The acquisition of cultural values in Japanese returnee students

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to compare Japanese returnee students and students who have never lived abroad on the dimension of individualism–collectivism (I–C) and locus of control (LOC). In addition, the effects of demographic variables (total number of years spent abroad, age of entry at (first) sojourn, years after returning to Japan, and school type attended) were examined. One hundred and forty-one returnee students, divided up into two groups depending on whether they sojourned to an individualistic/internal-LOC oriented country (i/i group) or a collectivistic/external-LOC oriented country (c/e group), and 148 students who have never left Japan (non-returnee group) completed questionnaire packages containing the I–C and LOC measures. Students in the c/e group were more individualistic than students in the i/i group or the non-returnee group, and within the i/i group, students who attended local schools during their period of sojourn were more collectivistic than students who attended Japanese or international schools. Both the i/i and the c/e returnee group had a more internal LOC in comparison to their Japanese counterparts; no demographic differences were found within the groups. The present results suggested that returnee students may be well aware of the public image associated with "returnees", and are presenting themselves in a manner that goes with this image, without disrupting group harmony as a whole. Thus, it was concluded that rather than assuming a unidimensional structure in cultural assimilation and examining quantitative

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differences in returnee students, future research should consider the functional aspects of such diversity.

1. Introduction

Acculturation is the process of assimilating into one's cultural background (Kobayashi, 1983). Learning the set of norms expected in a particular culture is a life-long process, but childhood, in particular adolescence, is considered to be a critical period in this process (Takada, 1999). In recent years, there are many children who grow up in a multi-cultural background. A typical example of this is returnee students, who sojourn to a foreign country due to their parents' work, and return to their home country after a certain period of time (Saito, 1988). These children are different from foreign/exchange students in that they usually are not given a choice regarding their sojourn or return. For such children, the process of acculturation becomes a far more complex procedure.

The cultural values acquired by returnee students in Japan have long been an issue of interest, from the scope of both cross-cultural and developmental psychology (Goodman, 1990; Minoura, 1984). This unique sample of students is ideal in pursuing the process by which children come to make sense of the diverse cultural values and experiences, and assimilate them into a single cultural identity (Nagao, 1998). However, to date, empirical studies focusing on this domain have been extremely limited.

The most comprehensive, large-scale study that has been done to address this research question is the field work by Minoura (1984). In this study, Japanese students who are living in or have returned from the US were interviewed. The main findings were that many of these children incorporated the culture-specific meaning system for interpersonal relations in their host country, and the critical period for this process was between ages 9 and 15. Thus, it was concluded that children who experience multiple cultures during these years acquire a different set of cultural values in comparison to their non-returnee counterparts.

Nagao (1998) took this study a step further by arguing that the cultural identity of returnee students cannot be measured on a single bipolar dimension of "Japanese" and "American". Through a detailed investigation using both interviews and questionnaires, she demonstrated that these children claim a new and unique identity as "returnees" that do not belong to either of the groups completely. It was also shown that parental values affect the acquirement of such child identity.

Although these studies built the theoretical foundations for exploring the accumulation of cultural values in returnee students, several methodological limitations restrict the generalization of findings. First, the returnee sample was limited to students coming back from the suburban areas of the US, mainly Los Angeles and New York. Second, the findings were mostly based on interviews, in which the interviewer (i.e. the researcher herself) was fully aware of the hypothesis. Third, the sample size was relatively limited, ranging from approximately 20–70. The present study attempted to

overcome such methodological difficulties by using the questionnaire method and maximizing sample size.

Minoura (1988) reported that one of the most profound differences among the returnees and non-returnees is the relationship between the individual and the group. Individualism–collectivism (I–C) is thought to be an especially important dimension in understanding interpersonal relations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). In Western countries, such as Australia and the US, individualistic values are predominant, whereas in Asian countries, as represented by Japan and Korea, collectivistic values dominate (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Both the prototypical image (Kanno, 2000; Kidder, 1992) and existing studies (Matsubara & Ito, 1982) support the common view that returnee students, especially those from countries such as the US and Australia, are individualistic.

