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Diversity of Intercultural Adjustment: Western Students at a Japanese University

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1. Introduction

In 2008, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) launched a "300,000 international students plan." It aimed to double the number of international students by 2020 to become a main hub of global business and exchange. About 91% of the international students who are pursuing degrees are from Asian countries, while the rest stay less than one year. Half of the top ten countries that send short-term international students to Japan are from the West, including the U.S. (12.6%), France (4.4%), Germany (3.7%), UK (2.8%) and Australia (1.7%) (Japan Student Services Organization, 2012).

Japan and its culture were once seen as extremely unique or almost opposite from the West. Japan's "High-Context Culture" tends to convey messages and non-verbal factors, which is the opposite of the American "Low-Context Culture" that uses explicit verbal messages (Hall, 1976). When dealing with conflicts, the differences between Low and High context cultures might cause misunderstandings because people do not see the other's intentions (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). The Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov's study (2010), which examined dimensions of national culture, revealed that individualism was more valued in the U.S. than Japan. While individual differences emerge within a national culture, personality and culture are closely linked (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Based on face and hierarchal relationships, Asians may employ inductive (topic-delayed) patterns of communication, whereas Westerners may use deductive (topic-first) communication style (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012). Emotional expressions and non-verbal languages also vary across cultures (Tannen, 2007). These cultural differences may make it challenging when students from Western countries try to adjust to Japan.

As Featherstone (2000, p.166) described, however, people now face a "digitalization of

culture" through which we can attain huge amount of information with speed and mobility. The study abroad experience of students who have full access to the world media and the Internet might well be quite different from those of a few decades ago. They might have fewer difficulties with cultural differences, with help of smartphone always in hand.

How do Western students in modern era perceive their experience of living and studying at a Japanese university? What kinds of difficulties with intercultural adjustments do they have? And what educational development would be necessary to sustain the needs of international students? These are the questions that initiated this study. In the current study, the term intercultural adjustment refers to the "short-term and medium-term adaptive process of sojourners in their overseas assignments" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p.123). The study analyzes the experiences of the students from the U.S., Europe and Australia enrolled in the beginner level Japanese courses at a university in Tokyo for two reasons. First, I had been teaching one of the courses prior to conducting this study and built relationships with the students to openly discuss sensitive issues. Second, according to the past research, the bigger the cultural differences are, the more likely people will struggle to adjust (Zhou & Qin, 2009). It is worthwhile to examine the experience of Western students in Japan, which contributes to the existing theories of intercultural adjustment. It is also important to develop educational support for international students to further expand the internationalization of the university.

2. Review of Literature

Studying abroad is widely considered an effective way to improve foreign language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness. A wide range of studies has examined gains made by those who went abroad and positive results have been reported in oral fluency (Freed, 1995; Hernández, 2010), writing skills (Sasaki, 2009) and cultural sensitivity (Martinsen, 2011). Living in an unfamiliar culture is not always smooth and easy. Sojourners often experience acculturative and psychological stress while going through environmental changes (Bochner, 2006). Cultural differences in daily norms and incompetence in a foreign language often increase misunderstandings in interactions and feelings of isolation (McLaren, 1999).

Kim (2001) has proposed an Integrated Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation, which defined the adaptation to be "the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments" (Kim, 2001, p.31). Under this concept, adaptation is situated at the intersection of the individual and the environments, promoted by communication. As she put it, it is "the necessary condition of communication between the individual and the host environment for the occurrence of adaptation" (Kim, 2001, p. 32).

This transformative process was conceptualized in "The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic" model. Living in a new culture requires learning about new elements

as well as "deculturation" of old norms (Kim, 2001, p. 51). Maintaining a balance between the new/old places and identities is stressful. This stress becomes a trigger for adaptation as individuals start striving to overcome their challenges through gaining new skills and cultural understandings. After the stress-adaptation stage, there is a subtle growth (Kim, 2001). The whole process is not linear and smooth. It is rather "draw-back-to-leap," which is a cyclic and ongoing transformation (Kim, 2001).

