Relationship between Friendship, Social Competence, and Social Pretend Play:
Comparison between Korean-and Anglo-American Preschoolers*

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국 문 요 약

본 연구는 사회적 능력 및 친구관계에서의 개인차가 아동의 집단상상놀이에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지를 한국계 미국아동과 백인계 미국아동의 비교분석를 통해 알아보았다. 연구대상은 46명의 한국계 미국아동과 46명의 백인계 미국아동으로 두집단의 평균연령은 모두 4세였다. 아동의 사회적 능력은 교사에 의해 평가되었으며 친구관계는 사회적 측정법을 통하여 측정되었다. 아동의 상상놀이는 실내외 자유놀이시간 동안 시간표집법으로 관찰되었다. 연구결과에 의하면 두 문화에서 모두 집단상상놀이에 빈번히 참여하는 아동은 교사에 의해 사교성이 높은 것으로 평가되었으며, 한국계 아동의 경우 이 아동들은 어려움점수가 높은 것으로 나타났다. 또한 백인계 아동은 한국계 아동에 비해 상호지명된 친구수가 많은 것으로 나타났다. 그러나 한국계, 백인계 아동 모두 친구가 많은 아동일수록 사회상상놀이에 더 빈번히 참여하는 것으로 나타났다.

1. Introduction

The preschool period is a time when children frequently engage in pretend play. In preschool years, pretend play becomes more social, and children begin to share the nonliteral meanings of their pretend worlds with peers. To participate in social pretend play with peers, several social skills are required. Children must maintain clear communication, manage conflicts that arise, and be open to others' perspectives. Also, they must cooperate, share, and compromise with play partners(Fein, 1981). As a result, social pre-

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tend play has been shown to be highly asso-
ciated with children's social competence
(Connolly & Doyle, 1984). Previous
research on the relationship of social compe-
tence and pretend play is consistent. Obser-
vational studies in naturalistic settings have
established that the frequency with which a
child engages in social pretend play is relat-
ed to social competence and peer popularity
(Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Doyle &
Connolly, 1989; Howes, 1988).

It has been suggested that the evaluation
of social behaviors may be influenced by
cultural values and social convention(Chen
& Rubin, 1992). Positively or negatively
evaluated social behaviors in Western cul-
tures may not be likewise evaluated in
other cultures. For example, social inhibited
behavior is considered to be socially imma-
ture and maladaptive behavior in Western
culture(Rubin, 1982), whereas inhibition and
self-restraint are considered as accomplish-
ments, mastery, and maturity in cultures
that share the Confucian philosophy(King &
Bond, 1985).

In a cross-cultural study(Chen & Rubin,
1992), second-and fourth-grade children in
China and Canada were administered the
Revised Class Play to measure peer percep-
tions of social reputation and a sociometric
nomination measure to assess peer accept-
ance. Chen and Rubin compared the rela-
tions of social reputation and peer accept-
ance in the two cultures. The results indi-
cated that the "shyness-sensitivity" factor

for social reputation was negatively related
with peer acceptance in the Canadian chil-
dren, while the "shyness-sensitivity" factor
was positively correlated with peer accept-
ance in the Chinese children.

Langfeldt(1992) found that a cultural dif-
ference in the perceptions of German and
Korean teachers lies in the ratings of non-
conformist behavior. In the Korean culture
where high standards for socio-emotional
adjustment and group conformity exist, chil-
dren's non-conformist behavior is considered
as problematic behavior by Korean teachers
in contrast to German teachers, who view
this behavior unproblematic.

There is evidence that more social pretend
play takes place between familar children
than unfamiliar children(Werebe &
Baudonniere, 1991). Children with a longer
history of shared social play are more suc-
cessful in coordinating complex social pre-
tend play(Howes & Unger, 1992). Further-
more, preschool children who maintained
friendships for several years are more suc-
cessful at social pretend play than children
with short-term friendships(Howes et al.,
1992).

