

Re-acculturation of Chinese Returnees after Study in Japan¹⁾

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This study aims to examine which aspects of Japanese culture Chinese individuals adopted during their stay overseas and if they retained these cultural qualities after their return. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Chinese individuals who had stayed in Japan for one to eight years. Each interview lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and took place at X University in China, where returnees from Japan worked as academic staff. The results showed that the individuals acquired aspects of the Japanese culture in three main categories: rules or manners (observation of public rules), ways of communication (respecting other people's intentions), and philosophy of life (orientation toward co-existence with others). It appears that Chinese individuals firmly accepted and later internalized Japanese characteristics that they believed were admirable; therefore, it is believed that returnees retained these qualities even after returning to their original society.

key words: reentry, study abroad in Japan, re-acculturation, Chinese returnees, Japanese culture

Background of Study

With the world becoming metaphorically smaller than ever, and with opportunities to study abroad increasing, individuals can change not only by acculturating into host societies but also by re-acculturating into their native societies. Researchers have investigated the issues related to cross-cultural reentry and its effects on sojourners' psychological well-being, identity, and re-adaptation to the native society (Dettweiler, Unlu, Lauterbach, Legl, Simon, and Kugelmann, 2015; Gaw, 2000; Kidder, 1992; Presbitero, 2016; Yoshida, T., Matsumoto, Akiyama, Moriyoshi, Furuiye, Ishii, 2003; Takahama & Tanaka, 2011). Takahama and Tanaka (2011) pointed out that research has tended to focus on the issue of reverse culture shocks of returnees, while rarely exploring the meaning or utilization of study abroad experience for these returnees. They reported that returnees experience feelings of alienation and are dissatisfied with the life of their native society. Indeed, many returnees

express higher levels of anxiety after their return than before their study abroad experience.

Do overseas-experienced individuals who changed their behavior patterns and sense of values through their intercultural experience in host countries maintain these behaviors and values after their readjustment processes? Research has rarely focused on the long-term changes of returnees and their effects on the communities in which overseas returnees start their new lives. The present study paid attention to Chinese individuals who studied abroad in the neighbor country Japan.

China has been sending out a large number of international students. The Chinese are the largest single nationality in the foreign student population of Japan. In 2018, there were 114,950 international Chinese students in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology, 2019). As for the number of international students from China in 2015, Japan received the seventh largest contingent, after English speaking countries and Korea. Chinese

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students from China consisted 55.9% of all international students in Japan, receiving the second highest rate of international Chinese students in the world after Korea (62.0%). As such, Japan has a great presence in China's international student exchange scene.

Kuroda (2011) reported the international student policy of China as follows. China expanded its international student policy, aiming at great power with rich human resources. Since starting its policy of open economy in 1978, China has developed into the world's second greatest economic power; in 2010, it began making its presence in the field of international educational exchange. As such, the number of Chinese returnees has been increasing as a result of Chinese economic development and preferential treatment for them, such as offering support in housing and employment (Komatsu, 2016). Re-adaptation could also be another important subject.

The cumulative number of international students since 1978 reached 458,660,000, whereas the cumulative number of returnees has reached 265,110,000. In the past, the "brain drain" phenomenon was seen as a problem, but in recent years, the return rate has increased to 70% to 80% (Meng, 2018). Returnees are referred to as "海 帰 族" or "sea turtle" (from the similar-sounding 海 亀 族), and employment waiting groups called "海 待 族" or "kelp ribe" (from the similar-sounding 海 帶 族) have emerged. As such, the future utilization of human resources is drawing attention.

Sending out international students shifted into high gear in the 1990s when reform and open policy proceeded in the field of higher education. During this decade, studying abroad became popular among ordinary citizens, leading to the significant increase in the number of international Chinese students. Thus, China came to rank high in the number of international students in major countries. Even in China, which sends out the world's largest number of students abroad, reentry study is underdeveloped. The issue of reentry has not been given sufficient attention compared with the issues related to entry and adjustment to a new culture.

Uchibori (2018) reported that the attractiveness of studying in Japan for Chinese students lies in the cultural similarities of the two as neighboring countries.

