Culture Shock: Reexamining the Concept and the

W-curve Model of the Adaptation Process through

Sojourner Experiences of International Students

To what extent, can the model of culture shock be

evenly applied to British/Japanese university students?

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Introduction

The term culture shock was coined by anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in the 1960s, and is now widely known as one of the most common reactions to an alien culture. The process of culture shock is commonly described as comprising of several different stages or phases. The W-curve model, proposed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), is one of the most widely known models of culture shock. The W shape represents the fluctuation of *sojourners*[1] emotions when adapting to a new culture, and then when re-adapting to their home culture. Despite the fact that it has been more than half a century since the term 'culture shock' and the W-curve model were first introduced, they seem to have been taken as authentic and valid up until now. For example, the term culture shock appears in a number of recent studies, such as those by Brown and Holloway (2008) and Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004). However, a number of criticisms can be brought against their authenticity and validity: (i) both the term and model are somewhat dated, (ii) there is no consensus regarding the definition of culture shock, and (iii) most studies in this field are conducted by western researchers with a small number of eastern researchers. This predominance of western researchers in the field may cause a cultural bias.

Based on these assumptions, in this study I intend to examine the possibility of whether the term culture shock and the W-curve model of culture shock can be revised. In particular my objectives are: (i) to test the existing definition of culture shock, (ii) to examine whether culture shock is preventable, (iii) to determine whether the W-curve

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[1] A *sojourn* means 'a temporary stay in a new place' (Ward et al., 2001:142).

model is still applicable today, and (iv) to assess whether the W-curve model is universally applicable in both the West and the East.

This dissertation employs three methodologies in order to carry out the research: (i) an extensive study of relevant literature, (ii) a questionnaire, (iii) an interview based on the questionnaire. Both the questionnaire and the interview are conducted on a number of British and Japanese university students who have experience living in another country. The samples were limited to university students, as many experience long stays abroad as part of study abroad programmes. Moreover, university students are able to provide an articulate representation of current zeitgeists. In addition, British and Japanese students were selected in order to represent both Western and Eastern cultures.

This dissertation first discusses what culture is. This is because having a clearer understanding of culture is crucial to this research and defining the meaning of culture at this point allows me to argue consistently throughout this dissertation. Following this is a review of literature regarding both the term culture shock and the W-curve model. This will involve both old and recent studies, as it is important to evaluate both classical and modern perspectives for the purpose of comparison. Finally, this dissertation will analyse the questionnaire and interviews.

Studying Culture

Before discussing the term culture shock and the processes involved, I will provide a

brief discussion regarding the concept of culture. This is crucial because the concept of culture shock cannot be understood without a clear understanding of what culture actually is. However, as Matsumoto and Juang (2012) state, even a book or a university course may not be enough to fully explore the breadth, scope, and enormity of culture. Therefore, it is difficult to define the meaning of culture within such a short section. Furthermore, despite the fact that there have been numerous definitions of culture proposed over the past centuries – according to Schneider (2003) there had been over 164 definitions by 2003 - there is no agreed upon definition. Therefore, my intention in this section is not to provide a thorough exploration of the concept of culture, but to instead develop an adequate understanding in order to discuss the issues related to culture shock. I will first analyse a number of scholars' proposed definitions and concepts, and then attempt to derive my own definition of culture.

The meaning of culture is different according to different people, because it covers a wide range of aspects in people's lives (Matsumoto and Juang, 2012). For example, Kluckhohn states that '*a culture* refers to the distinctive way of life of a group of people, their complete *design of living*' (1951:86). Vermeersch (1977:40) concludes that culture is 'created by one or more individuals and then transmitted to the others', therefore, 'everything that is man-made' can be called culture. Bernardi's definition of culture is 'the way in which man defines his relationships to the universe' (1977:76). Hofstede defines it as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (2001:9). Another definition of culture is 'a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet the basic needs of survival, pursue

happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life' (Matsumoto and Juang, 2012).

In other words, what the term 'culture' refers to varies and changes according to the context.

For instance, in a social context, 'culture' refers to the conventions, preferences, and rules of engagement within a group. In contrast, culture can also refer to aesthetic entities such as art and entertainment. Therefore, when attempting to discuss the concept of culture it is important to be aware of the depth, breadth, and dynamics of the term.

The ways in which these scholars define culture are different. However, there are some similarities amongst their definitions as well. One aspect that all the definitions have in common is that culture is shared by a group. It also seems to be agreed that 'a group' can be any type of group; for instance, 'an organization, a profession, an age group, an entire gender, or a family' (Hofstede, 2001:10), and in addition a nationality, a language group, ethnicity, or a group of people who have different sexual relationships with others (Matsumoto and Juang, 2012). Moreover, the factors presented by some of the scholars which are influential on the creation of culture are relatively similar. According to their opinions, those factors are: (i) *environment*, which refers to climate, the place people live, and population density, (ii) *resources*, which refer to food, water, and money, (iii) and *people*, which refer to community, ways of communication, and needs (Bernardi, 1977; Hofstede, 2001; and Matsumoto and Juang, 2012). It seems to be safe to say that every single aspect forming people's lives influences the creation of culture. By summing up the similarities found in the given definitions, it can be stated that a culture is:

  i) A characteristic which is shared by the members of a group in various categories, from a family to a nationality; and

ii) Influenced by a wide range of aspects which form people's lives, such as climate, food, and communication.