Weaver (1993) also maintained that intercultural adjustment is a long-term process that involves stress and growth. He pointed out that culture shock involves "the loss of familiar cues," "the breakdown of interpersonal communication," and "an identity crisis" (Weaver, 1993, p.139). The burden of adjustment can be reduced by understanding the adjusting process, learning about the new culture prior to departure, sharing feelings with other peers and developing strategies to facilitate the adjustment (Weaver, 1993).

A number of studies have analyzed the fatigue and psychological distress of students moving between the East and the West. Shi (2011) who studied Chinese MBA students in the U. S. identified how limitations in language and cultural competences negatively influenced successful participation in an academic context. Ayano (2006)'s research on Japanese students in the UK revealed their homesickness and psychological exhaustion, which were the cause of low stage of well-being. The key themes of Irish students' intercultural adjustment in Japan were social networks, food and language. It highlighted that these themes were correlated to the adjustment process, with students feeling isolation, homesickness and discouraged to speak Japanese (Pearson-Evans, 2006).

Although no single theory can explain the complexity of unique individual study-abroad experiences, past studies have delivered voices and minds of "mobile" students, which otherwise might not have heard or witnessed by host nations. However, little research examined whether students living in the current world where "shared systems of symbols and knowledge circulate globally" (Gille & Riain, 2002, p.274) experience similar adjusting stress as those in the past. Students are absorbed in the age of globalization that has broken down cultural boundaries (Parekh, 2008). It is important to consider whether there is only one hypothesis of intercultural adjustment, in which people always find issues during cross-cultural interactions and eventually learn to adjust to another culture as an ideal solution (Misaki, 2012).

Jackson (2008, p.200) argued that young Hong Kong students' identities were constantly "co-created in relationship to other people and events" that were also influenced by "social, psychological, economic, and historical as well as by contact with their own and other cultures." Jackson's view is supported by Kim (2001) who proposed that adaptation is a dynamic communication process between the self and the new environment. The elaboration of ups and downs during studying abroad may not be simply explained by the cultural differences and unfamiliarity.

3. Method

This exploratory study addressed three research questions: How do Western students perceive intercultural adjustment in Japan? What kinds of difficulties do they experience? And what educational development would be necessary to sustain the needs of international students? The study employed the mixed method. As the first part of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to eighteen students, eight male and ten female, in May 2013. They were from the U.S. (10), Germany (3), UK (2, one student is originally from Algeria), Poland (1), Ukraine (1) and Australia (1) and studying in the beginner Japanese courses at a university in Tokyo. By the time this study was conducted, nine students had stayed in Japan for seven months, eight students had stayed for one month and a half and one student stayed in Japan for three years and a half. Except for one research student, all the students came to Japan using exchange programs and were to study for six months or one year. The questionnaire was in a descriptive format, which students answered in English. In addition to the background information, six questions explored their experiences of culture shock and difficulties in Japan: Q1. Have you ever experienced culture shock in Japan? Q2. Have you ever had any difficulties with the Japanese language? Q3. Have you ever had any difficulties with customs, foods and lifestyle in Japan? Q4. Have you ever had any difficulties with relationships and interactions with Japanese people? Q5. Have you ever had any difficulties with studying at a Japanese university? Q6. Any other issues? The outline of the questionnaire was based on the past studies,

such as McLaren (1999) and Bochner (2006), who discussed the impact of culture shock on the success of studying abroad, Pearson-Evans (2006), who revealed that social network, food and language were the key schemes of adjustment.

A few weeks after the questionnaire, two male and four female students participated in semi-structured group interviews. Interviews examined the same topics presented in the questionnaire, but the participants talked about their personal experiences with more in-depth descriptions and elaborated thoughts. The interviews were conducted in English and all the conversations were recorded based on the participants' agreements.

