

**FACILITATING POSITIVE ACCULTURATION OUTCOMES AMONG AMERICAN SOJOURNERS  
TEACHING IN JAPANESE SCHOOLS**

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## ABSTRACT

One Japanese government-proposed method of counteracting the growing imbalance between the nation's workforce and the retired population is to increase the number of skilled foreign workers. However, Japan will need not only to physically accommodate these newcomers, but also promote their smooth acculturation into the organizations where they work. The central goal of this paper is to facilitate this process by focusing upon the acculturation of one group of non-Japanese skilled laborers which has grown continually over the past three decades: Assistant Language Teachers ("ALTs") employed in Japanese schools under the sponsorship of the Japanese government's JET Program. ALT acculturation attitudes, as well as those perceived by ALTs among their colleagues, were differentiated according to Berry's model. The impact of the alignments of those attitudes upon acculturative outcomes involving American ALTs and Japanese coworkers were summarized for two common patterns—referred to as "Intercultural Synergy," entailing a complementary alignment of acculturation attitudes, and "Alienation," which constituted a clash between such attitudes resulting in conflict. Intercultural Synergy was posited as a potential model for intercultural collegial relations—one in which Americans and Japanese negotiate an active professional and social role for the sojourner, leading to a mutually comfortable degree of inclusion. In order to facilitate such conditions, the Hampden-Turner/Trompenaars method of conflict resolution was employed to identify underlying value clashes endemic to the Alienation profile, and also to form behavioral and policy recommendations for bridging gaps in discordant acculturation orientations between ALTs and Japanese teachers which would promulgate Intercultural Synergy.

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### INTRODUCTION

Japan is the world's fastest aging society: concurrent trends of a growing retiree population and declining birthrates will rapidly deplete the workforce if no counteractive measures are taken (French, 2001; Outside chance, 2003). By 2017, in the best-case scenario, the ratio of people aged between 15 and 64 to those 65 and older will fall from its current rate of 3.4:1 to 2.2:1 (Whipp, 2004), and by the end of this century, the United Nations estimates that Japan's population of 120 million will be halved (French, 2003). Such demographics suggest an impending economic crisis (Edwards, 2003). Consequently, the government plans to partially address the declining population through accepting more foreign workers (Sakanaka, 2004), especially skilled immigrants who can make an immediate economic contribution—specifically, high-tech researchers, professors, business people, and athletes (Ministry to ease rules on permanent residency, 2004).

But importing labor is not a painless panacea. Japan will need not only to physically accommodate new workers, but also support their smooth acculturation into society and the organizations where they work. Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki (1989) defined acculturation as that which "occurs when two independent cultural groups come into continuous first-hand contact over an extended period of time, resulting in changes in either or both cultural groups" (p. 186). One element of psychological acculturation in individual members of acculturating groups is acculturation attitudes, which are, according to Berry et al. (1989), the attitudes that acculturating individuals hold "towards the ways in which they wish to become involved with, and relate to, other people and groups they encounter" (p. 186). As Sakanaka (2004) reasoned, "Unless Japan changes itself into a country that appeals to foreigners, there is no way it can get competent foreign personnel in the global scramble for talent" (p. 26). Thus, Japan's economic prospects hinge not only upon increasing the non-Japanese labor force, but also upon attracting and retaining quality people by ensuring a smooth acculturation process—i.e., one in which Japanese and non-Japanese acculturation attitudes towards each other are complementary—rather than contradictory.

In order to promote such conditions, the government would be wise to

examine both the current successes and struggles in the acculturation of foreign workers, or the factors which have contributed to creating consensual acculturation attitudes and a smooth acculturation process vs. those which have not. The central goal of this paper is to facilitate this process by focusing upon the acculturation of one group of skilled laborers which has grown continually over the past three decades: English teachers, known as Assistant Language Teachers ("ALTs"), who are employed in Japanese schools under the sponsorship of the Japanese government, or Japan Exchange and Teaching Program ("JET Program") participants.

Therefore, in order to answer the fundamental question, "How can an understanding of acculturation attitude alignments between ALTs and the Japanese teachers with whom they work be utilized to assist in the smooth acculturation of ALTs in Japanese schools?", the following research questions are posed: 1. How does a complementary alignment of perceived acculturation attitudes commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues? 2. How do divergent perceived acculturation attitudes commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues? 3. What value conflicts are apparent when intercultural relations are perceived as problematic? 4. How can such value conflicts be resolved through modifications in individual acculturation attitudes, the behaviors reflecting them, and organizational policies? Responses to the first and second questions will be offered through summarizing trends among ALTs observed in a previous study by the author, Komisarof (2004), while replies to the third and fourth research questions will be attempted by linking these trends to three of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's cultural value dimensions and employing their method for resolving conflicts within these value dimensions (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000).