Another important dimension in cross-cultural studies is external/internal locus of control (LOC). This distinction was first proposed by Rotter (1966) within the context of social learning theory, representing the perception of positive and negative events as consequences of one's own behavior (internal; e.g. ability, skills) or factors that one has no control over (external; e.g. luck, fate, chance). McGinnies, Nordholm, Ward, and Bhanthumnavin (1974) compared LOC in students from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, and the US. Participants from Sweden and Japan had significantly higher external orientation than those from Australia, US, and New Zealand. Similar results have been obtained by Hsieh, Shybut, and Lotsof (1969), which found that Anglo-Americans and American-born Chinese are more internally oriented than Hong Kong Chinese, even when controlled for socioeconomic status. Moreover, Anglo-Americans had significantly higher levels of internal orientation than the American-born Chinese. Thus, Hsieh et al. (1969) conclude that the amount of exposure to American culture, which endorses uniqueness, independence, and self-reliance of each individual, accounts for such differences. Given these results, it can be hypothesized that returnee students, under the influence of their host countries, possess a more internal LOC than their Japanese counterparts.

It is essential to consider where the returnee went and what type of education (e.g. attendance at local school, Japanese school, or international school) they received there to fully understand the setting in which the acculturation process took place (Yoshida et al., 2002). In addition, factors such as the age at which the sojourn took place and the age of return should be taken into account, provided that the acquiescence of cultural values is not a uniform process but there exists a critical developmental period in which one rapidly gains understanding of cultural expectations (Minoura, 1988). Previous studies (e.g. Goodman, 1990) have pointed to the importance of these demographic variables when examining the returnee population to control for the heterogeneous nature of the sample; therefore, the impact of these factors was examined.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the difference in the cultural values of returnee students, who grew up outside of Japan, and students who have never lived abroad. It can be argued that returnee students, who have had more opportunity to identify with culture outside of their home country, will undergo different acculturation patterns. In addition, specific characteristics of sojourn that affect the integration of these values were examined within the returnee group. Particularly, the effects of age at (first) sojourn, the length of stay, school types attended abroad, and the years after return to Japan were considered.

1.1. Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that returnee students from individualistic countries have low levels of collectivism, whereas students who have never left Japan score are comparatively high in collectivism. Likewise, returnee students from these countries were hypothesized to have an internal LOC, whereas their Japanese counterparts have a more external LOC. Furthermore, within the returnee sample, younger age at (first) sojourn, longer length of stay, attendance at local or international schools, and less time after return to Japan were hypothesized to work toward higher individualism and internal LOC.

2. Method

2.1. Respondents

One hundred and forty-one returnee students (52 male, 88 female, one did not indicate sex; mean age = 16.38 years, SD = 2.93) and 148 Japanese students who have never left Japan (52 male, 94 female, two did not indicate sex; mean age = 18.05 years, SD = 2.93) participated in the study. Returnees were students who lived abroad due to their parents' occupation for at least two consecutive years. Their countries of sojourn were as follows: Australia, Bahrain, Botswana, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, England, Fiji, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, The Netherlands, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thai, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and US.

Participants were recruited from the vicinity of Tokyo. Two high schools and one university agreed to conduct a survey within the classroom setting, and the rest of the participants were those who responded to a recruitment ad placed in an internet message board. Different methods of data collection were used to maximize sample size and to ensure that a broad range of population was represented by the present sample. The two high schools that participated in the survey were diverse in nature, one a national school with a high reputation for sending its graduates to prestigious universities, and the other a private high school where more than half of the students are returnees. The university was one of the largest in Tokyo, which enabled the recruitment of a wide range of participants, both with and without international experiences. The volunteers recruited by internet were asked of their e-mail address, and the questionnaire file was sent to that address. After completion, the questionnaire was sent back via e-mail. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) lives in the vicinity of Tokyo, and (b) is a full-time student at a high school or a university. The collection rate of the questionnaire was 78.86%. Altogether, a broad-based sample representative of diverse student background was obtained.

2.2. Instrument

A questionnaire to measure I–C in Japanese students, loosely based on previous studies (i.e. Ito, 1993; Matsubara & Ito, 1982), was developed. The I–C scale consisted of 13 items, measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all characteristic of me—0" to "very characteristic of me—4". Higher scores represented more individualistic views, whereas lower scores represented more collectivistic views. Sample items included "When

making my decisions, I don't let other people's opinions get in the way" and "I feel uncomfortable when doing things different from other people (reverse item)". Results of confirmatory factor analysis supported a single-factor structure, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.87, and RMSEA = 0.08. The α coefficient for the scale was 0.76, which was in the same range as those reported in other studies of individualism and collectivism (e.g. Cross, 1995; Singelis, 1994). Overall, the I–C scale had sound psychometric properties.

