

Cross-Cultural Contact and Cross-Cultural Social Skills

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Abstract

This presentation focuses on the psychology of cross-cultural contacts and transitions, and introduce studies conducted by the author and colleagues. The first study is a cross-cultural adjustment study of international students in Japan. We investigated the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and social relations. For the second study, the cross-cultural adjustment of international care workers in Japan was examined. We focused on the effect of social skills on the three levels of adjustment. The third study, the cross-cultural social skills learning session is introduced. The fourth study is a practical study of American social skills learning sessions for Japanese international students in the U.S.A. Finally, future tasks and prospects for developing studies about cross-cultural adjustment and social skills which enhance cross-cultural contact and relationship formation are outlined.

Keywords: cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural social skills, cross-cultural psychology, international students, international care workers.

I am in charge of cross-cultural psychology and conduct cross-cultural adjustment studies both within and outside Japan. I would like to introduce some of our studies and consider what we could do together in the future.

First, I introduce a concept for understanding human behavior and culture in cross-cultural psychology. I think three-layer model (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) (Figure1) is a good basic model for understanding humans: First, humans have a general nature as human beings. Second, we are socialized into groups, by which we acquire

additional traits. Third, we all have individual characteristics. The sum of all three features constitutes a single human being.

In the old days, only two layers, general and individual features, were hypothesized. I guess they did not have enough opportunities to notice group features because of insufficient contact with other groups. People generally acquire common sense during the socialization process. Only after we encounter different groups, we notice that our common sense is limited to us.

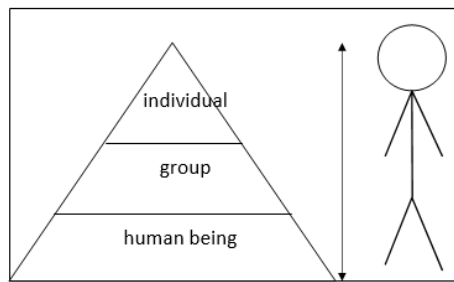


Figure 1 Three-layer model (based on Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) for understanding human behavior and culture in cross-cultural psychology

I review our previous series of studies and introduce some that focus on people who temporarily stay in foreign countries. First, early comprehensive cross-cultural adjustment studies are introduced. Next, cross-cultural social skills, which play an important role for cross-cultural adjustments, are considered for international students and international care workers in Japan. “Social skill” is a technical term in psychology, human behavior and cognition, which refers to skills to begin, maintain, and develop interpersonal relationships. The third aspect is cross-cultural social skills learning for sojourners in Japan and Japanese students in the United States.

Before discussing the results of these studies, we consider the features of Japan as a host society. When we consider Japan as the host society, we recognize that a unique language, Japanese, is mainly spoken. It is an island country. Its geographical isolation and closed-door policy, which lasted for 200 years, seem to have enhanced its unique culture and history. Regarding interpersonal relations, researchers have identified strong distinctions between inner and outer groups. Western countries’ people often view Japan as group-oriented society. However, this may be different for Asian people. Japanese prefer to use indirect expressions that often embarrass foreigners. Recently, changes toward a multicultural and multiethnic society have progressed rapidly.

The first study is a cross-cultural adjustment study of international students in Japan (Okunishi & Tanaka, 2011). This study investigated the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and social relation. We attempted to determine whether developing social relationships would promote cross-

cultural adjustment. The hypothesis was that social skills enhance cross-cultural adaptation mediated by social support. “Social support” is psychological and practical support from others. How is cross-cultural adjustment affected by social skills, social support, Japanese and English language ability, and length of stay in Japan?

We describe the social skills they used to interact with Japanese people as cross-cultural social skills for international students (Tanaka & Okunishi, 2016). Factor analyses were conducted. Social skills had a one-factor structure. Social skills are mainly composed of culture-specific behaviors and interaction techniques for overcoming differences. Using titles such as “san” or “sensei”. Conforming to a group and avoiding being different. Showing respect through bowing. Showing humility about one’s own abilities. Trying hard to speak Japanese. Trying to ask for the opinions of others as much as possible. Promoting understanding by teaching Japanese people about own country. Listening to others. Giving

gifts bought in a shop. Observing or expecting “ladies first” treatment. Enjoying time with same-gender friends. Showing reservations when making an offer. Becomes a friend with someone of the opposite gender. Recognizing the feelings of others. Reserved for emotional expressions, gestures, and laughter. Using indirect expressions. Speaking thoroughly to avoid misunderstanding or doubts.