This paper is designed to make several contributions to existing acculturation literature. Primarily, consequences of the fit between acculturation attitudes have hardly been investigated at all in acculturation research (Zagefka & Brown, 2002), and this paper, in tandem with Komisarof (2004), extends such research into an American-Japanese intercultural context, which has also received scant attention in such literature. Finally, in proposing a means of resolving conflicting values in the acculturation process, the gap between theory and practice will be

bridged so that this research can be utilized by practitioners and policy-makers in acculturation-related fields.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Acculturation Attitudes: The Berry Model

Berry (1997) delineated two key factors in differentiating acculturation attitudes, 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, or remain primarily among themselves)” (p. 9). When these two issues are considered simultaneously on attitudinal dimensions represented by bipolar arrows, a conceptual framework is generated positing four acculturation strategies for both dominant and non-dominant group members (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1  
The Berry Model of Acculturation Attitudes

Heritage-Culture Identity Maintenance (for Non-Dominant Group)	High	Segregation/ Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalization	Assimilation

Refused

Maintained

Dominant and Non-Dominant Group Relations

Acculturation attitudes may be held by either nondominant or dominant group members about the acculturation process of the former within larger society. According to Ward and Kennedy (1994), individuals who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations for the nondominant group endorse an integrationist attitude. Those who espouse cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations adopt a separatist position when they are members of the nondominant group and segregationist when dominant group members (Berry & Sam, 1997); in contrast, those who value intergroup

relations but reject or are relatively unconcerned with cultural maintenance for nondominant group members are assimilationists. Finally, individuals who value neither cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations are characterized by marginalization attitudes.

#### The Context for Inquiry: The JET Program

The JET Program provides a fruitful context for exploring factors facilitating or obstructing the smooth acculturation of non-Japanese in Japanese work organizations. Established by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1987, it has brought over 40,000 non-Japanese to teach foreign languages and foster positive international relations in Japan's schools for terms of one to three years (although a small number—about 2% of participants—are permitted to stay up to five years). In the 2005-2006 academic year, 5,852 people participated (49% of whom were American), with over 90% employed as ALTs (MEXT, 2006).

ALTs form a unique group—sojourners—i.e., voluntary, temporary migrants who experience acculturation for a specific and limited purpose with foreknowledge of their eventual return. Sojourners differ from immigrants, ethnocultural groups, indigenous peoples, asylum seekers, and refugees in their mobility, voluntariness of contact, and permanence (Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry & Sam, 1997). Moreover, sojourners themselves constitute an extremely heterogeneous group, including guest workers (which could be further divided—for example, into physical laborers and ALTs), international students, diplomats, and missionaries (Berry & Kim; Berry & Sam; Navara & James, 2002).

Despite such diversity, Partridge (1987) found many similarities in acculturation attitudes between Western, English-speaking immigrants and sojourners in Japan (tending towards integration), as well as how they perceive the acculturation attitudes of their Japanese hosts (commonly rejecting integration of Westerners into Japanese society). Considering the intergroup differences cited above, however, as well as the paucity of research comparing the experiences of such groups (Ward, 1996), it would be premature to assume that the characteristics of ALTs' acculturation are identical with those of other American groups in Japan. Only future research which compares the experiences of acculturating groups within a Japanese context can clarify the extent that the conflicts outlined in this paper

exist among various acculturating groups (and nationalities), as well as the degree that the proposals offered for their resolution can be effective beyond American ALTs.

#### The Importance of Organizational-Level Analysis in Acculturation

Palthe (2004) defined organizational socialization as "the process whereby an individual develops an appreciation for the values, expected behaviors, and social knowledge that are essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member" (p. 43). However, its influence extends far beyond hours spent at work. Palthe found that host company socialization is strongly related to interaction adjustment, or "the comfort achieved in interacting with hosts nationals in both work and non-work situations" (p. 39), and constitutes, along with family adjustment, the strongest predictor of expatriate general adjustment—or overall adaptation to living in a foreign culture.

Similarly, previous research about the JET Program (Komisarof, 2001; McConnell, 2000) suggested that the degree to which ALTs are able to gain collegial acceptance as members of their school faculties is a primary concern for many and has a great impact on the quality of coworker relations—more so than the extent to which ALTs feel accepted by colleagues as fellow Japanese. This is probably because ALTs are contractually-limited sojourners, without legal means of permanently settling in Japan (unless they have a Japanese spouse or find permanent employment elsewhere). Therefore, unlike most acculturation research, which examines acculturation to national cultures, this study is concerned with acculturation attitudes on the organizational (i.e., towards ALT school cultures) rather than the national level (i.e., towards Japanese culture). However, the two are not entirely distinct, because acculturation to Japanese organizations involves acculturation to norms pervasive in both the organization as well as the broader national culture—such as supervising after-school club activities vs. speaking Japanese, respectively. Consequently, broader cultural norms are considered only to the extent that they affect ALT organizational acculturation.

