmar sport similar to Thailand's Circle Takraw)" (Rujawongsanti, 2013)

Much of the complaints received were voicing the opinion that it was not fair to include a sport that was the national sport of Myanmar because they would seemingly have an unfair advantage. Much of the confusion once again lay with the naming of this particular event, because it was named 'Chinlone' but it was not pure Burmese Chinlone per se, in actuality, it was a hybridization of all these Southeast Asian kick-ball games meshed into one event. So in truth, it was actually a rather fair event with regards to the rules, and that is simply because the official rules used were not the official rules of Burmese Chinlone, they were a set

of all-inclusive rules that completely disregarded the stylistic approach to traditional Burmese Chinlone and instead purely focused on tallying the number of times the team could kick the ball in the air to keep it aloft before allowing it to drop to the ground (Creak & Trotier, 2024).

As previously mentioned, nearly all Southeast Asian nations contain within the typical practice of their national kick-ball game the common skill of simply keeping the ball aloft for as long as possible without allowing it to drop to the ground. Thus, not only was the event fair, but it could even be argued that Myanmar actually had the disadvantage, because their version of the Southeast Asian kick-ball game focuses more on flair and elegance while the other Southeast Asian nation's kick-ball games focus more on simply keeping the ball aloft. So, the issue here once again lay within the naming of the event, not the actual event itself, and as you can see this whole controversy bears a stark resemblance to what happened with the naming of the kickboxing event at the 2023 SEA Games in Cambodia. These are just two examples of the long list of disputes and discussions that have occurred which are based on cultural rivalry throughout the history of not only Southeast Asia but the whole world.

What's in a name?

Since its inaugural inclusion at the 2013 Southeast Asian Games, Chinlone has been further included on three occasions: 2015 (Singapore), 2017 (Malaysia), and 2023 (Cambodia). It was not included in 2019 (Philippines) and 2021 (Vietnam). At all the SEA Games events in which Chinlone has been included since its inaugural inclusion in 2013, it was grouped under the category of 'Sepak Takraw' and was not afforded its own separate sporting event category. However, the subgrouping it has been given has consistently gone by the name 'Chinlone', and has not been changed even though it has retained the same all-inclusive rules. Thus, one might argue that at some point it may be a good idea to change the name of the event to improve its chances of longevity. It should be mentioned that many of these Southeast Asian kick-ball games which use the wooden rattan ball, are sometimes referred to collectively as 'Cane ball'. While this is a decent casual blanket term for all the sports that use the wooden rattan ball, it seems like a rather shoddy formulation of a name for the version of the sport played at an internationally competitive level. This is because many would argue that it just seems inadequate to name the sport after the material of the ball that it uses, like imagine for example if Tennis was instead called 'Felt ball', so it might be a good idea to come up with a better name to promote a better future for the sport altogether.

A similar sort of derivative title could be used in the renaming of the Chinlone event at the SEA Games. Another method to achieve this could be the utilization of a portmanteau or a compound word consisting of two or more parts taken from the name Chinlone and one of the other various names for a Southeast Asian kick-ball game. For example, using 'Chinlone' and 'Sepak Raga' we can create either the compound word: 'Chinlone Raga' or the portmanteau: 'Chinraga'. This is not a suggestion of any particular name; this is merely a provided example of how a more inclusive name for the sport can be achieved (Liu et al., 2018).

To some people the thought of suggesting this sort of solution may seem odd, but this kind of solution for coming up with a universal name for a sport that is called different things in different countries is a tried and tested method for resolving this type of issue. This was used in the creation of the official international name for Sepak Takraw.

"Sepak is the Malay word for kick and Takraw is the Thai word for a woven ball, therefore Sepak Takraw quite literally means "to kick ball." The choosing of the Sepak Takraw name for the sport was essentially a compromise between Malaysia and Thailand, the two powerhouse countries of the sport" (Chen Xiao, 2017)

It should also be noted that this was not an organically developed name, this formal title for the sport was officially created in 1960, by a delegation of representatives from each of the countries that play this sport (not only Thailand and Malaysia) in an attempt to appease the international community of fans and give them a name that they could all agree on. Therefore it would not be preposterous at all to suggest using similar processes in creating hybridized names for not only the various Southeast Asian kick-ball games but also the multiple Southeast Asian versions of kickboxing which resemble each other. In the case of the several similar Southeast Asian forms of Kickboxing though, it may be too late to propose a hybrid name because internationally the name 'Muay Thai' is already so well

known. For the numerous related Southeast Asian kick-ball games however, it could still be a very fitting solution for the question, as the international hybrid version of the game is still in its infancy, and has only been contested internationally at the SEA Games for a little over a decade now (The Nation, 2023).

If the sport is to continue growing globally, it will most likely require a name change by the time it gets internationally popular enough to be included at the Olympic games. It should be understood that this is not a suggestion of a name or rule change for Chinlone within Myanmar itself, it deserves to retain its original name and rules within its homeland. This is simply a suggestion that for the future of the international hybridized version of the sport, a name change may be necessary to promote inclusivity and unity between nations.

Conclusion

The article has argued that Chinlone while being distinctly 'Burmese' in character is a product of culture diffusion and hybridity. The transformation of Chinlone in it contemporary form is similar but still distinct from its regional counterparts. It is certainly a TSG of great importance, and is very unique in the sense that it is noncompetitive. It is over a thousand years old, and is likely descended from the even older Chinese sport of Cuju. It has many links and a shared heritage with several other traditional Asian games. It has gone through a myriad of changes in the past 200 years, caused by colonization, Westernization, and postcolonial nation-building projects (Guttman, 1996). In the very recent past it has gained a place at important international competitions such as the SEA Games, but the version played at these events is not traditional Chinlone. What is played at the international competitions is a hybridized version of all the similar Southeast Asian kick-ball games which simply carries the name of Chinlone. At these international competitions this name should be changed to clear up confusion, promote further inclusivity, and deter misinformed critics from making accusations of unfairness. Though the name for the hybridized game should be changed at the international level, practitioners and fans of not only Chinlone but all the other various Southeast Asian kick-ball games should still retain a sense of pride knowing that their TSGs will still be represented vicariously through this new hybridized game. Regardless of the fact that these TSGs are developing into more modern competitive games, for the sake of preservation of traditional culture they should still retain their traditional names and rules in their respective countries.

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