On the other hand, there are many culture theories that contrast Japan and China, for example, Japanese cooperativeness, group orientation, tendency to worry about shame, and preference for tranquility, and Chinese directness, individualism, tendency to focus on face, and preference for liveliness (e.g., Engelbart & Gladu, 1993; Kong, 1992; Matsumoto, 1987; Murayama, 1995; Zhu & Wu, 1997; Yang, 1999). Other researchers have addressed these cultural features individually, explaining that the Chinese emphasize on human network, are influenced by Confucianism, have centralized politics, and emphasize order, whereas the Japanese use indirect expressions in communication and prefer homogeneity, and that both countries have courtesy practices, such as gift giving and respectful greetings (e.g., Kaneyama, 1979; Mitsubishi Corporation, 1983; Morrison, Conaway & Borden, 1999).

Researchers, including Takahama and Tanaka (2012), have investigated the reentry of Japanese students who studied abroad. However, data for the comparison of returnees of other countries remain lacking. As such, researcher cannot conclude which aspects of the study-abroad experience are universal or socio-culturally specific phenomena or related to external or internal factors. Adding to the knowledge on reentry for different countries would help solve the problems related to this issue.

Okunishi and Tanaka (2011) examined Japanese cultural behaviors that give feelings of strangeness to international students in Japan and extracted six categories: indirect expressions to avoid direct communication, normative behavior in line with Japanese social conventions, suppression of openness of expression, consideration for a group, ways of dealing with a person of the opposite sex, and being treated as a foreigner. Chinese students' acquisition of such cultural behaviors through their acculturation may mean their mal-adaptation to their native Chinese cultural contexts after their return.

In this research, we examined the acculturated behaviors as well as the long-term effects of Chinese students' past acculturation into a Japanese culture that could possibly continue after their reentry into their native country.

Table 1 Profiles of informants

Informant	Years of stay in Japan and forms of stay	Years after reentry to China	Gender	Age	Major
A	1 year as a student	2 years	Female	Twenties	Humanities
B	7 years as a student	2 years	Male	Twenties	Humanities
C	10 years as a student	2 years	Female	Twenties	Humanities
D	7 years as a student	3 years	Female	Twenties	Humanities
E	3 years as a student and 4 years as a worker	8 years	Female	Twenties	Humanities

Methods

Participants

The participants were five Chinese individuals who worked as academic staff at X University in China at the time of the interviews. X University is located in a large city in eastern central China. The participants stayed in Japan as international students for one to ten years. Their detailed profiles are shown in Table 1.

Research procedure

The authors visited X University for interviews in March 2016. Semi-structured interviews lasting for about 30 to 90 minutes were conducted with these five individuals separately. The participants were asked for research cooperation through the researchers' acquaintance prior to the visit. The interviews, held in a classroom at X University, were conducted in Japanese. The main questions included "When did you first come to Japan and how long did you stay there?", "Did you feel any cultural differences when you first came to Japan", "What did you think about the cultural differences you experienced?", and "Did you try to adopt a Japanese way?". The questions covered issues in cultural differences experienced by the participants, time and duration of stay in Japan, evaluations of these differences, and adoption of these differences. The same questions were also asked for their reentry experiences. The purpose of the research and protection of their privacy were explained prior to the interviews, and questions were asked in a casual conversation style. The responses were recorded with the participants' approval. All recorded data were transcribed verbatim and eventually used for qualitative analyses.

Analyses

The authors carefully read through the transcribed

data and sought to identify the parts mentioned by the participants as differences between two cultures while staying in Japan. The participants' evaluations of these differences and acculturated behavioral aspects that they recognized were also extracted. The same procedure was repeated for the reentry part based on the same transcribed data. We scrutinized the behaviors that were continued by the participants even after reentry.

Results

The analyses indicated three aspects of Japanese culture that Chinese returnees had acquired in their adjustment to the host society: (1) rules and manners, (2) ways of communicating, and (3) philosophy in life. Among these cultural aspects, a number were retained even after their reentry into their native country. The overviews of the acquired and retained behaviors are shown in Table 2.