With the above taken into consideration, in this dissertation I intend to define culture as *a shared norm of living customs and ways of communication between the members of a group*. By *living customs* and *ways of communication*, I mean to include all the aspects discussed above. However, the word *group* will be replaced with *country* when the research on British/Japanese university students' sojourner experience is discussed. This is for the purpose of comparing the research data. Some might argue that there is a danger of excluding subcultures within the nations by treating culture at the national level. It is true that national subcultures can be an important factor in the concept of culture shock. Nevertheless, nationality would be the most appropriate group category for this research considering the scale of the dissertation. Moreover, some national subcultures in a country which seem to be so different to each other still have similarities across national boundaries (Mincov and Hofstede, 2012). Thus, in the section which deals with British/Japanese university students' sojourner experiences, 'culture' will be treated as equivalent to 'country'. However, it is also noted that the 'culture=country' perception comprises a danger of excluding individuals' uniqueness.

As stated earlier, the intention of this section is to seek an adequate definition of culture for this particular research by analysing some proposed definitions. Although the derived definition of *a shared norm of living customs and ways of communication between the members of a group* might be simplistic, it is adequate for this research. This is because it covers the underlying consensus that culture is: (i) something shared in a group, (ii) a

group can be constituted in numerous contexts (such as ethnic, linguistic and gender), and (iii) is influenced by almost all the aspects which form people's lives. This definition will form the basis of this dissertation, particularly in the following section, which analyses the concept and processes involved in culture shock through an extensive study of literature.

Literature review

Kalvero Oberg's concept of culture shock

The term culture shock coined by Oberg (1960) is one of the most commonly used words to describe the reaction when an individual encounters a new culture. Oberg (1960) defines culture shock as an 'occupational disease' and he claims that it is caused by anxiety due to the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social practices. It occurs when an individual encounters a new culture, and it often results in a feeling of frustration or hassle. By losing all familiar social practices, an individual feels uncomfortable in the environment. The first reaction to this discomfort is the rejection of the host culture: the sojourner's attitude becomes negative towards the host culture and its people. The second is the regression to their home culture: everything about the home culture suddenly looks glorious and only the positive things are remembered. In addition to these reactions, Oberg (1960) states the following 'symptoms' which can be observed when a sojourner is experiencing culture shock:

excessive washing of the hands; excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and

bedding; fear of physical contact with attendants or servants; the absent-minded, far-away

stare; a feeling of helplessness and a desire for dependence on long-term residents of one's

own nationality; fits of anger over delays and other minor frustrations; delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country; excessive fear of being cheated, robbed, or injured; great concern over minor pains and irruptions of the skin; and finally, that terrible longing to be back home…to talk to people who really make sense' (Oberg, 1960:142).

Oberg (1960) comments that not everyone experiences these symptoms, as the degree of culture shock and its effect differ greatly depending on the individual.

According to Oberg (1960), a sojourner experiences culture shock in four stages: (i) the honeymoon stage, (ii) the hostile and frustration stage, (iii) the recovery stage, and (iv) the adjustment stage. In the first few weeks, a sojourner is 'fascinated by the new' and excited about everything they see and experience in the new culture (ibid., 143). However, this dreamlike period normally ends once the sojourner realises that they are not a visitor and have to seriously deal with the culture and the differences as real conditions of their life. This second stage is what Oberg (1960) calls culture shock. The third stage begins when the sojourner successfully acquires an adequate level of language ability to communicate with the people of that culture. Through the acquisition of language, the sojourner '[gets] to know the people' in the host culture, allowing them to overcome culture shock (ibid., 145). Although the sojourner is now on the way to recovery at this stage, some difficulties still remain. These are overcome by accepting the difficulties as 'just another way of living', rather than rejecting or denying it. In this final stage, one does not only accept the culture, but also enjoy it. In addition to these four stages, Oberg (1960) suggests the possibility of having the same process when the sojourner goes back to the home culture after having successfully adapted to the new culture. Therefore, it can be argued that culture shock is an unavoidable negative

consequence of the adaptation process to a new culture, which affects everybody.

Although the term culture shock and its definition by Oberg (1960) have been remarkably popular, it seems that they have not always been the most supported term and definition of the concept. Church (1982) indicates that some writers preferred to use alternatives to the term when referring to culture shock: for example 'culture fatigue' (Guthrie, 1975), 'language shock' (Smalley, 1963, cited in Church, 1982), and 'role shock' (Higbee, 1969, cited in Church, 1982). Furthermore, in Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004:168) it is noted that the term 'has been repeatedly renamed and redefined', such as 'cultural adjustment stress' (Anderson 1994). Despite the number of attempts at re-examination, the term has never seemed to be replaced by any other new term or concept. Therefore, it can be argued that there exists an unspoken consensus amongst scholars that the term 'culture shock' and its definition are valid, despite there being no official agreement upon them. Thus, in this research, I will employ Oberg's definition, rather than deriving a new definition for myself.