LOC scale developed by Kambara, Higuchi, and Shimizu (1982) was used to measure the participants' internal/external LOC. This scale consists of 18 items that are rated on a four-point scale of "agree—1", "slightly agree—2", "slightly disagree—3", and "disagree—4". Some modifications were made to the original version by Rotter (1966) based on previous studies when the Japanese version was developed (Kambara et al., 1982). First, social and political issues were excluded so the scale would measure solely personal issues. Second, all items were rephrased "Do you think~" in order to reflect the respondent's personal opinion. Third, the scale was modified to consist of a single dimension. These modifications have proven reliable and valid in previous research for a wide range of developmental stages (Kambara & Higuchi, 1987). The α coefficient for the Japanese LOC scale was 0.78 and the 2-month test–retest reliability was 0.76 (Kambara et al., 1982). This is a considerable improvement from the original version (α = 0.70, test–retest reliability = 0.55; Rotter, 1966). The α coefficient in the current study was 0.77, and confirmatory factor analysis provided support for a single-factor construct (GFI = 0.85, AGFI = 0.81, RMSEA = 0.08).

2.3. Research procedure

Participants responded to the questionnaire via e-mail or in a classroom, along with a demographic survey that included detailed questions about sojourn experiences (i.e. country of sojourn, age of entry at (first) sojourn, total number of years spent abroad, school types attended, years after return). It was ensured that all participants had adequate Japanese language ability to comprehend the meaning of the questions. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were given for participation. All replies were assured to be strictly anonymous and confidential.

2.4. Analysis

All analyses were done on SAS ver. 8.1, with the exception of correlational analysis for the demographic variables of sojourn, which included categorical variables. The polyserial correlation between the school type attended abroad and other continuous variables were calculated using Mplus ver. 2.02. The total I–C score and LOC score were calculated for each participant. Since some of the returnees sojourned to collectivistic/external-LOC oriented countries, the returnee sample was divided into two groups. In line with previous studies (e.g. McGinnies et al., 1974), Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Scotland, Spain, and US were grouped as individualistic/internal-LOC oriented countries (i/i group), and the remaining countries were grouped as collectivistic/external-LOC oriented countries (c/e group). The I–C and LOC scores of the three groups (i/i returnee, c/e returnee, non-returnee) were compared by means of one-way ANOVA. Additionally, to examine the effects of demographic variables in the returnee group, age of (first) sojourn, total number of years spent abroad, type of school attended abroad (local
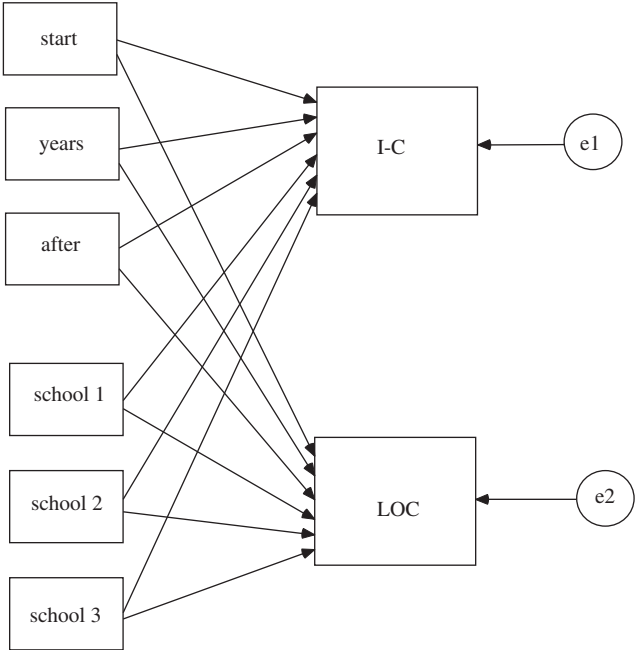
Fig. 1. Path analysis model for demographic variables of the returnee group: Influence of age at sojourn, number of years spent abroad, years after return to Japan, and type of school attended abroad. Start: age at sojourn, years: number of years spent abroad, after: number of years after return to Japan, school 1: local school, school 2: Japanese school, school 3: international school, I–C: individualism–collectivism score, LOC: locus of control score.

school, Japanese school, or international school; longest school attended when more than one applies), and years after (last) return to Japan were examined by path analysis. Since proc calis, the command for structural equation modeling in SAS, does not allow for the use of categorical variables, planned matrix was introduced, and special restrictions were set for the variable "type of school attended abroad" to enable simultaneous analysis (see Appendix A). The hypothesized path model is shown in Fig. 1.

3. Results

Since there was a significant age difference between the two returnee and the non-returnee groups ($F_{(2)} = 10.62$, $p < 0.001$), the influence of age on the dependent variables was examined. No significant effects were found for both variables (I–C: $F_{(15)} = 1.06$, $p = 0.40$, n.s.; LOC: $F_{(15)} = 1.49$, $p = 0.11$, n.s.). Likewise, the effects of the different data collection method (in a classroom setting or via e-mail) were examined. Again, no significant effects were found for both dependent variables (I–C: $F_{(1)} = 0.21$, $p = 0.65$, n.s.; $F_{(1)} = 2.87$, $p = 0.09$, n.s.).