Social support was measured by every support resource that was “Japanese host”, “people from the same country”, and “people from other countries”. Japanese host support has a one-factor structure. These are the support items: Study and research. Japanese culture and customs. Enjoying time together and going out together (meals, leisure activities, etc.). Consultation and encouragement. University and local information (procedures, news, etc.). Japanese language. Goods and money (lending, giving, and so on). In addition, both support from people of the same country and support from people of different countries showed one-factor structures.

The cross-cultural adjustment items were as follows: Cross-cultural adjustment was measured using the multi-list method. The adjustment was made using three factors. The first factor was “low maladaptive adaptation”, which was distinguished by less loneliness, less stress, less maladaptive feelings, more satisfaction, and more feelings of understanding Japanese culture. The second factor was “self-regulated adaptation”, which showed improved

stress coping and interpersonal orientation. The third factor was “satisfactory adaptation”, which involves remarkably high satisfaction with one’s stay in Japan. We hypothesized that social skills would enhance cross-cultural adaptation, mediated by social support. A path analysis of social skills, social support, language proficiency, and adaptation is shown in Figure2

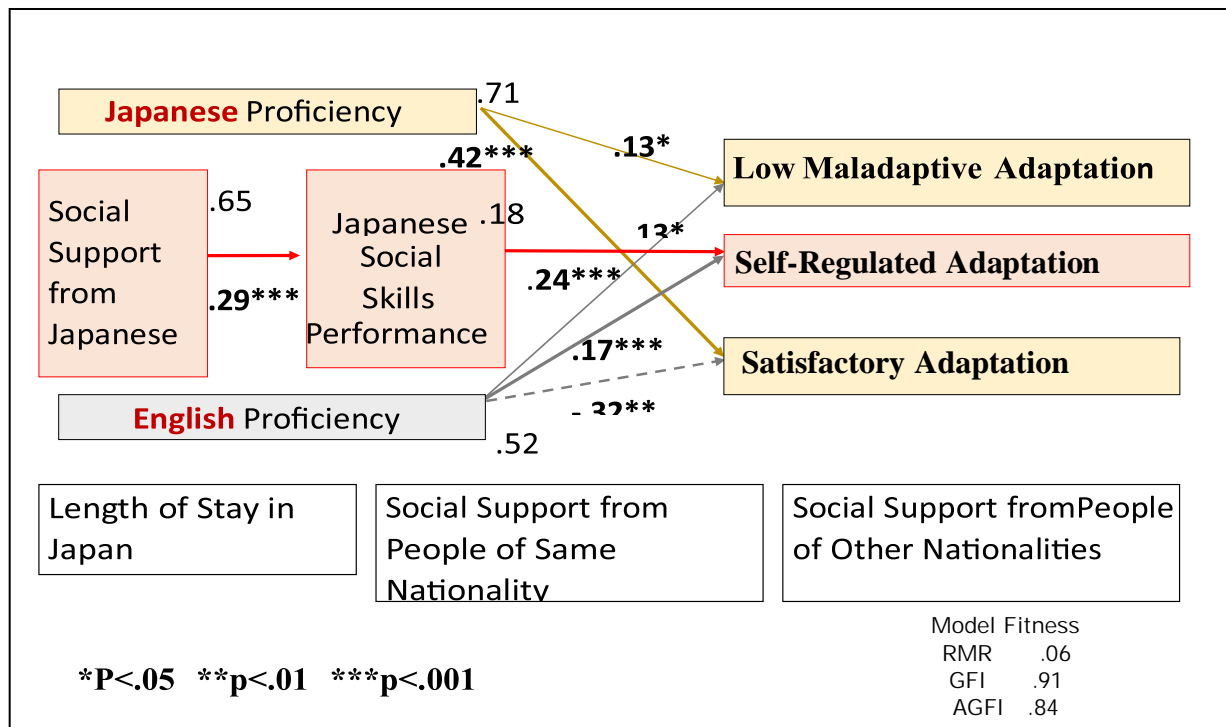


Figure 2 Path Analysis of Social Skills, Social Support, Language Proficiency, and Adaptation (Okunishi & Tanaka, 2011).

