

Conflicting Acculturation Strategies Regarding Ethnocultural Diversity:
Towards a Resolution for Japan's Multicultural Future

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Who is open towards ethnocultural diversity? In other words, what characteristics and skills does such a person have, and how does s/he behave when encountering people who are culturally different? The answer may change depending upon the individual asked, but my research indicates that answers may also be influenced by our national cultural background. Differences in how people conceptualize openness towards ethnocultural diversity impact our intercultural communication, as well as the goals that we create for corporate training programs and intercultural/foreign language education in secondary and tertiary institutions. The goal of this speech is to show how many Japanese and Americans have answered this question in the past, the impact of those answers on the formulation and execution of intercultural training and education in Japan, and how I hope these answers will evolve in the future in order to better fit the needs of Japan as it faces the challenge of growing domestic diversity.

Among Japanese people, a “Global Person” who is open towards non-Japanese has often been defined as someone who speaks English (or perhaps another foreign language). Culture also plays a role: there has been a tendency among Japanese people to reason that Westerners, especially Americans, are direct communicators, so Japanese also must learn to speak their minds frankly and more assertively. Therefore, a Global Person is usually thought of as someone who can adjust both her/his behavior and language to what s/he believes is a Western and perhaps most commonly American mode.

Among Americans, the ideal of a person who is open towards ethnocultural diversity is often constructed in terms of inclusiveness—i.e., someone who helps create an American society that admits people—regardless of their race, nationality, or ethnicity—at the levels of community, work organizations, schools, and other institutions. Despite the fact that many non-dominant cultural group members in America, including Japanese-Americans, have not always been accepted as expressed

in such ideals (Takaki, 1993), this faith has a pervasive place in American thought.

In an organizational context, Americans often assume cultural similarity between themselves and people from other cultures: foreign people can (or “should”) speak English and adhere to U.S. business practices. Japanese, on the other hand, tend to assume cultural difference, i.e., Americans and other Westerners do not speak or read Japanese, understand Japanese culture, or competently practice Japanese business norms, so it is important for the Japanese to adapt to Western cultures to make communication successful. Of course, there are Japanese and Americans who do not make such assumptions, but in my research, corporate training experience, and during the 19 years since I first moved to Japan, these are general cultural patterns which I have observed.

These divergent notions of open-minded attitudes and behaviors toward ethnoculturally diverse people affect how we design corporate training, as well as secondary and tertiary educational programs. For example, in Japan, an underlying assumption of many curricula in secondary schools and universities is that Japanese must learn English and about Western cultures so they can linguistically and behaviorally shift towards the language and culture of English-speaking foreigners. In America, the goal of creating a nation in which people can climb the socioeconomic ladder free from discrimination often shapes cultural sensitivity programs in university and corporate contexts.

Acculturation strategies have a powerful impact upon how we interact with cultural “others,” and such strategies can help us to understand better the ways in which Japanese and American ideals diverge for positively coexisting with ethnoculturally diverse people. Acculturation strategies include the *attitudes* regarding how individuals wish to become involved with people they encounter from other cultural groups, as well as their related *behaviors* in day-to-day intercultural contact. Berry (1997) identified two key factors in differentiating acculturation strategies, namely “*cultural maintenance* (to what extent are heritage cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for), and *contact and participation* (to what extent should people become involved in other cultural groups)” (p. 9). Considering these two issues simultaneously, Berry posited a conceptual framework of four acculturation

strategies (Figure 1):

Figure 1

The Berry Framework of Acculturation Strategies

Heritage- Culture Maintenance (for Nondominant Group Members)	High	Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalization	Assimilation
		Refused	Desired
Nondominant Group Interaction with Dominant Group			

Acculturation strategies in Figure 1 concern the degree that dominant group members (e.g., European Americans in the U.S.) expect nondominant group members (e.g., Japanese expatriates living in America) to retain their heritage culture and interact with the dominant group. These acculturation strategies can also be used to describe the nondominant group members' expectations *for themselves* on these two dimensions. For example, according to Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, and Obdrzalek (2000), Integrationists who are members of the dominant group accept that the nondominant group both maintains its heritage culture and becomes "an integral part of society by partaking in relations with them" (p. 2). On the other hand, Integrationists who are nondominant group members want to maintain their own identity but are concurrently interested in forging relations with the dominant group. Dominant group members with Assimilation strategies support active intercultural relations and societal participation of the nondominant group, but do not accept the maintenance of their heritage cultural identity. Nondominant group Assimilationists pursue close relations with the dominant group while renouncing their heritage culture.