Subsequently, the scores of the two returnee groups and the Japanese student group were compared by means of one-way ANOVA. The effect of group was significant for both I–C ($F_{(2)} = 3.68$, $p < 0.05$) and LOC ($F_{(2)} = 3.35$, $p < 0.05$) scores. Multiple comparison using Scheffe's method revealed that the I–C scores were significantly higher in the c/e

Table 1
Correlations among the variables

	Start	Years	After	School type	I–C	LOC
Start	1.00					
Years	−0.69	1.00				
After	−0.20	−0.12	1.00			
School type	0.17	−0.19	−0.03	1.00		
I–C	0.05	−0.07	−0.07	0.33	1.00	
LOC	−0.02	0.03	−0.10	0.05	−0.01	1.00

Table 2
Unstandardized and standardized parameter estimates

	Start	Years	After	School 1	School 2	School 3
I–C						
B	−0.08	−0.24	−0.21	−3.56	0.54	3.02
β	−0.01	−0.03	−0.02	−0.07	0.00	0.01
t	−0.33	−0.67	−0.92	−2.18*	0.23	1.17
LOC						
B	−0.08	−0.04	−0.24	−0.55	3.73	−3.18
β	−0.01	0.00	−0.02	−0.01	0.02	−0.01
t	−0.39	−0.11	−1.18	−0.38	1.80	−1.39

*$p < 0.05$.

returnee group (group mean = 55.08) than the other two groups, and there was no significant difference between the scores in i/i returnee group (group mean = 50.79) and the non-returnee group (group mean = 50.49). As for the LOC scale, further analysis yielded no significant difference between the groups, presumably due to uneven sample sizes, although the non-returnee group had more external LOC (group mean = 48.71) and the i/i and c/e returnee groups had scores in the similar range (group mean = 50.76 and 50.92, respectively).

The sample size for c/e group was too small to obtain valid coefficients, so the path analysis was conducted only for the i/i group. The hypothesized model had excellent fit indices: GFI = 1.00, AGFI = 0.99, CFI = 1.00, and RMSEA = 0.00. The correlation matrix of the variables is shown in Table 1. The unstandardized and standardized path coefficients are shown in Table 2. The only variable that influenced the I–C score was the type of school attended abroad (local school: $t = −2.18$, $p < 0.05$). Students who attended local schools were more collectivistic than students who attended Japanese schools or international schools. No significant effects of demographic variables were found on the LOC score.

4. Discussion

The effect of the data collection method was not significant in the present study. Since participation for both groups were voluntary, and no incentives for participation were given, both groups were presumably comparable in terms of motivation. The only

difference between the two groups was the age of the respondents (i.e. the internet group was older), but this did not seem to affect the dependent variables.

The present research did not find significant differences for the I–C score between students returning from individualistic countries and non-returnee students. Rather, students returning from collectivistic countries were more individualistic than returnees from individualistic countries or their non-returnee counterparts. Furthermore, within the returnee students from individualistic countries, those who attended local schools proved to be the most collectivistic. These findings are in contrast with the public image that assumes returnees from countries such as the US and Australia who attended local schools are most likely to be influenced by the individualistic culture predominant within such an environment.

Previous studies (e.g. Kanno, 1996) presumed a unidimensional acquisition of collectivistic culture in returnee students after their return to Japan. Consequently, discussions focused on when and how much the Japanese collectivistic culture was incorporated into the returnee students' individualistic values acquired overseas, and this process was understood as the readaptation to Japanese setting. However, the current results do not seem to fit this common notion. The key to understanding such counterintuitive results may be self-presentational schemes on the part of returnee students. As the number of students returning from overseas increase and more attention is shed on the so-called "returnee problem" (Goodman, 1990), the returnees themselves become increasingly aware of their public image, including both the positive and the negative values ascribed to them. Thus, the process of readaptation becomes not just a matter of "blending into the Japanese culture", but "fitting in, while coming to terms with the public image of returnee students". For students returning from individualistic countries, especially those who attended local schools, the "fitting in" part becomes the most challenging task; therefore, these students, upon their return to Japan, may try to blend in the picture by taking overly collectivistic positions. On the other hand, students returning from collectivistic countries are aware of the fact that they do not fit the common image of "returnees", which in the Japanese mind are students from Western, individualistic countries that are self-assertive and outgoing (White, 1992)—thus, they may try to make up for this by taking excessively individualistic standpoints. The same would hold true for students attending Japanese schools in i/i countries, although the path coefficient did not reach significance level. These students, although returning from countries such as the US and England, live in minimal contact with the local culture (Nagao, 1998). However, upon their return to Japan, they are treated as "returnees", someone who must be different due to his or her special experiences overseas. Students can learn to "play along" with this common view, presenting themselves as possessing prototypical returnee characteristics. The fact that the temporal context of sojourn (e.g. period of stay) did not influence the I–C scores also points to the fact that self-reported I–C is not a direct function of the amount of exposure to local culture.