#### Alignment of ALT and Japanese Acculturation Attitudes: A Typology

The degree of compatibility between the acculturation attitudes of

both dominant and non-dominant members, as well as its impact upon acculturative outcomes and intergroup relations, has been examined in various studies (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Komisarof, 2004; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). All agreed that shared acculturation attitudes of assimilation or integration between dominant and non-dominant groups result in positive relational and acculturative outcomes, while segregation attitudes (in which contact and ingroup penetration are generally denied) among dominant group members, coupled with integration or assimilation attitudes (where contact and penetration of the dominant group are desired) among non-dominant group members, leads to conflict.

Komisarof (2004) created an interactive model of acculturation attitudes, which is employed in this study to glean insights into the conditions for smooth ALT organizational acculturation. The model included four types of acculturation and relational outcomes which are products of specific combinations of acculturation attitudes among ALTs and those perceived among their Japanese coworkers (see Figure 2). ALT expectations for their penetration into the teachers' collective and ALT perceptions of collegial expectations for such penetration were conceived of as dichotomous dimensions, generating four acculturation profiles.

FIGURE 2  
Alignment of Expectations for Social Penetration Between ALTs and Colleagues

ALT Perceptions of Colleagues' Expectations for Penetration	Strong	Reluctant Membership	Intercultural Synergy
	Weak	Mutual Disaffection	Alienation
		Weak	
	Strong	ALT Expectations for Penetration	

A detailed discussion of each acculturation profile is provided in



Komisarof (2004), but this paper exclusively examines the characteristics of Intercultural Synergy and Alienation, as these constitute the most common complementary and conflictual alignments of acculturation styles found among ALTs in Komisarof's (2004) population. In the next two sections, ALT acculturation attitudes, as well as those perceived by ALTs among their Japanese colleagues, are summarized for both profiles. By detailing such characteristics, responses are offered to the first and second research questions posed previously, i.e., "How does a complementary alignment of perceived acculturation attitudes most commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues?" and "How do divergent perceived acculturation attitudes most commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues?"

Acculturation research indicates that individuals may, depending upon the context, employ varied acculturation strategies or experience different acculturation orientations from the dominant group (Berry, 1990; Berry & Sam, 1997). Therefore, the following discussion differentiates ALT acculturation attitudes and those perceived among their colleagues into two types: social and professional—i.e., acculturation related to ALT attendance at social events that are not officially required as part of a teacher's job but facilitate entry into and maintenance of membership in the collective of teachers at Japanese junior high and high schools, and that referring to ALT involvement in the activities that make up the professional duties of a Japanese teacher and serve as essential rituals in the process of gaining and maintaining membership status in the faculty collective, respectively.

Finally, this model describes the fit between ALTs' own acculturation attitudes and those perceived among their colleagues by the ALTs, not the Japanese themselves. Various scholars (Horenczyk, 1997; Piontkowski et al., 2002; Zagefka & Brown, 2002) have operationalized fit similarly—i.e., not on absolute attitude deviations (i.e., those measured separately among two interacting groups), but rather as the discrepancy between one's own acculturation attitudes and the *perception* of those among respective outgroup members. Admittedly, perceptions of outgroup acculturation preferences might not match self-described acculturation strategy preferences if Japanese colleagues were questioned directly, and some acculturation research suggests that self-described acculturation strategy

preferences do not correspond well with the perception of these preferences by respective outgroups (Horenczyk, 1997; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). However, Zagefka and Brown justified this approach: "We assume that an individual's psychological responses to reality are mediated by the subjective perceptions of this reality. . . . Essentially, we argue that people's subjective perceptions of reality constitute and become the reality that informs their psychological responses" (p. 173). Therefore, the ALT-attributed acculturation attitudes are not meant to reflect Japanese coworker self-perceptions; rather, such assessments exert a powerful influence on ALTs and play an essential role in understanding intercultural communication dynamics during the acculturation process.

#### COMMON ACCULTURATION ATTITUDE ALIGNMENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

##### Intercultural Synergy

ALTs who reported a match between their own assimilation or integration orientations and those of their colleagues were placed in the Intercultural Synergy profile. In general, such ALTs desired active professional and social participation within the faculty collective, which they described most colleagues as welcoming and in some cases facilitating (thus accepting the ALTs as organizational insiders regardless of nationality). Professional acculturation was characterized by frequent collaborative work in which ALTs felt engaged by applying their skills, making decisions, and devising solutions, while also sharing duties with Japanese teachers at school events (e.g., supervising students at school excursions). These ALTs also recounted satisfying collegial relations due to regular opportunities to attend and actively participate in social gatherings (e.g., private parties and trips).