4. Results
4.1 Questionnaire Results

Due to the small number of the respondents, the questionnaire did not analyze the tendency of intercultural adjustment among them. Rather, the objective was to find out the kinds of challenges that students experienced, which emerge from written descriptions in the questionnaire. The summary of the questionnaire results is presented as Table 1. Pseudonyms have been used to protect students' privacy.

As for the Q.1, about 56% of the respondents wrote that they have experience, while others mentioned they had none at all. Many descriptions of culture shock were regarding the busy urban lifestyle in Tokyo, such as "The first time I came here I had culture shock. Everything was different to my small town in England" (UK, Mike, 7 months) and "A little bit. People in Tokyo are busy and not helpful. Crowded trains. Long days,

Table 1 The Kinds of Difficulty that Students Experienced in Japan
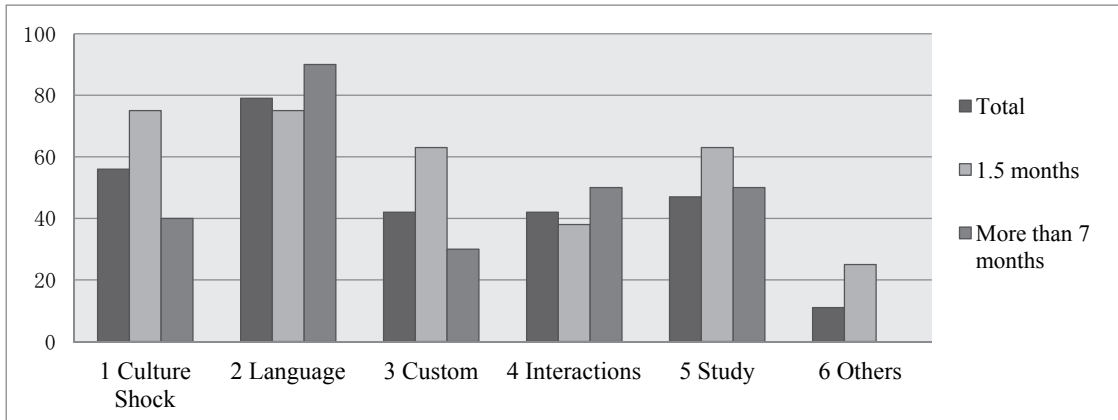
getting up 6 am, going to bed midnight" (Australia, Kate, 1.5 months). Those who mentioned they do not recall culture shock commented on their flexibility cultivated through adequate preparation and global experiences. They wrote, "Not really, I have traveled a lot in the past and have many Japanese friends so I was prepared for Japan" (U.S., Emily, 7 months). Regarding the Q.2, 79% of the respondents confirmed their difficulties. Most of them were related to two kinds of language issues: lack of speaking skills and poor *Kanji* (Chinese characters) comprehension. When considering that the respondents were all placed in beginner-level Japanese courses, experiencing the difficulties with the language seemed rather ordinary. It was notable however that there were a few comments, such as "None that I can think of at the moment" (U.S., Jessica, 1.5 months).

Regarding the Q.3, 42% of the respondents experienced challenges. Many answers were regarding eating manners and particular foods that they could not eat, such as, "Eating while walking, train etiquettes"

(U.S. Sarah, 1.5 months). As for the Q.4, 42% of the respondents described their difficulties, yet many of them contained positive perspectives. For instance, "I think it's a little difficult to make friends with Japanese people at first. Sometimes they come off a little aloof, but if you keep trying you can make some very good friends. It just takes some time" (U.S., Steve, 7 months).

For the Q.5, 47% respondents commented on the difficulties with different school systems and their inadequate Japanese skills. Those were "The systems are different and the customs and offices are different from my own university, so I just have to re-learn a new system" (U.S., Amy, 1.5 months) and "Sometimes classes don't make sense" (U,S., Ted, 7 months). For the Q.6, only two students described issues as "Everything is too expensive" (U.S., Brian, 1.5 months) and "The biggest issue for me is just that I can't break through speaking barrier. Even if I understand things I cannot respond" (Ukraine, Sophia, 1.5 months).