Although sparse, there are some cross-
cultural studies which show that the styles
of friendship that children develop are
strongly influenced by values of their cul-
ture. Anthropologist Graves provide an ex-
ample which shows that because of different
patterns of socialization among the Polyne-
sian and European ethnic groups in New

Zealand. Polynesian children were more likely to adopt inclusive patterns of interaction, while European children are more likely to display exclusive patterns of peer interaction (Rubin, 1980).

In the Chinese culture, children are likely to interact in smaller cliques(Chen & Rubin, 1992). When Chen and Rubin(1992) compared peer acceptance of Chinese with Canadian children, they found that average sociometric rating scores received by Chinese children were not as high as Canadian children because Chinese children were rated positively by a small number of their classmates.

Given this background, cross-cultural comparisons should be added to the studies conducted with children from Western culture to examine whether different cultures share common views of social competence and friendship. Moreover, it remains to be determined whether the relations between social competence, friendship, and social pretend play are universal or culturally specific.

For the purpose of this study, the following three questions were explored.

1) Does social pretend play relate to social competence in Korean-and Anglo-Ameircan children?

2) Is friendship status associated with social pretend play in Korean-and Anglo-American children?

3) Is there cultural difference in friendship status between Korean-and Anglo-American children??

Ⅱ. Literature Review

The participation in social pretend play with peers requires various social skills. Children must maintain clear communication, manage conflicts that arise, agree more than they disagree, and be able to shift perspective. Also, they must negotiate and renegotiate themes, props, roles, acts, and settings(Garvey, 1990). Participation in social pretend play requires a flexible repertoire of social behaviors, socially relevant cognitive skills, and the willingness to cooperate, to share, and to compromise in defining their play scenarios(Rubin et al., 1991). The skills required for cooperative social pretend play are similar to those associated with sociometric status(Howes, 1988).

Theorists have proposed mechanisms to explain the relationship between social pretend play and social competence. Based on Piaget's work(1962), pretend activities are hypothesized to contribute to social development by providing a context for peer negotiation and the resolution of conflict(Rubin, Fein & Vandenberg, 1983). Social pretend play makes great social demands. For example, "once inside the playframe, children must become co-play writers, co-directors, co-actors, and vicarious actors, without getting confused about which of these roles they and playmates are momentarily adopting"(Bretherton, 1984, p. 384).

Some empirical studies report associations between the frequency of social pretend play in preschool age children and measure of social acceptance. In Connolly and Doyle's(1984) study, young children who frequently engaged in social pretend play were rated as more socially skilled and ranked as more popular playmates with their peers by their teachers. When the social behaviors of these children were observed, differences relative to their low-oriented play peers were noted. High pretend play children were more socially active, and this activity was characterized by its sustained, reciprocal, and verbal nature.

Similarly, Rubin(1982) examined whether particular play forms correlate differently with a variety of developmental measures. He found that high frequencies of group-dramatic play in preschool and kindergarten are associated positively with popularity. However, children who engaged in frequent solitary-dramatic play were rated as socially incompetent by teachers. Nonparticipants in social pretend play is encouraged and is an active part of the free play curriculum (Rubin, 1982).

Further evidence for this relationship comes from Howes'(1988) longitudinal study. Individual differences in the proportion of complementary and reciprocal play in the early toddler period, the proportion of cooperative social pretend play in late toddler period, and sociometric status in the preschool period were positively associated with individual differences in the ease with which children entered play groups and in the teacher ratings of social competence.

Friendship and social pretend play are linked in several different ways. Social pretend play is important in the process of forming and maintaining friendship. According to Gottman(1983), as children shift from being strangers to being friends, they go through four stages. First, children try to interest each other in an activity. Then, the two participants engage in social comparisons to find common ground. Third, their speech shifts to the activities they are doing or planning to do. The final phase is the initiaion and extension of pretend play.