The experiences of ALTs in Intercultural Synergy shared many parallels with Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder's (2002) "legitimate peripheral participation," in which a newcomer to a workgroup is not a central member, but granted legitimacy as a potential member who can inculcate oneself in the group culture through consistent welcomed observation of and limited participation in its activities. Such newcomers are likely to fall short of what the community regards as competent engagement, but if they are granted legitimacy, then their inevitable mistakes become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion. Legitimate

peripheral participation among ALTs heightened their sense of organizational inclusion despite several obstacles to greater participation: their limited linguistic and cultural skills, and status as assistant—as opposed to full-time teachers.

### Alienation

ALTs who desired full organizational participation, yet felt denied it because they are foreign, were grouped in the Alienation profile, as they typically reported feeling alienation as a result of such disappointed expectations. These ALTs held assimilation or integration attitudes, yet they perceived segregation or marginalization orientations among Japanese faculty. Specifically, they described limited professional roles—including a lack of collaboration with coworkers and exclusion from administrative duties performed by other teachers. Regarding social acculturation, ALTs reported frequent feelings of social ostracism from colleagues who appeared to avoid or limit contact with non-Japanese (often attributing such behavior to a lack of English proficiency). Such coworkers were perceived as differentiating themselves from Americans and protecting their distinctiveness as Japanese with various forms of particularistic treatment towards ALTs (e.g., codeswitching from Japanese to English).

It is important to note that such data constitutes ALT *perceptions* of collegial behavior, and had coworkers been interviewed, they may have expressed quite different interpretations of the same events. A discussion of such alternative interpretations is beyond the scope of this paper, but a review of explanations offered in the literature is included in Komisarof (2001).

### Benefits of a Sense of Belonging

Although the population in Komisarof (2004) was small, many ALTs fit the Alienation profile—experiencing negative relational outcomes with Japanese coworkers, which is the opposite of the intended effect of the JET Program. On the other hand, the positive collegial relations and active organizational involvement described by ALTs in the Intercultural Synergy profile mirror the findings of Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987), Inoue and Ito (1993), and Ward (1996), who suggested that a key factor in reducing sojourner stress and maximizing positive affect towards the host culture

is *involvement* in it. Intercultural Synergy provides a potential model for intercultural collegial relations—one in which Americans and Japanese negotiate an active professional and social role for the sojourner, leading to a mutually comfortable degree of inclusion.

Benefits of the relational outcomes endemic to Intercultural Synergy, i.e., a sense of belonging or acceptance for non-dominant group members among host nationals, as well as the detriments of those associated with Alienation, are amply delineated in acculturation literature. For example, by participating in national institutions, including work, to the extent desired, acculturative stress among non-dominant groups is reduced (Berry, 1997; Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok, 1987). Phinney et al. (2001) concluded that immigrants who feel that their efforts towards societal inclusion are not rejected will feel greater general satisfaction and become more productive members of society. Although Phinney and Berry focused on immigrants, Inoue and Ito (1993), Partridge (1987), and Ward (1996) similarly emphasized the importance of sustained social contact between sojourners and host culture members in positive sociocultural adaptation. Moreover, ALTs interviewed by Komisarof (2001) indicated that feeling accepted as a member of the faculty collective positively contributed to the quality of their overall experiences in Japan, while feeling unaccepted or excluded had negative effects on such quality.

Regarding organizational acculturation and outcomes, Gaertner et al. (2000) concluded that perceptions of organizational unity among colleagues can increase cooperation, organizational commitment, and productivity on both the individual and group levels. Similarly, Hess (1993) reviewed various studies which indicated that a sense of group membership positively correlates with job satisfaction, and that group cohesion leads to greater organizational commitment, which in turn is strongly tied to worker performance and productivity. Komisarof (2004) also found that ALTs in Intercultural Synergy described a general sense of well-being and happiness as they worked longer hours, taught more energetically, and collaborated more harmoniously and effectively with colleagues when they felt treated as group members.

If Japan plans to increase the labor force, it appears that merely opening its doors will not be enough; a society, including work organizations, needs to be created where Intercultural Synergy, rather than Alienation,

is the norm. In other words, acculturation attitudes among host nationals that discourage penetration must be modified to permit greater access to the opportunities and benefits that extend from organizational membership, while sojourners aspiring to participate more in their organizations need to develop the linguistic and sociocultural skills required to do so. Research clearly demonstrates the advantages of non-dominant groups having a sense of organizational belonging and the opportunities to participate in mainstream society—not only to such group members, but also to the dominant group, which benefits from having more mentally-healthy, self-actualized, and productive non-dominant group members in its midst.