The framework in Figure 1 is limited in that it addresses only the acculturation of the nondominant group. Acculturation is a bidirectional process, so by failing to consider the degree that dominant group members also acculturate to the nondominant group, an essential dynamic in the

acculturation process is lost. For example, among Japanese living in Japan, the nondominant American culture has influenced many Japanese as reflected in the popularity of Hollywood movies, the ubiquity of American English, and arguably, especially among younger Japanese, the predilection towards individualism stressing personal fulfillment.

Due to this limitation, acculturation strategies have been conceived alternatively in much acculturation research as the degree that *either* dominant or nondominant group members maintain their heritage culture and acculturate to the other group (see Figure 2). In Figure 2, the vertical axis represents one's own heritage culture maintenance (regardless of whether s/he is a member of the dominant or nondominant group), and the horizontal axis reflects the degree of acculturation to one's cultural outgroup (e.g., their customs, values, and traditions). For example, an Assimilationist in Japan, whether American or Japanese, is willing to forego her own cultural practices in the workplace and adapt to the other group's culture, while an Integrationist shifts between both languages and cultural practices depending upon the situational demands and his communicative partner.

Figure 2

The Berry Framework of Acculturation Strategies: Alternative Conceptualization

Heritage- Culture Maintenance (for Self)	High	Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalization	Assimilation
		Low	High
		Acculturation to Cultural Outgroup	

But the framework in Figure 2 also has limitations. While Figure 1 focuses solely upon the extent, for example, that Americans living in Japan (i.e., a nondominant group) acculturate to Japanese culture (the dominant group), Figure 2 instead examines the extent that such Americans learn

Japanese language and cultural norms or that their cultural outgroup, Japanese in Japan, master English and American cultural norms. So the framework in Figure 2, unlike in Figure 1, has no means of considering how Americans in Japan should acculturate *from the viewpoint of the Japanese*—for instance, by learning Japanese language and business practices.

The differences between Figures 1 and 2 also reflect differences between common American and Japanese acculturation strategies. As I explained previously, Americans—whether located in the U.S. or Japan—often expect Japanese working in American multinational corporations to assimilate to American culture, for example, by speaking English and using an explicit, assertive verbal communication style in meetings. These Americans are constructing acculturation strategies, as well as being accepting of ethnocultural diversity, in terms of Figure 1: the expectation that Japanese assimilate to the dominant American corporate culture carries the tacit assumption that by doing so, the Japanese will become corporate insiders. However, such Americans are only considering how Japanese should change—not how they could acculturate to the Japanese.

In contrast, the tendency among Japanese to use English and shift to Western cultural norms when communicating with Westerners (whether such interactions take place in Japan or abroad) reflects acculturation strategies constructed in accordance with Figure 2—i.e., the degree that one actually *takes on* the culture of the other group, regardless of who is dominant. The Japanese are mainly considering their acculturation to American culture rather than how Americans should acculturate to Japan. A consequence of Japanese emphasizing their own acculturation to the West is that the assimilation or integration of Americans into Japanese society is generally not stressed to the extent that is the assimilation or integration of nondominant cultural groups in American society.

Thus, both the Japanese and American predominant acculturation strategies have strengths and weaknesses. When Japanese people speak English to non-Japanese, this treatment as valued guests (“*okyakusama atsukai*”) is extremely thoughtful and welcoming for those who do not understand Japanese language and/or culture, such as many tourists and short-term expatriates. However, such treatment no longer matches the

needs of a growing class of non-Japanese workers who are not temporary guests in Japan, but rather long-term or permanent residents who are fluent in Japanese, understand Japanese culture, and live in Japanese neighborhoods—often with Japanese spouses/partners. In my latest research, which appeared in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Komisarof, 2009), many of the Americans surveyed living in Japan fit this profile. It is important that Japanese people recognize such diversity, as these non-Japanese may neither want nor need to be spoken to in English or have Japanese behave in a Western way towards them. Therefore, the behavior of a Global Person as it has been constructed in Japan in the past is *one*, but *not the only* desirable prototype for interacting with non-Japanese.

The American construct of acculturation strategies may give some insight as to how Japanese people can be more accepting of other cultural groups who live in Japan—i.e., by creating a meritocracy regardless of national cultural background. But the common American notion of acculturation largely fails to consider how Americans should acculturate when they live abroad. Arguably, Americans may be experienced in opening their society to other people, but are they themselves prepared to acculturate to other cultural groups? My research indicated that many American executives at American multinational companies in Japan were inclusive towards Japanese workers as long as they conformed to American business norms and used English. Such “global” standards were actually quintessentially American and felt exclusive to many Japanese, as they felt pressure to assimilate to U.S. business culture. Perhaps this potential shortcoming is where the Japanese notion of a Global Person can help Americans be more truly global when they are living abroad.