There is evidence that more social pretend play takes place between friends than acquaintances or unknown partners(Howes, 1989; Werebe & Baudonniere, 1991). Older preschool children who are friends have fewer disagreements and their pretend play is more harmonious than dyads who are not friends(Gottman, 1986). Children who are friends become very experienced at social pretend negotiations and appear motivated to sustain less than pleasant negotiation because they know that resulting play will be pleasurable(Howes et al., 1992). When children are unable to second-guess one another and their concerns are dissimiar, pretend play rapidly deteriorated under the weight of disagreement after disagreement (Gottman, 1986). This is why social pretend play is more common among friends than

among acquaintances or strangers.

Werebe and Baudonniere(1992) confirmed the previous findings by providing evidence of the effect on the degree of familiarity in children's pretend play. The pretend play was investigated in a specific social setting where two friends interacted in a triadic situation in the presence of a third familar partner. The duration of dyadic episodes between friends was significantly longer than the duration of dyadic episodes with the third child pretend play between friends was more complex as indicated by the number of difficult components such as role-taking, object substitutions or transformations, introduction of absent objects, inanimate objects treated as animate, simulation of natural phenomenon.

Howes(1988) longitudinal study highlights the importance of mutual friends for young children. She investigated the function of mutual friendship by comparing play behaviors of children with and without mutual friends. Her results showed that children with mutual friends had more easy entries and engaged in more cooperative social pretend play than did children with no mutual friends. Moreover, she computed the proportion of the mutual friendships children kept, ended, or lost. Children who kept a high proportion of friendships engaged in easier entries and social pretend play than children who lost a high proportion of their friendships because their parents changed their child care settings or the peer group compo-

sition changed within the schools.

In sum, friendship is a special social relationship and is different from other interpersonal relationships. Children's competence in forming relationships with friends appear closely linked to their pretend play behavior. Previous studies consistently indicate that social pretend play is related to social competence, which is measured by teacher ratings or sociometric interviews. Social pretend play seems to provide the best context in which young children develop, and learn to practice social skills.

III. Methods

1. Subjects

The children in this study were 46 Anglo-and 46 Korean-American preschool children, half girls and half boys. The mean age of Korean-American children was 48 months(range 35-53 months). The mean age of Anglo-American children was 48 months(range 34-64 months). The criteria for selection of children was parent permission to participate in the study. The Anglo-American sample was obtained from three preschool in a small city in the southwest U.S. They were from white middle-class families. Korean-American participants were selected from two Korean preschools in the Koreatown area of Los Angeles. They were all from middle-class Korean-American families.

2. Procedures

1) Observation of Pretend Play

Children's play behaviors were observed during indoor and outdoor free play time. Each child was observed on four occasions for a total of 20 minutes. Children were observed in random order for five-minute periods. Using Howes'(1988) checksheet, the following play behaviors were observed. Complexity of social pretend play consisted of solitary pretend play, parallel pretend play, simple social pretend play, and cooperative social pretend play. Solitary pretend play was coded when one child engaged in a pretend act and there was no social interaction. Parallel pretend play was coded when the child and a peer engaged in the same or similar pretend activity but did not make eye contact or engage in interaction. Simple social pretend play was coded when children were engage in interaction with at least a turn-taking structure and they performed pretend acts, but there were no script and no assumed pretend roles. Cooperative social pretend play was coded when children performed pretend play acts and there were a script and complementary pretend roles(e.g., mother-baby, teacher-student). A script was defined as an organized, multi-event play sequence in which the two children arranged pretend acts into a meaningful sequence(Nelson & Seidman, 1984).

2) Social Competence

Teachers completed a social competence measure for each child using Howes' teacher ratings of social competence. This measure consists of 16 items rated on a 5 point Likert scale from least to most characteristic of each child. Three composite scores-difficult, hesitant, sociable-were computed from 16 items using a procedure adapted from Howes(1988). Difficult score was the sum of the following items: is upset easily if a peer interfers with his activities; bosses and dominates other children; hits, pushes, or hurts other children; reacts with anger if another child takes something that is his; is unable to share or take turns. Hesitant score was the sum of the following items; is liked by peers; and shows concerns if another child is distressed.