#### VALUE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE ALIENATION PROFILE

##### Utility of the Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars Reconciliation Method

The Hampden-Turner/Trompenaars conflict resolution method (Hampden-Turner, 1998, 2001; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000), which can be used to mollify value clashes between cultural groups, also has utility in mitigating problems arising from the diverging acculturation attitudes in the Alienation profile. As Liebkind (1996) explained, "Subjective experiences of . . . acculturation . . . cannot be understood without close scrutiny of the particular cultural values clashing in the acculturation process" (p. 177). Therefore, in the following sections, value conflicts between ALTs and their Japanese colleagues typically described by Alienated ALTs are discussed in terms of the Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner value dimensions (Trompenaars, 1994), and recommendations for reconciliation are made utilizing their conflict resolution method (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2001). Thus, the remainder of this paper constitutes a response to the third and fourth research questions, respectively: "What common value conflicts are apparent when intercultural relations are perceived as problematic?" and "How can such value conflicts be resolved through modifications in individual acculturation attitudes, the behaviors reflecting them, and organizational policies?"

The Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner value dimensions are particularly relevant to this study because they address culturally divergent values in relation to business organizations; while businesses differ from schools in many aspects, such organization-level analysis is consistent with the goals of this paper. However, these value dimensions are utilized with one

caveat: although certain value orientations may be common in Japan, e.g., particularism or communitarianism, this does not mean that all Japanese ascribe to them. Rather, Alienated ALTs perceived most of their Japanese colleagues espousing them. Such perceptions may or may not be accurate, but only through their clarification can the conflicts endemic to Alienation be ameliorated.

#### Value Conflict #1: Universalism Vs. Particularism

Most Alienated ALTs described their status within the school hierarchy as foreign guests, which they appreciated when they received assistance to accomplish tasks that they could not accomplish on their own (e.g., making complex requests in Japanese). However, as they achieved greater linguistic and cultural competence during their sojourns, their desire grew for consistent, uniform, and egalitarian treatment among their colleagues (i.e., to be "treated like everyone else"), and they felt excluded when such expectations went unmet.

Specifically, ALTs negatively construed codeswitching when colleagues spoke English to them in contexts where Japanese was the linguistic norm and the ALT was communicating competently in Japanese. Also negatively interpreted were compliments about ALT abilities to perform everyday functions in Japan, such as using chopsticks, speaking elementary Japanese, or eating food widely considered by Japanese to be inedible among Americans due to their peculiar flavors and/or textures. ALTs interpreted such complements as distancing mechanisms when they violated expectations for universalistic treatment.

Such proclivity for similar treatment likely stems from the common American value of universalism (i.e., the preference for dealing alike with people across relationships and contexts) (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000), the behavioral manifestation of which serves as an indicator of respect and social acceptance (Hofstede, 1991; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Yum, 1988). This preference stands in stark contrast to Japanese tendencies toward particularism (Dillon, 2002; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars)—or particular rules and interaction patterns that vary with context and relationship (Yum)—in which special treatment toward foreigners as guests can be an indicator of respect, care, and kindness (CLAIR, 1990; McConnell, 2000). ALTs demonstrated universalist tendencies when expressing their

desire to be treated either exactly the same (assimilationists) or similarly (integrationists) to Japanese teachers, while Japanese coworkers were perceived as particularists—granting ALTs a social status both privileged and removed from the core membership and activities of the work collective.

#### Value Conflict #2: Achievement Vs. Ascription

Alienated ALT and Japanese coworker values were also perceived to clash on the value dimension of achievement and ascription, defined by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2001):

Ascription and achievement refer to different ways in which a society determines social status. Ascribed status is determined by what an individual is and has acquired by external circumstances, while achieved status is related to what an individual does and has accomplished. (p. 32)

Alienated ALTs perceived colleagues as limiting full organizational participation to Japanese full-time teachers. McConnell (2000) described the resulting dynamic: “[ALTs’] foreignness . . . simultaneously defined them as noteworthy and kept them distant” (p. 136), with ALTs kept “at a polite distance rather than [the Japanese] socializing them to become part of daily routines” (p. 272). Some subject comments indicated that race, language, nationality, and culture tend to be intertwined into one inviolable concept of “Japaneseness,” and such perceptions of a descent-based ascriptive system for determining Japanese nationality and concomitant core group membership among their colleagues resulted in feelings of exclusion—particularly since only Japanese can legally become full-time, regular status teachers in Japanese public schools (McConnell).