Social support from the Japanese enhances their Japanese

social skill performance, and then enhances “self-regulated adaptation”.

However, the direction of the relation between skills and support contradicts this hypothesis. Interpersonal relations enhance skill acquisition and adjustment. Japanese language ability positively affects “low maladaptive adaptation”. English language ability also positively affects “low maladaptive adaptation” and “self-regulated adaptation”. However, “satisfactory adaptation” is enhanced by Japanese-language ability and inhibited by English-language ability. The effects of the length of stay and support from foreigners were not significant.

The study of the cross-cultural adjustment of international students in Japan suggests the following: The three types of adjustments were enhanced by Japanese skills or language. Support from hosts is more important than support from guests. We can say that relationships with the host society enhance cross-cultural

adjustment. It is not enough to just stay for long period for adjustment. Therefore, it is important to contribute to the host society.

English is ambivalent regarding this adjustment. English is used in academic situations within universities and works as one of the community languages among international students. However, if they rely only on English, their communication with the host society is limited. Relying solely on English makes it difficult to obtain satisfaction while staying in Japan.

The second study examined the cross-cultural adjustment of international care workers in Japan. We used a three-level model of cross-cultural adaptation for workers (Hatanaka & Tanaka, 2013) (Figure 3). We focused on the effect of social skills on the three levels of adjustment.

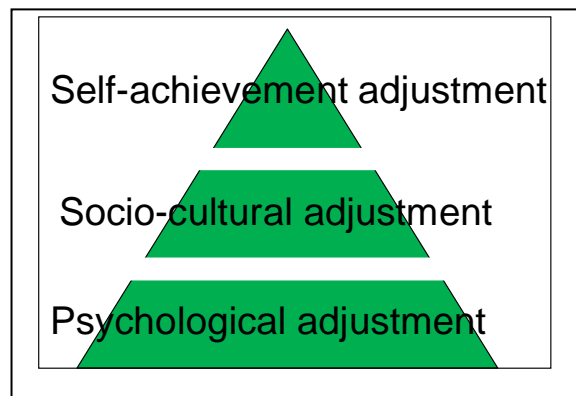


Figure 3 Three-level model of cross-cultural adaptation (Hatanaka & Tanaka, 2013).

Questionnaire survey was administered to international caregivers and nurses of elderly individuals in Japan (Hatanaka & Tanaka, 2013). The bottom level is “psychological adjustment”, which include the negative and positive dimensions of mental adaptation. The second level is “socio-cultural adjustment”, which refers to creating relationships with the surroundings, finding a place to stay, and being evaluated enough about job performance. The highest level is “self-achievement adjustment”, which indicates a meaningful stay with feelings of achievement and a sense of fulfillment. The list of social skills was the same as in the first study (Okunishi & Tanaka, 2011).

The effects of social skills on psychological adjustment were as follows. Social skills were divided into four factors: direct settlement, consideration of others, an active approach, and guessing others’ intentions. Psychological adjustment can be classified into two factors: depression and vitality. Consideration of others and guessing others’ intentions from the context enhances vitality; however, these factors might also create psychological pressure, which increases depression. If they do not actively approach Japanese people, their depression decreases. Direct settlement through a straight discussion about cultural differences did not play a significant role in adjustment; this rejects the

recommendation in Western studies that direct discussion be used for effective intercultural problem solving.