3) Friendship

A sociometric technique, teacher nominations and behavioral observations were used to identify friendship. Because of low reliability of sociometric techniques with preschool children, the other two methods were used to validate the sociometric method.

To administer the sociometric measure, children were taken individually to a separate room, they were shown photographs of all of their classmates, and were asked to identify them. To identify friends, children were asked to select three children whom they like a lot and enjoy playing with. After the child chose a picture, the picture was removed, and the same question was

repeated twice until children selected a total of three friends. To identify nonfriends, children were asked to chose whom they do not like and do not enjoy playing together using the same procedure used for determining friends.

Teachers were asked to nominate three friends for each children who appear to enjoy each other's company and play together often, and three nonfriends who do not interact with each other on a regular basis and do not appear to enjoy each partner (Howes, 1988).

Behaviorally identified friends were listed during the free play observations. Children who maintained proximity within 3 feet of each other in 30% of the combined observations of the two children and expressed shared positive affect while engaging in social play, were behaviorally identified friends (Howes, 1988).

The number of mutual friends were computed for each subject using three methods. Mutual friends were defined as dyads who chose each other as a best friend. Agreement between the three methods for identifying mutual friends was computed using Chi-square analysis. In both cultures, the sociometric measures showed the highest agreement with the other two methods. Thus, mutual friends identified by sociometric measures were used in analysis.

3. Analysis

To examine the research questions, proportions were calculated for the frequency of simple social pretend play and cooperative social pretend play. Also, the proportion of total social pretend play was calculated by combining simple social pretend play and cooperative social pretend play.

The relationship between teacher ratings of social competence and proportions of social pretend play was examined by Pearson product-moment correlations within the two cultures. The relationship between friendship status and proportions of social pretend play was tested using a MANOVA within the two cultures. To investigate cultural difference in friendship status, the number of mutual friends was compared by culture using Chi-square analysis.

Ⅳ. Results

To investigate the relationship between social competence and social pretend play, Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted within the two cultures. As Table 1 shows, in the Korean-American sample, sociability with peers and difficulty with peers were positively correlated with total social pretend play $r(46) = .44$, $p < .001$, $r(46) = .42$, $p < .01$, respectively. Hesitant behavior with peers was not related to the social pretend play of Korean-American children $r(46) = .13$, N.S.

Table 2 indicates that in the Anglo-American sample, teacher ratings of sociability

with peers were associated with cooperative social pretend play r(46)=.46, p<.001, and total social pretend play r(46)=.53, p<.01. However, teacher ratings of difficulty, r(46) =.11, N.S., and hesitant with peers r(46)= -.21, N.S., were not related to total social pretend play. In both cultures, children who engaged in social pretend play frequently were rated as being sociable by their teachers. However, these children were also perceived as being difficult if they were from the Korean-American sample.

〈Table 1〉 Correlations between Social Competence and Complexity of Social Pretend Play in Korean-American Children

Complexity	Social Competence		
	Sociable	Difficult	Hesitant
Simple Social Pretend Play	.35*	.35*	.09
Cooperative Social Pretend Play	.31	.27	.10
Total of Social Pretend Play	.44**	.42**	.13

*p<.05, **p<.01

〈Table 2〉 Correlations between Social Competence and Complexity of Social Pretend Play in Anglo-American Children

Complexity	Social Competence		
	Sociable	Difficult	Hesitant
Simple Social Pretend Play	.31	.18	.14
Cooperative Social Pretend Play	.46**	.00	.18
Total of Social Pretend Play	.53*	.11	.21

*p<.05, **p<.01

〈Table 3〉 Relationship between Mutual Friendship and Complexity of Social Pretend Play in Korean-American Children