Alienated ALT anger over the failure to achieve organizational penetration likely resulted from frustrated expectations for an acculturation process similar to what is widely assumed to be the reality in American organizations: exclusion based on national, racial, or ethnic background is immoral and anathema to American ideals of equality of opportunity and freedom of association (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Kim, 1999; McConnell, 2000). Such ideals profess that non-dominant cultural groups, by virtue of assimilation, should have access to the same opportunities as all Americans (Bourhis et al., 1997), including organizational membership. Despite the fact that many non-dominant

cultural group members in America, including Japanese-Americans, have not been readily assimilated or integrated into society or the organizations where they work (Nakayama, 1994; Navarro, 2004; Takaki, 1993), this faith is a staple of the prevalent American assimilationist belief system. Assimilation remains the predominant acculturation attitude among European Americans towards immigrants, their descendants, and racial/ethnic minorities in general (Aspinall, 2003; Berry & Sam, 1997; Landis & Wasilewski, 1999; Phinney et al., 2001), despite increasing preferences for integration or separation among racial/ethnic minorities (Berry & Sam; Steinberg, 1981) and integration among European Americans (Kim, 1999).

Alienated ALTs tended to employ an achievement-oriented approach towards attaining organizational membership; through improving their Japanese linguistic and socio-cultural competencies, i.e., culturally assimilating to an extent, they assumed they would be more accepted by their colleagues. However, they perceived such attempts to be rebuffed by persistent particularistic treatment by coworkers, who ascribed membership only to fellow Japanese full-time faculty. As one ALT reflected, "[My coworkers] never let me forget that I'm a foreigner and that their expectations for me are different." Such conflicts commonly occurred in relation to professional acculturation, specifically when working on collaborative projects. Among Japanese teachers, engaging in such cooperative group projects serves as a means to form a group identity and become acculturated as group members (LeTendre, 1998; Sato & McLaughlin, 1998; White, 1987). However, Alienated ALTs perceived that they were not given opportunities to participate in these projects despite their desire to do so. For example, when the staff was grading entrance examinations to her high school, one ALT recounted the following:

I was only allowed to do one small pocket of work. After that, they were tallying the scores, and I said, "I can add this stack." And they were really adamant that I couldn't. . . . I felt like it was a task I could do but the rules didn't let me. . . . All of the teachers at that table were doing it. . . . So I'm always included but not really.

The source of such frustration likely lies in the divergence between achieved vs. ascribed membership in America and Japan, respectively, and consequent eligibility to perform tasks within an organization. Membership



in Japanese collectives is based, according to White (1988), on the "active presence and participation in the social network" (p. 105). With the ascribed job title of "Assistant Language Teacher" (ALT) and impermanent residency in Japan, ALTs lack the long-term presence at work, government-sanctioned teacher accreditation (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993, 1994, 1997; Shimahara, 1991; Shimahara & Sakai, 1998; White, 1987), and official job title which are prerequisites for ascribed full-time teacher status, as well as complete access to the responsibilities shared by group members in collaborative projects. In other words, such qualifications are likely the prerequisites for Japanese to feel similarity and permit potential members to enter the ingroup.

Conversely, literature suggests that gaining and maintaining membership in American organizations is based upon competently performing tasks for which each member is uniquely skilled (Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Brislin, 1993). The key element in feeling a sense of similarity with other potential group members is task readiness, which is an achieved proficiency. With this competence-based membership concept, ALTs expected to be granted roles in projects for which they possessed enabling skills, but they felt alienated from the group when not permitted to engage in such membership-confirming tasks.

### Value Conflict #3: Individualism Vs. Communitarianism

According to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000), in individualistic societies, the welfare, development, personal fulfillment, and rights of each person are valued more than the shared resources, mutual supportiveness, and common heritage among group members (which are stressed in communitarian societies). Alienated ALTs repeatedly reported that they felt excluded from the collective of Japanese teachers due to their non-Japanese status, a perception which likely has roots in conflicting individualistic and communitarian processes of claiming ethnicity, and by extension, group membership, in America and Japan.

McConnell (2000) contended that Americans tend to conceptualize ethnicity in a more individualistic manner than Japanese. European Americans, for example, often conceptualize ethnicity as voluntary and associational (McConnell; Phinney 1990)—e.g., they "claim" ethnic membership through the personal choice of acknowledging such ancestry in

one group where multiple group ancestry exists (Aspinall, 2003), espouse membership in multiple groups simultaneously (McConnell), or in other cases, do not recognize or emphasize the ethnic nature of their identity at all (Brown, McNatt, & Cooper, 2003; Phinney). However, Phinney qualified, "Among those who are racially distinct, by features of skin color, or whose culture (language, dress, customs, etc.) clearly distinguishes them from the dominant group, self-identification is at least partially imposed" (p. 504). Such a voluntary, radically individualistic process of claiming ethnic membership among at least European Americans is consistent with American values of individual choice, expression, and voluntary group association (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; McConnell).