In fact, several studies suggest that returnees from the US, in contrast to the stereotypical view of "outgoing, individualistic returnees", are more collectivistic than their Japanese counterparts. For example, Takeuchi, Imahori, and Matsumoto (2001) report that the returnees have a criticism style that is more indirect than their Japanese counterparts, overcompensating for differences in communication styles. This is in close resemblance to the results for our sample of i/i group students. Kanno (1996) points out that part of the readjustment difficulty for returnee students is in the discrepancy between

how they define themselves and how they are defined by other Japanese; e.g. when they think of themselves as Japanese but others do not accept it, or conversely, when they do not consider themselves Japanese but others insist that they be Japanese. Such communication styles may be learned as a technique to cope with these readjustment difficulties.

In contrast, LOC was more internal in returnee students, regardless of their country of sojourn. From the scope of adaptation, internal LOC may be advantageous when adjusting to an unfamiliar environment. The belief in the controllability of an environment is crucial when attempting to integrate into that background. This tendency was not influenced by demographic variables, which suggests that regardless of situation, internal LOC helps promote integration.

Ward and Kennedy (1999) argue that sociocultural adjustment is best explained within a social skills or culture learning paradigm. Social learning models emphasize the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills and behaviors through contact with hosts, cross-cultural experience, and training (Searle & Ward, 1990). Whereas I–C are beliefs that determine the specific behaviors in situations, LOC refers to thoughts and attitudes toward a situation; since returnee students undergo a series of acute transitions, it may be more adaptive to behave in accordance with the environmental setting they are presented with while maintaining an attitude that helps to keep trying to "fit in". Future research should incorporate these aspects, since it is usually not the cultural values themselves, but the ways such values are expressed, which cause interpersonal troubles. Considering the functional aspects of the diversity in returnee students, rather than assuming a unidimensional structure and examining quantitative differences will be of more use in promoting social adjustment.

In summary, returnee students not only are influenced by the multi-cultural background they are brought up in, but also may be behaving in a manner that is the most adaptive to fit into their environment. Returnees have a more internal LOC than their Japanese counterparts while presenting themselves in a manner that goes along with the common image, thereby facilitating the readaptation process. Such coping styles likely persist for a long time after their return to their home country, in light of the fact that the demographic variable "recency of return" did not yield significant differences.

There are several limitations to the present study that must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, the β weights for the demographic variables, although significant, were relatively small, suggesting their limited effect on the dependent variables. We feel the discussions stand nonetheless, since the main purpose of this analysis was not to fully predict the dependent variables only with the demographic variables, but to compare the characteristics of the different demographic groups without the repeated use of statistical tests. Second, in order to maximize sample size, a wide range of student age was allowed. This resulted in a significant age difference between the two groups. Although there were no significant effects of age on the dependent variables, developmental factors may be considered in future studies. Finally, the present study relied solely on self-reports. Whether such perception is in accordance with objective evaluation is a theme for future research.

Appendix. SAS program for the path analysis

```
data iiplan;
    infile 'f:¥iiplan.dat';
    input (xs1-xs3)(1.);
```

```
run;
data ii;
   infile 'f:¥ii.dat';
   input sex age after years start schtype ic loc;
run;
data realii;
   merge iiplan ii;
run;
proc print data = realii;run;
/*----------------------*/
proc calis data = realii ucov aug all nomod
      noint privec method = ml;
   var start years after ic loc xs1 xs2;
   lineqs
      fs3 = intercept-xs1-xs2,
      ic = mui intercept + si1 xs1 + si2 xs2 + si3 fs3
         + lamis start + lamiy years + lamia after + ei,
      loc = mul intercept + sl1 xs1 + sl2 xs2 + sl3 fs3
         + lamls start + lamly years + lamla after + el;
   std
      ei = psii,
      el = psil;
   /* constraints */
      si1 = 0-si2-si3;
      sl1 = 0-sl2-sl3;
run;
```

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