Complextity	Friendship Status				
	None		One or more		
	Proportion	SD	Proportion	SD	F
Simple Social Pretend Play	.01	(.05)	.05	(.06)	−2.95**
Cooperative Social Pretend Play	.03	(.05)	.03	(.05)	− .53
Total of Social Pretend Play	.04	(.05)	.09	(.08)	−2.29*

*p<.05, **p<.01

Using a MANOVA, the relationship between mutual friends and social pretend play was examined from two cultures. As table 3 reveals, Korean-American children with one or more mutual friend engaged in more simple social pretend play $F(1,44) = -2.95$, $p<.01$ and total social pretend play $F(1,44) = -2.29$, $p<.05$ than did children with no mutual friends.

As table 4 shows, Anglo-American chil-

dren with one or more mutual friends were found to participate in cooperative social pretend play $F(1,44) = -2.67$, $p<.01$ and total social pretend play $F(1,44) = -2.52$, $p<.05$ more often than children without mutual friends. Therefore, in both cultures, children with mutual friends were more likely to engage in social pretend play than children without mutual friends.

⟨Table 4⟩ Relationship between Mutual Friendship and Complexity of Social Pretend Play in Anglo-American Children

| | Friendship Status | | | | |
| | None | | One or more | | |
Complextity	Proportion	SD	Proportion	SD	F
Simple Social Pretend Play	.06	(.07)	.10	(.08)	−1.44
Cooperative Social Pretend Play	.03	(.05)	.10	(.12)	−2.67*
Total of Social Pretend Play	.09	(.11)	.19	(.14)	−2.52*

*p<.05

To examine the relationship between culture and mutual friends, a Chi-square was calculated. Table 5 shows that among Korean-American children, 32% of the children had no mutual friends, 63% had one mutual friend, and 4% had two or more mutual friends. Among Anglo-American children, 26% had no mutual friend, 13% had one mutual friend, and 45% had two or more mutual friends. Chi-square analysis indicated that Anglo-American children had two or more mutual friends, whereas Korean-American children had none or one mutual friend $\chi^2(2) = 22.12$, $p<.001$.

⟨Table 5⟩ Frequencies of Friendship Status by Culture

| | Percentage | | |
| | Friendship Status | | |
Culture	None	One	Two or more
Korean-American	32	63	4
Anglo-American	26	13	45

$\chi^2(2) = 22.12$, ***p<.001

Ⅴ. Discussion

The children who frequently participated in social pretend play would be rated as

being sociable by their teachers was found to be true. Neverthless, the present data is a correlational nature. Thus, it may not be possible to decide whether socially competent children choose to play or whether participation in this play enhances social competence. These children were rated as being difficult if they were from the Korean-American sample. In a highly structured Korean-American setting, which requires task-oriented and task-persisted behaviors, children would be judged as being difficult when they fail to meet these standards. In studies of early childhood group care(Klein, 1980; 1982), high activity was a powerful predictor of adjustment difficulty in task-oriented programs, but not in open-unstructured settings where the free opportunity was available. Given this background, Korean-American children who engage in frequent pretend play may be negatively perceived by the teachers in their setting.

The data revealed that more Anglo-American children had more mutual friends than the Korean-American sample. The possible explanation for this difference is that Korean-American children may not exclusively select each other. Rather they maybe more likely to interact inclusively. They may not make a clear distinction between a friend and a nonfriend. When Korean-American children were asked to name three children who they like and do not like respectively, some of them appeared to hesitate to choose negative nominations and they chose only one or two as a nonfriend. A further study is needed to examine this possibility in more detail.

In spite of the cultural differences in the number of mutual friends, the relationship between social pretend play and mutual friends was similar in the two samples. This suggests that the function of mutual friends may be universal. The results suggest that social pretend play is associated with social competence and friendship, and this association must be considered within the socio-cultural context in which children's play and their interaction take place.

Some limitations must be considered to interpret the results. The children participating in this study were a small number of Korean- and Anglo-American children with a middle-class background. Thus, limitations to the generalizability of these findings should be noted.

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