The effects of social skills on socio-cultural adjustment were as follows: Socio-cultural adjustment is divided into four factors: kind care, which is in line with their original cultural ways; affinity relations, which means getting along with Japanese people; adaptation to workplace habits; and job achievement. Direct settlement did not explain the adjustment in the four skill factors. Consideration and guessing skills enhance kind care. A less active approach to Japanese people also enhances kind care based on original cultural ways. Consideration skills enhance close friendships with Japanese people. In short, if workers endeavored to provide kind care, close relations, and adaptation to the workplace, then they recognized their achievements as professional workers. The effects of social skills on self-achievement adjustment were as follows. Active approach skills to Japanese people

enhanced their feeling of having meaningful stay in Japan.

This study of the adjustment of workers suggests the following. Social skills for expressing a tender heart toward others enhance psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. Reduced approaches to Japanese people decrease depression, and original cultural care is available; however, this reduces feelings of meaningful stay in Japan. Building interpersonal relationships by practicing cultural values greatly helps the adjustment of professional workers. In short, workers can work with vitality, experience high-level job achievements, and stay in Japan with a sense of fulfillment.

If we understand the cultural values behind behaviors, decipher others' intentions without misunderstanding, and perform the expected behaviors after making adequate judgments about the social context, then adjustment is promoted. How can we acquire these skills? Our idea is that we learn skills not only through the natural learning process but also through psycho-educational

sessions. If we know the rules and repeat the training, we can use them. The concept of learning cross-cultural social skills is as follows. Learning theory and cognitive behavioral therapy techniques are used. Social skills training is based on a clinical model, whereas social skills learning is based on an educational model. This is not a forced one but an independent cultural learning that depends on one's interest in a new culture.

The third study introduced a cross-cultural social skills learning session (Tanaka, 2012; Tanaka & Nakashima, 2006). Each group comprised five to fifteen people. This was the experimental session. Learners, facilitators, and co-facilitators participated in the sessions. The classroom settings are shown in Figure 4.

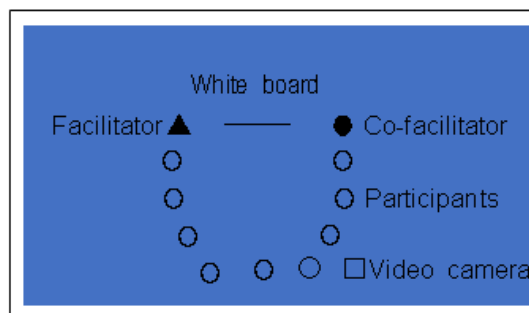


Figure 4 Classroom setting (Tanaka, 2012 ; Tanaka & Nakashima, 2006 et al.)

There was a whiteboard, chairs, and a video recorder. On the whiteboard, we wrote down comments by members and explanations by facilitators. Learners performed role-plays inside a circle. In the classroom, only positive comments on role-playing were allowed, because an accepting atmosphere was helpful for the trial-and-error process with new behavioral patterns. There was not criticism or correction of words or grammar. Practices in everyday life depend on one's free will. They were free to use or not use their skills. They acquired a new behavioral repertoire and more freedom in their behavioral choices.

Examples of the task situations were as follows: We first prepared a list of skills based on our previous research and participants selected tasks based on their needs and interests.

1) Asking for directions: This involves skills that compensate for language handicaps. They used pens and paper, gestures, and facial expressions. Using Japanese words, only for important points, is also a

good idea. Using Japanese at first is also good because approaching in English may scare people. Smiling, bowing, and saying thank you in Japanese (Arigato-gozaïmasu) are also effective ways to improve the motivation to help and to draw information from hosts.

2) Visiting to professor: This involves attitudes toward superiors and making requests. It is expected that one will politely enter and leave a room of superiors, and ask for favors in a polite way. If the assertion is too strong, it may sound selfish. Social apologies, that is, using apologetic phrases as etiquette, are also effective.

3) Drinking communication: This refers to drinking norms and communication. There are many rules that are not clearly showed in drinking situations. This often embarrasses foreigners. For example, they learn polite ways to offer and decline alcohol consumption.