The results showed that the students who

had stayed more than seven months recognized less culture shock and difficulties with customs and studies. It was difficult to determine whether they could not recall their experience in the early stages of living in Japan or did not experience difficulties. Interestingly, the respondents who stayed more than seven months experienced more difficulties with language and interactions than those with shorter stays. It indicated that the longer they stayed, the more complex relationships with Japanese people they built, which might have initiated more challenges.

4.2 Interview results

Shortly after collecting questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants as in Table 2. They were randomly chosen from the beginner-level Japanese class according to time convenience. Ellen and Max, Diana and Sophia did the interview in pairs, apart from Ben[1]. Interview questions were roughly based on the questions in the questionnaire,

although the participants talked freely according to their thoughts. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed by coding techniques to "note core ideas and concepts, recognize emotive stories, and find themes" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.229). The following key themes emerged in the student experiences of intercultural adjustment: (a) Confidence about being ready to live in Japan; (b) A global point of view that diminishes the boundaries; and (c) Weakness in interpersonal communication.

4.2.1 Confidence about Being Ready to Live in Japan

The students hesitated to admit that they experienced difficulties with culture shock and intercultural adjustment. Diana and Sophia said, "It's definitely different from what I imagined, but it did not shock me." Sophia recalled her pre-departure to Japan as "In my home university, they told us more about Japan, about the culture, about the traditions,

Table 2 Interview Participants

Participants	Nationality	Main subject of study	Length of Stay	Interview Style Time
Ellen	Poland	Engineering	3.5 Years	Group, 45 minutes
Max	Germany	Law	1.5 months	June 21, 2013
Diana	Algeria (study in the UK)	International Politics and Japanese	8.5 months	Group, 40 minutes June 14, 2013
Sophia	Ukraine	Linguistics	1.5 months	
Ben	U.S.	English Literature	1.5 months	Individual, 30 minutes May 31, 2013

[1] Due to the time conflict, Ben participated in the single interview, not a group interview. Ellen was a research student and lived in Japan longer than other exchange students.

and about how people act." Diana also elaborated that:

There were actually some things that were quite different like…from what we thought it was going to be. But it wasn't a major thing like, "Oh my god this wasn't expected" or "Culture shock" or "I am not good!" It's just not very special or it wasn't that feeling. (Diana 14/06/13)

Similarly, Max noted that "You know so much information and you could imagine what will happen." Only after he started living in Japan, could he identify some was true and others were old stereotypes that have been changing. Being surprised, however, did not pressure him negatively because he had collected knowledge about Japan over the years. Ellen said that "It is a kind of shock because you knew what's going on, then you actually see them. Maybe 20 years ago, we were shocked by facilities or something but now we have the Internet and books." Ben, likewise, commented that he was really interested in Japan and learned a lot about the country. He was therefore expecting to see the differences and even excited about them.

Their ample traveling experience also made them think that coming to Japan was not an extraordinary event. Sophia recalled, "I used to travel a lot. I had never been to Japan before but even for the first time, I do not have a shock or lifestyle is pretty much comfortable here" Ellen mentioned that "My family is always like wherever we go, at the end we say oh it was good. So maybe I am easygoing for this way. Even India was perfect."

Positive views on their intercultural experience seemed to have influenced their views on language barriers. When they were asked about difficulties with the Japanese language, all of them laughed about it with a cheerful attitude. "You want to tell something in an easy way, so it will be easy to understand. But they don't understand you. So that's really, really tough sometimes," Sophia mentioned. She was able to manage the language barriers and did not considered them as problems because "We have a dictionary on our phone," which "Definitely helps a lot!" Max commented that face to face communication is harder, but communicating through text messages was not a big problem. "You can check *Kanji* easily nowadays. Just using the Internet or using a phone."