Ethnic labels in America have meaning for the individual, yet as McConnell (2000) explained, they "rarely are accompanied by a whole set of obligations and expectations for behavior of the kind attached to ethnic affiliation in Japan" (p. 279). Similar observations have been made about the steep price of membership in Japanese work organizations: conformity to a broad array of exacting norms (e.g., maintaining a continued, consistent physical presence among group members and working long hours) in order to demonstrate dependability and loyalty (Bachnik, 1994c; Komisarof, 2001; McConnell; White, 1988). Although many Japanese work organizations are currently characterized by weaker communitarianism (since the economic restructuring over the past two decades that has forced many firms to abandon lifetime employment), public junior high and high school faculty still enjoy lifetime employment and the communitarianism which it encourages. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) described American work organizations as marked by comparatively greater voluntary association, permeable boundaries, few incumbent obligations towards the group, and readily-dissolved bonds between individual and group when one no longer fulfills the other's needs. Not surprisingly, Alienated ALTs reported feeling unprepared for the far more demanding, exacting process of gaining collegial acceptance at their schools.

#### RESOLVING VALUE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE ALIENATION PROFILE

##### The Common Function of Conflicting Values

Although the values in each Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner dyad (e.g., universalism and particularism) appear diametrically opposed, they are,

as Hampden-Turner (2001) asserted, "mirror images of one another" (p. 52) employed to solve broader personal and societal dilemmas through different means. In the acculturation described by Alienated ALTs, these values and the behaviors that they engender shared an underlying purpose: to ensure security, which Schwartz (1994) defined as an etic value that promotes "harmony and stability of society, of relationships, of self" (p. 22). In America, security on the societal level is maintained by the broadly held belief in equality of opportunity actualized through universalistic treatment in human relations, and equal access to membership in institutions of power. Kim (1999) posited the centrality of "procedural equality" in the American mind, which asserts that all people, regardless of skin color or religious creed, should have equal rights and opportunities. Although individual and institutional discrimination create a gap between such ideals and reality, this ideology has a pervasive place in American thought, and likely influenced ALT expectations for universalistic treatment from colleagues, achievable organizational membership, and individualistic rights to claim such membership in an organization with relatively permeable boundaries.

Many Japanese teachers, on the other hand, maintained security by creating a buffer from potentially disrupting societal influences—i.e., ALTs with limited Japanese linguistic and cultural competences. McConnell (2000) explained:

One might expect that the introduction of an outsider into the tight-knit culture of the school would result in serious disruption, radically altering the chemistry of the community; but instead all the other elements, from the principal down to students, reconfigure themselves to minimize the effects of the outside agent. (p. 227)

Therefore, both societies and their organizations employ different means of ensuring their own continuity: America through an ideology of a color-blind meritocracy, and Japan through the creation of a buffer guest position for Americans which brings them to the periphery, yet comfortably removed from organizational inner circles and workings. Recognizing this common focus is the first step in resolving the aforementioned conflicts in values and concomitant expectations for the acculturation process.

### Ameliorating Conflicts in Values and Acculturation Attitudes

If such issues can be resolved successfully, then both sides will benefit: as Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) proclaimed, "Values working together make the organization more powerful. . . [as] unresolved conflicts tend to diminish individual and group energies" (p. 349). While the potential benefits of greater organizational penetration for ALTs are clear, such acculturation must occur without disrupting the smooth functioning of the group—or as McConnell (2000) explained, internationalizing "while at the same time protecting local meanings and institutions" (p. 272). Therefore, proposals for resolving conflicts in acculturation attitudes and their associated values follow the fundamental tenet of the Hampden-Turner/Trompenaars method—that corybantic values are resolved *through* each other (Hampden-Turner, 1998). Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) described such mutual accommodation, which they symbolized with double-helix imagery:

The more Alpha can see the values complementary to her own, which Omega espouses, the more she can move in that direction. The more Omega can see that Alpha's values give contrast and meaning to his own, the more willing he is to join those values. The two "waltz" around each other. (p. 340-341)

Through such mutual accommodation, the values of each side are actualized without denying those of the other.

When considering how to positively acculturate ALTs as faculty, both social and professional dimensions must be considered. In order to accomplish the former, it is recommended that Japanese accept as ingroup members Americans who can follow critical norms that ensure smooth group functioning in daily interactions between members, such as conflict-avoiding and face-preserving communication (Barnlund, 1989; Gercik, 1992; Goldman, 1994; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Tezuka, 1992), context-appropriate use of honorific or colloquial language (Lebra, 1976; Yum, 1988), and context-appropriate display of self-restraint in expressing needs (Bachnik, 1994a, 1994b; Doi, 1985; Lebra).