Participant A, in her entry into the host culture, realized that she had to adhere to a large number of manners and rules that were specific to Japanese culture. She also realized that Japanese people used contrasting communication methods from Chinese, who are rather direct and candid. Participant B realized communication-related aspects of Japanese culture that were different from home, such as using indirect expression in talking, listening to others' talk until the end, and showing an accepting attitude toward other people. Participant C pointed out that Japanese students never invited private friends to their research laboratory, a public place, which she recognized as part of Japanese manners. She also realized the communication tendencies of Japanese people, in which respect for other people is emphasized. Participants D and E found multiple behavioral differences falling under all three categories: manners and rules, com-

Table 2 Overview of Acculturation and Its Influence after Reentry

	Acculturated cultural behaviors while staying in Japan	Acculturated cultural behaviors continued after reentry
Informant A	<p>(1) Manners & Rules bowing, frequent acts of assuring, writing a response in email correspondence, demonstrating etiquette such as ways of lining up shoes and placing bags, being punctual, telephoning at appropriate times and situations</p> <p>(2) Communication contacting a host before a visit, not easily asking for a big favor without thoughtful consideration especially to teachers and superiors, using indirect expressions</p>	<p>Trying not to be late for meetings, telephoning before visiting</p> <p>directing students to make thoughtful considerations, explaining situations before asking a big favor from teachers, telephoning at appropriate times and situations</p>
Informant B	<p>(2) Communication using indirect expressions, listening to others' talk until they are finished, showing an accepting attitude toward others</p>	<p>making introductory and indirect remarks before asking a favor</p>
Informant C	<p>(1) Manners & Rules not inviting private friends to a research laboratory</p> <p>(2) Communication being nice to others and strongly considering their needs and situations, making decisions through discussions, using indirect expressions, praising others often, telephoning infrequently except for emergency situations, making an appointment before events (eating out, meetings)</p>	<p>Praising others often, not telephoning often, considering the convenience of others, making an appointment before events (eating out, meetings)</p>
Informant D	<p>(1) Manners & Rules bowing, exchanging formal greetings among unacquainted individuals, greeting in respectful ways, cleaning up with high awareness of public beautification</p> <p>(2) Communication being considerate of others' feelings without being too pushy, keeping a certain distance from others with politeness and respect, giving back a present every time and returning something equivalent for a gift, demonstrating a stronger sense of belonging to a group</p> <p>(3) Philosophy of life being cooperative with others and emphasizing processes</p>	<p>Being considerate of others' feelings, especially with colleagues who have studied in Japan, listening to others and respect their opinions when eating out, teaching students Japanese manners of preparing for and cleaning up with everyone, returning something equivalent for a gift</p> <p>being cooperative with others</p>
Informant E	<p>(1) Manners & Rules splitting a bill, waiting in lines, bowing, talking with quiet voices, telephoning at appropriate times and situations</p> <p>(2) Communication not asking private questions, even among close friends, making decisions through discussions, using indirect expressions</p> <p>(3) Philosophy of life being competitive with others to achieve a successful career</p>	<p>giving strict guidance to those students cutting in a line</p> <p>Making introductory, explanatory, and indirect remarks before asking a favor, not disclosing private things to others</p> <p>not being competitive with others to achieve a successful career</p>

munication, and philosophy in life. The accepted cultural aspect pertaining to the third category, philosophy in life, was retained after their return and influenced the way they interacted with people and managed their work. The Japanese virtue of being coop-

erative with others was firmly internalized by these two participants and remained with them in the long run.

The following are examples of the participants' comments regarding the abovementioned aspects.

Examples of participants' comments

(1) Rules and manners

Participant A

"It's not that I am different from other Chinese people, but it is that there are more things for me now to worry about. I came to feel uneasy about others' ways of doing their work. For example, in cases like when I receive an email from my [Chinese] students; I reply to them, receiving no reply in the end. I did not care about such cases before, but because of the influence of my study abroad in Japan, I am now particularly bothered by these kinds of acts."