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that all the participants saw and experienced cultural differences. However, they did not perceive them as "problems," as they knew that differences would be there and considered them as an ordinary matter. The confidence underlies their positive perspectives, which were cultivated through collecting knowledge about Japan through the Internet, media, phones and books and abundant experience of traveling abroad.

4.2.2 A Global Point of View that Diminish the Boundaries

The participants talked about similarities between their home and Japan. Some of them pointed out how urban life can be similar, even though there are national boundaries that they had to cross. Ben specified that "To be honest, Tokyo is not that much different than Seattle. That's how… that's got a kind of similarity, I feel like." The problem that he found with people in Japan was "remembering their names," which also happens when he is

speaking English in Seattle. As he put it, "The problem is you know I am always bad with names. […] I guess it's not a problem in Japan, but it's a problem in general." Diana also noted, "Life in general at a Japanese university is, as a university student, it's not that different than the life in the university in England. You come to class, you can have lunch at the university you can meet people at uni, you have many things surrounded the university." When Sophia talked about how Japanese people were eager to help her, Diana said as follows:

You know what in France? For example, people who love Japan, sometimes there is a Japanese person there, they would try to get this person, like straight away. Yeah, so I think it's quite the same here, they really become, like get… be friendly, when you are a foreigner. (Diana 14/06/13)

Regarding how to find the right words in a Japanese dictionary, Max said, "You just get used to it. You have a feeling which one would be correct." "I think the problem is the same as any other languages. Because I remember when I was learning English, I always had 10 different words on the dictionary," Ellen added. They could relate their experience of learning Japanese to their previous experience of learning another language in their home countries.

Particularly in the minds of Ben and Diana, what was happening in Tokyo could happen in any other big cities. The lifestyle of a foreigner in Tokyo and being a local resident in Seattle did not differ dramatically. What happens to a foreigner could happen to a foreigner in France. Difficulties with learning Japanese was similar to the ones with English.

While they perceived differences, they also found common patterns between their homes and abroad, which weakened the significance of cultural boundaries that require proper intercultural adjustments.

4.2.3 Weakness in Interpersonal Communication

All the interview participants were concerned about their limited communication skills and opportunities. Ben wished he had more time to socialize with Japanese people. He explained that "A part of the challenge of being in Japan as an exchange student is that you have people who speak the language that you are actually comfortable with. You are more inclined to spend time with them." The issue had increased because "I am in class with a lot of foreigners. I have only one class which is phenomenally Japanese, which is sort of frustrating."

Max also emphasized, "For me the problem is speaking and listening. I think grammar is quite fine, it's not that difficult." He was concerned that his pronunciation sometimes confused Japanese people. In addition, he was not sure how to develop friendships with Japanese students. "I don't know whether I can take them seriously when they say things. I think they use like *tomodachi* (friends) or *nakama* (buddies) at a very early stage. But I think what we are thinking is maybe different." He further clarified his thoughts as follows:

I think another problem with communication is that difference between high context and low context societies. And Europe is the typical low context society. We directly say things or we don't expect or…

expect to read our mind or understand body language, but in Japan it's a lot of *kedo* and *ga* (but) and there is nothing. Then you have to read it. (Max 21/06/13)

"Only the big culture shock I had was people don't say what they are actually thinking. […] If they can speak to us in Japanese, they will treat you differently, he elaborated." Ellen also agreed with him that:

People are not honest with each other. Like they say, for example, I want to go on a trip, and I say like, "*Sotsugyoo ryokoo ni ikitai* (I want to go to a graduation trip)," and everybody is like, "Yeah, ikitai ikitai (I wanna go, I wanna go)." So, then I say a few days later, "Okay, let's go here," and *minna wa "Oh, chotto*. (everyone says oh it's a little bit of a problem)." It's many many situations like that the Japanese try to be nice so they say "Oh yes I want to go." (Ellen 21/06/13)