4) Indirect refusal: This technique avoids directly saying no as a social grace. They try not to say no directly but to convey a message of no. They may explain the situation or simply say it is difficult. Using

Japanese indirect expression would be difficult. Some foreigners feel a sense of incongruity because it seems dishonest. However, once they role-play and see the effect of making a better impression on others, uncomfortable feelings are reduced and there is an understanding of the social function of the behavior.

The learning procedure is as follows. (1) Explanation of a task situation. (2) Trying role-playing. (3) Positive feedback from peers and hosts. (4) Explanation of Japanese behavioral patterns and cultural background. (5) Modeling. (6) Second role-play. (7) Second feedback. (8) Q&A and summary. This set is repeated for each task situation. For example, one session for ten people would take approximately one and a half hours.

Based on our studies, short- and long-term effects were recognized in the sessions. First, behavioral effect refers to acquiring points of culture-specific behaviors. Our data showed increased self-evaluation of performance and host evaluation of performance. Second, cognitive effect is the understanding

of the cultural background of behaviors. Our data showed an increased understanding of the meaning of cultural behaviors and cultural background. Third, emotional effect entails fostering positive feelings and reducing negative feelings.

Our data show reduced anxiety and uncomfortable feelings toward different cultures, and increased interest and motivation in interactions. Improving the quality of cross-cultural interpersonal interactions and changing the quality of relationships is suggested. This means that not only the interior of individual participants but also their relations with hosts could be changed.

The fourth was a practical study of American social skills learning sessions for Japanese international students. For young Japanese students who hope to study in the United States, this session helps their cross-cultural adjustment.

The Japanese participants learned skills that were necessary in the United States but unfamiliar to them and difficult to perform. They planned to study in the United States

for a few months. In contrast to Japanese culture, which expects hesitation and consideration for others, many students were perplexed by the higher standards of assertion in American society. They required an outgoing approach to their surroundings. However, they found it difficult to accomplish this in English. They could learn the skills as preparations for cultural behaviors before going to study abroad or as coping strategies to practicewhile studying abroad.

The following are examples of social skills used in an actual American social skills session. Participants practiced how to approach classmates, offer self-disclosure, and develop some questions or ask to join something to show an interest in making friends. Since their relationship with professors in America is quite different, Japanese students need explanations and practice to deal with it. Many things are available for negotiations. Students need to explain their own situation and request special consideration or guidance.

Classroom organizations also differ in the US. In Japan, students are expected to sit and take notes silently during classes. Discussion is more important in the US. Japanese students should be familiar with these characteristics. Assertions and negotiation are often necessary in both private and public situations. They need to learn how to stand and make statements for themselves.

The pre- and post-session participants' reactions were confirmed. Compared in the first and second role-playing, both self-evaluation and native evaluation increased. The participants showed increased motivation to make friends and decreased anxiety in different cultural environments. In a follow-up survey conducted during their stay in the United States, it was confirmed that students used the learned skills and acknowledge their effects. Compared to students who did not attend the session, they did not give up, even when they did not receive good responses. They seemed relaxed because they believed they knew what they should do. They used their

learning to form interpersonal relationships.

I have introduced some studies on social skills and a learning session for the guests. However, this method is not applicable only for guests. We also conducted social skills studies with the hosts. This idea can be applied both and drawbacks of each style. Such studies should be conducted in many host societies.

This is an interesting attempt to make full use of quantitative and qualitative research methods and to conduct basic and applied studies focused on cross-cultural contact phenomena in the internationalization of society. Let us collect and analyze our own Asian data, even if there is plenty of previous Western data. We need to develop a network of joint research projects.

Note: This article is a record of a keynote speech presented at

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It is important for us to be aware that the way to face cross-cultural contact is not always universal. It depends on the socio-cultural context. For example, directness is preferred in Western cultures, whereas consideration is preferred in Japan. Therefore, the ways to solve problems are different. On the front line of cross-cultural contact in Japan, indirectness is being replaced by the Western preference of directness. What is the situation in other Asian countries? I would like to know the answer to this question and consider its meaning with Asian researchers.

More studies should be conducted to elucidate the various styles of cross-cultural contact and their psychological functions, and to clarify the merits of Japanese Language Teaching, 146,61-75 (in Japanese).

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