Participant C

"One good thing about Japan is that, for example, after a meeting, everybody puts away garbage such as tangerine peels together, puts seats back to their original places before leaving. Actually, I taught this manner to Chinese students. In China, there are many people who can't do this because they tend to expect that somebody else would do it for them. Also, there are many cases, even among faculty staff, of people not throwing their own garbage, so the faculty room is, in fact, full of garbage. I would clean up litter if I find it on a desk. There is a difference in the attitude toward beautification, especially in public places. I could probably call this as morality."

(2) Ways of communicating

Participant B

"In communication with others, I learned in Japan to express what I want to say indirectly. The people in Kyoto I stayed with expressed themselves in this way, so I learned to say things in a bit of a round-about way. At first, I couldn't understand what people intended to say. After my Japanese friends explained their real intentions to me, I came to understand gradually. I started to use this way of expression about two years after my first arrival. My manner of communicating probably hasn't return to my original [before studying in Japan]. When I want to say something, I now make lots of introductory remarks, quite a lot of remarks. For example, when I ask for any favor, I explain the situation, the difficult situations, surrounding myself. I don't immediately ask for the favor; I do it after making such [introductory] remarks. I adjusted to the Japanese way. I adjusted myself so easily in Japan probably because of

my original personality that is not that much straightforward either."

Participant C

"Japanese people contact others in advance to an event. They don't ask somebody to dinner without prior announcement. In fact, they rarely do. Especially in the workplace, people make an appointment in advance, even one week ahead. In China, among colleagues who live nearby, it is easy to ask one another to eat out unexpectedly, even at a last minute. You don't have to worry too much about this issue. But now I try to make an appointment in advance when planning events with my superiors. I try to avoid actions that may possibly inconvenience others, including the act of making casual phone calls."

(3) Philosophy in life

Participant D

"I am exploring myself to find a way to curry favor with others, like my superiors. I have not found answers as to how to wisely deal with others yet. There is a gap in the sense of values. There is a difference in views between those who want to move upward and those who don't. Some of my values are those I originally had, and others are Japanized. I don't hope to intentionally bring advantageous things to my life. I don't want to be such a person anymore. I dare not to be that kind of person. In this sense, I am similar to Japanese."

"So far, I have a feeling that I am right. I don't pursue promotion. I am not unscrupulous about the means to it [promotion]. I am neither searching for a successful career nor promotion. One thing I wish for is that I could live in a world that I can feel satisfied with, a world for which I am not to be blamed at all but in which I am not so much recognized as strange."

Participant E

"I feel every Chinese person is oriented toward upward mobility. This feeling has such a strong power. For me, in Japan, well, it may be related to my innate character, but I don't like such ways so much. Almost all Chinese want to advance in life. For example, they want to be promoted to a professor and such. There are competitions created, and people try to do many things to achieve their goals. For example, they intentionally make friends with their superiors. I do not

like such ways. And I didn't have to think and go in that way in Japan."

"[After studying in Japan,] I have totally given up such practices. I tell my husband not to expect from me in terms of getting promoted in my career. For me, an ordinary life with freedom is enough. Coming back, I realized we Chinese are supposed to exert ourselves, after all. I feel it every day. I just feel it. And I don't like it very much. When everybody goes that way, I feel like I want to stay back."

Implications

The participants reported their continued practice of cultural behavior and values acquired in Japan. Although these behaviors did not match with social and cultural behaviors expected in China, they were nonetheless maintained by them, intentionally. The cultural behaviors found in this study overlapped with four of the six items of Japanese social skills for international students categorized by Tanaka and Okunishi (2016): indirect expression, social conventions, suppression of expression, and consideration for a group. These four behaviors seemed to have been naturally learned by the participants through their life in Japan. Among these behavioral features, several were recognized by Chinese returnees as admirable, and those behaviors firmly accepted by them were eventually internalized in them. In this way, these Japanized cultural behaviors were retained. The significant aspect is that the acculturation of individuals changed not only the returnees' personality aspects but also the ways in which they interacted with people in their original society. Such actions by returnees could contribute change to the practices and values of a native society, making the latter more multicultural and internationalized.