As we continue to design university, school, and corporate programs to improve intercultural competencies, I hope to see Japanese and Americans (as well as other non-Japanese when applicable) learn from how each other’s acculturation strategies promote openness towards ethnocultural diversity. I’d like to give some ideas as to how this can be achieved by using my own research (Komisarof, 2009) as an example, which focused upon work organizations in Japan.

As explained previously, the demographic profile of Americans working in Japan seems to be shifting to include more long-term residents

deeply acculturated to Japan. Even so, some Americans noted difficulties in becoming organizational insiders. These Americans perceived that Japanese coworkers assumed that the Americans inadequately understood Japanese language and culture, so Japanese coworkers reserved roles or duties requiring strong Japanese linguistic and sociocultural skills—work for which the Americans felt capable—only for other Japanese. Such Americans concluded that their qualifications for becoming core organizational members, as well as the expertise which they could have contributed, were overlooked.

Rather than Japanese using Americans' country of origin as a criterion for whether or not they should be accepted as core organizational members, it is proposed that Japanese employ standards that include Americans' potential to *successfully complete work that is crucial to their organizations' well-being*—i.e., involving significant, positive, and long-term contributions. Conversely, Americans can work towards learning critical linguistic, sociocultural, and professional skills in order to *competently enact roles as core and productive organizational group members*.

Particularly in American multinational companies in Japan, it is critical that Americans make reciprocal efforts to adapt to Japan. In my study (Komisarof, 2009), many Japanese people perceived themselves acculturating to U.S. business culture but their American coworkers not making similar efforts to acculturate to Japan. These Japanese desired to be recognized, appreciated, and rewarded for their acculturation to U.S. business culture—at the very least, not penalized. For example, Japanese workers wanted their American managers to acknowledge their handicap of working in a foreign language by giving them extra time to complete tasks. They also hoped that American managers would support them in creating an organizational environment in which the Japanese could enact Japanese business norms more often with both coworkers and customers. For instance, Japanese customers often require many more services after a sale than Americans. These jobs are extremely time consuming, but since they maintain strong customer relationships and ensure future sales, Japanese companies view them as sound investments. As most American companies do not spend as much time on follow-up care, this is an aspect of Japanese business culture which, if acknowledged and leveraged, could be potentially a source of better corporate results. In many other areas, Japanese culture

should be viewed as an asset and a source of competitive advantage by these American companies—rather than ignored or merely tolerated.

Ultimately, as interculturalists helping to positively facilitate Japan's increasing exposure to cultural diversity, I hope that we can do so in accordance with three messages in Barack Obama's speech about race in the United States, "A More Perfect Union," delivered in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008. First, President Obama (2009, March 6) emphasized his "unyielding faith in the decency and generosity" (p. 48) of both European Americans and racial minorities, i.e., all parties involved in such intergroup relations. In our case, Japanese and Americans have created acculturation strategies that mirror and attempt to constructively deal with the type of acculturation dynamics which they have most commonly faced in the recent past. These acculturation strategies have been assumed largely with good intentions: for Japanese, efforts to make short-term sojourners and guests comfortable are noble, as is the American endeavor to create a true meritocracy.

Second, Pres. Obama explained that the problems in race relations in the U.S. are largely the result of *choices* made up until now, but he also expressed his belief that all parties can rise to the level necessary to solve this problem by making *new* choices. In our case, today's common acculturation strategies of Japanese and Americans have weaknesses that make them, on their own, inadequate for dealing with the current and future challenges in an increasingly diverse Japan. We may have chosen these strategies until now, but this does not mean that we must continue to do so. People can enact new acculturation strategies that better address the realities as ethnocultural diversity in Japan grows. As Greer (2001) argued, in this global age when people are increasingly influenced by more than one national culture, a paradigm shift is occurring toward "multiple subject positions," in which binary notions, such as Japanese/foreigner, "no longer describe the wide variety of identities that exist within each of us" (p. 12). We must adapt to this changing notion of ethnocultural group membership.

Finally, Pres. Obama (2009, March 6) emphasized that a Win-Win Solution for both sides will result if relations improve: "A path to a more perfect union . . . requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams" (p. 51). If Americans and other non-Japanese can play a useful, productive role in their organizations and

Japanese society, then both Japanese and non-Japanese are rewarded. The potential gains are tremendous in terms of workplace productivity, mutual good will, and improved quality of life *for all*.

Therefore, in the future, I hope to see Japanese people create a more inclusive acculturation strategy—one that recognizes non-Japanese as members of society with valuable contributions to make based on their diversity. And I'd like to see Americans and other non-Japanese living in Japan acculturate deeply to Japanese culture so that they can take on the roles and responsibilities that come with such membership. We as interculturalists can ease this transition towards Japan becoming more diverse by designing and executing corporate training, educational programs, and research that further these goals more effectively than ever before.

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