Concerning professional acculturation, it is recommended that ALTs be admitted to the group as more than temporary guests if they can perform jobs for which they are uniquely qualified as English native speakers that also enhance the collective's ability to educate students. Such work

includes teaching English classes, coordinating study abroad or sister city programs, serving on school committees to promote international understanding and effective English education, as well as helping Japanese colleagues in their daily administrative tasks.

ALTs capable of fulfilling these criteria should have the opportunity to enter an elite program of former JET Program participants who could serve as full-time school employees with the same permanent status and monetary benefits as their Japanese peers. Such a program would not only ensure job security and promote job satisfaction for ALTs, but for the Japanese, create a workforce of experienced native English language teachers—rather than the current crop of ALTs, who are mostly untrained as teachers (McConnell, 2000).

In sum, Japanese and ALTs in the Alienation profile mutually adapt so that the Japanese become *distinctively inclusive* in terms of organizational membership and ALTs become *inclusively distinctive*. In other words, the Japanese do not need to accept all ALTs regardless of their level of adaptation to organizational and Japanese culture; rather, they can expand group boundaries beyond native Japanese to embrace non-Japanese who possess the tools to acculturate deeply enough into an organization to make significant, positive, and long-term contributions. Such tools include adequate Japanese language ability and proficiency in following social norms that are keys to gaining membership status and ensuring the smooth functioning of Japanese collectives at junior high and high schools (which are discussed at length in Komisarof [2001] but beyond the scope of this paper).

Conversely, ALTs should not expect indiscriminately to become members—instead, they need to work towards first learning critical linguistic and cultural adaptation skills. In other words, they would not expect pure universalistic treatment from the outset, but rather earn rights as full-time workers by assimilating (or integrating) enough to become productive members of Japanese organizations/communities—an achievement-oriented process leading to circumscribed universalism. Japanese would suspend a particularistic, ascriptive system based on nationality, but only for those ALTs who have the skills to supplement the faculty collective's work effectiveness—hence ensuring the group's prolonged survival and well-being, which are the ultimate goals of

communitarianism. Such mutually-adaptive moves would not threaten the value orientations of either group, but rather affirm them through the reframing of the conditions which satisfy them—thus contributing to the appeasement of the conflicts experienced by Alienated ALTs.

#### STUDY LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the focus of this study was upon ALT-perceived acculturation attitudes among Japanese colleagues, future research also needs to assess Japanese acculturation attitudes as reported by the Japanese themselves. This would allow researchers to understand how closely Japanese and ALT perceptions about Japanese acculturation preferences align. If a disparity exists, then the perceptual miscues causing this need to be identified to reduce such misunderstandings. Moreover, the value orientations inferred by the author need to be assessed among both American and Japanese participants in future studies to ensure that such values correspond with acculturation attitudes in the manners hypothesized. Also, studies with larger populations of ALTs, as well as foreign workers from diverse fields and nationalities, are necessary to further assess conditions in the acculturation of non-Japanese in Japan.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has provided a snapshot of a small group of Americans in one professional field where sojourners are acculturating into Japanese organizations. The responses to the first two research questions (“How does a complementary alignment of perceived acculturation attitudes commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues?” and “How do divergent perceived acculturation attitudes commonly affect acculturative and relational outcomes between American ALTs and their Japanese colleagues?”) can be summarized as follows. ALTs who perceived complementary acculturation attitude alignments between themselves and their Japanese colleagues most commonly reported the relationship and acculturative outcomes described in the Intercultural Synergy profile, while those who perceived divergent perceived acculturation attitudes most commonly experienced the many negative relational and acculturative outcomes detailed in the Alienation profile.

The response to the third research question (i.e., “What value

conflicts are apparent when intercultural relations are perceived as problematic?") consisted of three value continuums (i.e., universalism vs. particularism, achievement vs. ascription, and individualism vs. collectivism) which demonstrated utility in clarifying the roots of many conflicts perceived among Alienated ALTs. Finally, recommendations were made in response to the fourth research question (i.e., "How can such value conflicts be resolved through modifications in individual acculturation attitudes, the behaviors reflecting them, and organizational policies?") to resolve these conflicts through adjusting Japanese and American acculturation attitudes, improving American linguistic and sociocultural skills, and also changing organizational policies that restrict or limit the long-term employment of qualified ALTs.

Despite the limited population in this study, it is clear that problematic acculturation and relational outcomes experienced by Alienated ALTs limited their work contributions to the detriment of all organizational members—both Americans and Japanese. Intercultural Synergy provides a more productive alternative—one that can hopefully be applied to improve intercultural communication not only among American ALTs, but also for other acculturating groups in Japan. By modifying acculturation expectations and their concomitant values, supported by organizational policies which promote complementary acculturation attitude alignments, both ALTs and their Japanese coworkers can create conditions in which Intercultural Synergy is increasingly commonplace and Alienation a relic of an unenlightened past.

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