Of the behaviors acquired by the participants in Japan, rules and manners and ways of communicating partially agreed with the list of Japanese social skills acquired by international students in Japan (Okunishi & Tanaka, 2011; Tanaka & Okunishi, 2016): indirect expression of negative matters in consideration of others, social grace, and listening to and respecting others in groups. In the psycho-educational learning of these skills (Tanaka, 2012), students pointed to the philosophical background of Japanese thought for

harmony. Our participants also demonstrated understanding of this idea. However, as for the third category, philosophy in life, similar items were not found in the aforementioned skills list. The social skills list was devised to help in the formation of interpersonal relationships with Japanese hosts. An individual's attitude toward life would not coincide with such skills but rather relate to their own beliefs.

Adopting Japanese social skills benefits the socio-cultural adaptation of international students in Japan. Lee and Tanaka (2017) discussed the "switching" of cultural behaviors between two cultures. In a host country, behaviors are used selectively depending on whether a counterpart is a host or a compatriot.

However, after returning to China, the participants in this study continued some of their acquired behaviors. This gives rise to several questions. Do these acquired behaviors gradually regress with time in their native societies? Or are they continued in the long term under certain circumstances, such as if they are convinced of the meaningful impact of their behavior on society?

Takahama and Tanaka (2011, 2012a, 2012b) investigated the experiences of seven Japanese undergraduate students who studied in the US for 4 to 11 months. The students, after returning to Japan, reported feelings of alienation arising from the discontinuation of the environment, discomfort from not being able to tune in to the talk of their friends, loneliness from not being able to share their precious experience, and dissatisfaction with their non-stimulating daily life. They refrained from talking about their study abroad and showing their acquired skills; they avoided making their differences stand out. They were distressed by the cultural differences, especially Japan's emphasis on cooperativeness and peer pressure. However, the culture shocks were settled in a few months after interacting with their friends, and they analyzed themselves as they "got used to" and gained positive attitudes, such as creating new goals (Takahama & Tanaka, 2013).

The reports of discomfort and irreversible cognitive behavioral change by the Chinese individuals in this study after their return seem to suggest their deeper intercultural acceptance of the host culture. Unlike code-switching trials to adjust to different cul-

tural groups (Lee et al., 2017), the phenomena we recognized were the maintained Japanese ways of thinking and behaviors. The participants in our study had a longer period of studying abroad, and were more mature in terms of age compared with the previously mentioned Japanese students. They were professionals with their own way of life, and had a longer time period after returning before being interviewed. Participant B confessed that she could not understand an indirect way of expression when she first encountered it in Japan but came to be able to decipher after hearing the explanation and began to adopt it herself two years later. Thus, learning of cultural behaviors take time. However, if one's personality harmonizes with the cultural characteristics of a host society, acculturation may be promoted. The acculturated self would continue to exist on returning, leading to the intention of continuation of the acculturated behavior despite recognizing the gap with the social norms of the native society.

The findings also give rise to more questions on adjustment. Are those who are well adjusted to a new environment simply skilled at coping with changes, and therefore will re-adjust smoothly to their original society after coming back? Or would they have trouble in their re-adaptation to their original society? In other words, does intercultural adaptation to one culture promote or inhibit re-adaptation to one's original culture? The hypothesis of smooth adjustment to a host society leading to rebound in re-adjustment to a native society could be modeled after a bow-drawing, if the repulsive force when drawing a bow is used as metaphor. Based on this viewpoint, it may be difficult to adapt flexibly to any culture. Instead of simultaneous use of cues from multiple cultures, people would selectively choose those that fit them and settle accordingly. This selective acceptance of cultural behavior and the depths of cultural learning likewise merit discussion.

The limitations of this research should be stated. First, the research approached only a limited number of participants within limited social and age groups. Second, all of the participants were researchers belonging to the same university; therefore, the obtained knowledge may be limited. Future research should confirm the results of our findings. Longitudi-

nal research is also required for the refinement of this study. Third, it cannot be concluded that the findings of this study were culture-specific phenomena applying only to those having stayed in Japan or universal ones common to sojourners regardless of destination. Further study of Chinese returnees having studied abroad in different parts of the world can be expected to lead to concrete answers.

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