Ellen emphasized that another problem was not using any Japanese that she learned. She said, "Even yesterday I went to a meeting with friends. We just had a beer and I was not using any of what we learned yesterday. And I was thinking, how can I not use anything that I know?" Diana and Sophia agreed that they definitely have difficulties with normal conversation. When speaking and listening were involved, Sophia sometimes found herself helpless. Many of their Japanese friends were the ones who could speak English. As Diana explained, "They would come to talk to you very easily, only if they are able to speak English a little bit. But if they don't, they don't speak at all. They would act like I am not here. Or they don't know you."

While the participants perceived their relationships with Japanese people positively, their interactions seemed limited to those who could speak English to some extent. Writing text messages and reading emails in Japanese were easy. Having conversations, which could deepen personal relationships, was one of the biggest challenges.

5. Discussion

As for the experience of living in Japan (RQ.1), mixed perspectives were reported. Some felt challenged with differences in lifestyles, language barriers and food, just like those discussed in the past studies. Others did not perceive the adjustment as a difficult, stressful stage. They were "expecting to see the differences" and "excited for Japan." Knowledge from the Internet, books, world media and Japanese friends seemed to reduce the burden of intercultural adjustment and build confidence for living in Japan. The findings supported Kim (2001) and Weaver (1993) who maintained that difficulties with adjustment could be minimized by adequate preparation prior to arrival.

Their global experience appeared to be a key factor that facilitated their intercultural adjustments. About 40% of the questionnaire respondents previously visited Japan. For the participants from Europe, Japan was not their first foreign country to visit. It was hard to determine whether the participants of this study happened to be particularly internationally oriented, or they were ordinary students living in the global era. It was notable that Japan, formerly the "Far East," had become more accessible for many students through their mobility cultivated by global experience. A certain commonness on the surface in cities has also influenced how

students perceive their intercultural adjustment.

Nevertheless, it was questionable whether the participants had experienced the "deep culture," which is "the unconscious meanings, values, norms and hidden assumptions that allow us to interpret our experiences as we interact with other people" (Shaules, 2007, pp.11-12). Even though current mass media delivers different cultures to our homes, it only covers superficial information that would not change our worldviews dramatically (Shaules, 2007). When considering the adaptation process to be communication between individuals and the environment (Kim, 2001), the participants who had limited interactions with local Japanese might not have experienced a radical transformation. Students' understanding of deep aspects of culture could have been dismissed and the adjustment was perceived as less challenging.

Regarding the RQ.2, the questionnaire results revealed that students who had newly arrived in Japan identified more difficulties with daily customs and school systems than those who had stayed more than seven months. The longer they stayed in Japan, the more difficulties with language and personal interactions emerged. It was further discussed in the interviews that reaching out people and expanding personal relationships through communication were the main challenges. The findings would fit into Kim's "Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic" model (2001), which is a cyclic and ongoing transformation involving all the three stages. Interview participants pointed out that they could adjust to Japanese lifestyles and overcome some language barriers using their phones. While

their "growth" was evident, they faced another challenge with interpersonal communication, which could not be explained by digital information. Although the participants hesitated to admit major culture shock, "the breakdown of interpersonal communication" (Weaver, 1993) was seen. Culture shock occurred in the long-term scope and became a significant part of their life in Japan.

Likewise, the differences between High and Low context cultures (Hall, 1976) still had a significant impact on Max and Ellen. Collectiveness among Japanese (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) perhaps hindered active interactions between the Japanese and international students. It has been argued that younger Japanese would no longer fit into old stereotypes. They maintain more individualism (Tanaka, Spencer-Oatey & Cray, 2000) and Japanese traditional norms may have been changing. However, the interview participants perceived that Japanese students were indirect and obscure, as described in the past studies. These differences made it challenging for the international students to integrate with Japanese students.

A possible explanation for this was that the young Western students had also changed, just like the Japanese had changed over the decades. Because of that, significant differences between them remained. As Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010, p.19) explained, "young Turks differ from old Turks, just as young Americans differ from old Americans. […] young Turks differ from young Americans just as much as old Turks differ from old Americans."

Adequate preparation prior to coming to

Japan and previous experience traveling abroad facilitated their adjustment to social customs, manners and school systems in Japan. On the other hand, interpersonal communication that is influenced by one's value sets and world views have remained challenging. Language and cultural education can play a key role in supporting students to overcome such challenges.

6. Suggestions for Language and Cultural Education

For the future development of education (RQ. 3), there are three suggestions. First, it is necessary to expand educational opportunities where local and international students can learn and work towards shared goals through collaborative process. As Ben pointed out, many international students, particularly with lower Japanese fluency, study in courses exclusively occupied by international students. If academic courses were polarized to meet the demands of Japanese and international students, they would not build a true international learning environment. There should be more academic opportunities where students can cooperate towards shared objectives, while exchanging their languages, cultures, knowledge and skills.

Second, teaching about the process of intercultural adjustment would help students to recognize their situations and strive for further language and cultural learning. Some participants said they did not face any difficulties while living in Japan, except for the language barriers. This perspective seemed sustained by the confidence and strengths gained through previous global experience. On the other hand, there was the possibility that they did not experience "deep culture" (Shaules, 2007) and simply considered living in Japan within the bubble of international students, and Japanese students who speak fluent English, was easy. They may finish their studying abroad without being aware of "core of culture," such as values (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 8-9) and facing various cross-cultural encounters (Brislin, 1981). Intercultural education can play a pivotal role to help students recognize what they have experienced (or not) and what transformative stage they are at. By referring to a model of adaptation (e.g. Kim, 2001), students can objectively observe their trails of intercultural adjustments and plan how to spend rest of their time in Japan. Japanese students who socialize with international students can also participate in this process, because one's identity in an intercultural context is co-created by others and social events (Jackson, 2008).

Finally, face-to-face intercultural interactions can be increased inside and outside Japanese language classrooms. The findings suggested that studying at a Japanese university would not naturally create abundant opportunities for students to speak Japanese. While learning grammar based on textbooks is important, a language classroom can be a place to challenge their skills with local students, through which they can learn how to activate their knowledge into practice. For instance, Kubota (2003) suggested critical approaches to target culture with a focus on descriptive, diverse, dynamic and discursive aspects of culture. This can be achieved by testing stereotypes through conducting questionnaire surveys with

Japanese people or fieldwork in the neighborhood. While limited language skills could be an obstacle for investigation, creating short questions for the surveys and using numbers and graphs to present the results would reduce the burden of language. These projects may lead students to discover more diverse and complex aspects of Japan, which may also influence their perspectives on their lives in the country.

7. Conclusions and Future Research

This study investigated the unique perceptions of young students living in a global society. In their worldviews, the border between the West and Japan did not appear as vivid as it used to be, which could not be simply explained by the significance of cultural differences that require a stressful intercultural adjustment. They were willing to take their unique personal experience in Japan as a part of their ongoing global experiences. Limited interpersonal interaction with locals and the possibility of dismissing deep aspect of culture were also discussed. Due to the small sample obtained from this study, the findings cannot be generalized. The coding method used for analyzing interview data could be subjective. The findings can be used for interpreting the situations of students in a study abroad context. The implications for pedagogical development can be applicable to other universities aiming to expand international exchange.

It was left unexamined how the Western students that participated in this study modified their perspectives throughout their stay in Japan. If data were collected only from the students who never left their hometowns

and it was their first time in Japan, the results could be different. Further data collection in a longer time-frame is necessary to understand the bigger picture of international students crossing the border between the East and the West. It is my hope that this study will expand intercultural opportunities for students learning languages and cultures.

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