Models of the adaptation process

Similar to Oberg's adaptation process model (1960), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) propose the W-curve adaptation model, which is an extension of the U-curve, introduced by Lysgaard in 1955. The U-curve suggests the initial euphoria, followed by a period of depression and frustration, and finally, the adaptation to a new culture. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) add the re-adaptation process to this U-curve, which occurs when a sojourner goes back to their home culture. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963:39) argue that it is typical for a sojourner to find 'himself out of phase with his

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home culture on his return'. This is the result of the sojourner *re-socialising* through increased association with their host culture over their home culture. The sojourner eventually re-adjusts back to their home culture; however, the impact of adapting to the host culture will have often resulted in a change of their attitudes toward their home culture. Gullahorn and Gullahorn indicate that readjustment to a home culture may become more difficult for those belonging to minority groups in their home culture, especially if the experience was the first time in their life, and it was rather positive (1963).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn's W-curve (1963) is not the only model which is similar to Oberg's adaptation process model (1960). For instance, Brown's *acculturation model* (1980) has four stages: (i) excitement and euphoria, (ii) culture shock accompanied by feelings of 'estrangement, hostility, indecision, frustration, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, even Physical illness', (iii) 'gradual', 'tentative', and 'vacillating' recovery, and (iv) full recovery. Furthermore, the other models proposed by writers such as Adler (1975), Torbiorn (1994), and Mohamed (1997) also appear to be similar to Oberg's model. This shows that four-staged/curved models have been a popular means for describing the adaptation process since its identification. This popularity is not limited only to the academic field; it is also popular in non-academic fields as well. As an example, in *Survival Kit for Overseas Living: for Americans Planning to Live and Work Abroad*, Khols (1984) gives advice on how to deal with the difficulties in a new culture by stating symptoms and the four stages of culture shock.

Nonetheless, the four-staged/curved models of the adaptation process have not always

been supported. Church (1982) analyses the U-curve model through an extensive examination of literature, and concludes that the support for the model 'must be considered weak' (ibid., 542). He claims that it is 'inconclusive' and 'overgeneralized', and the occurrence of depression is not universal (ibid., 542). Additionally, Church (1982) argues that not all students' sojourn experience begins with feelings of excitement or optimism. Brown and Holloway (2008) conducted an ethnographic study using interviews on the adjustment process of international postgraduate students at an English university. Their study acknowledges that the first stage in models of culture shock is typically 'a time of excitement and a positive frame of mind' (Brown and Holloway, 2008:34). However, they argue that it is more understandable if the process begins with the stress being greatest upon arrival, and then gradually decreasing as the sojourner proceeds to acclimate to the culture. In fact, in the interview transcripts, the most frequently found words which describe the feelings of sojourners in the first few days after their arrival in the UK were: 'scared, frightened, unsure, nervous, anxious, stressed, and uncertain' (Brown and Holloway, 2008: 37). Moreover, Pritchard (2010) examines the re-adjustment of Taiwanese and Sri Lankan postgraduate students after studying in the West. In the study, it is claimed that the results show no evidence of difficulties in re-adapting to the home culture that are suggested in the literature of Oberg (1960) and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963).

Therefore, in summary the weakness of four-staged/curved models of the adaptation process is that they overgeneralise. This is demonstrated by their shared assumption that a sojourner's initial experience of entering into a new foreign culture will always be a positive one. Rather, there are grounds to assert that the stages suggested are not

necessarily undergone by all individuals, and thus are not universal.

Research method

The aim of the study

The study was conducted (i) to examine the preventability of culture shock, and (ii) to revise the W-curve model of the adaptation process. Since it is defined as a 'disease', culture shock should in theory be preventable as are other diseases. However, as already stated, Oberg (1960) implies that it cannot be completely avoided. Nonetheless, there exists doubt as to whether culture shock remains unpreventable in the present day, due to the rapid change of the last fifty years which has seen an increase in the accessibility of information. It is my contention that the increase in the accessibility of information has enabled sojourners to familiarise themselves with the host culture in advance. As a result, all sojourners may no longer necessarily experience 'shock' when they actually enter into the host culture. Based on this assumption, this research will examine whether culture shock is preventable by preparation.

The W-curve has two points which require revision: (i) the validity of the model in the present day, (ii) the applicability of the model in the East as well as the West. The first point is raised because the model is as old as the term culture shock. It is doubted whether a sojourner now will still undergo the same process when adapting to a new culture. Based upon this assumption, this research hypothesises that the W-curve model may no longer be valid. The second point was raised in respect to the disparities

between Western studies and Eastern studies on culture shock and the cultural adjustment process. All the credited researchers in this field are western researchers, for example Oberg (1960), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), Brown and Holloway (2008), and Adler (1975). Although the focuses in the studies generally cover both Western and Eastern cultures, the studies are done based on western theories developed from a western point of view. There are a few studies which have been performed by Eastern researchers; however these were also based on western studies (such as Kojima and Fukada, 2011, and Kanno, 2000). Thus, this research suggests a hypothesis that there might exist a cultural bias towards Western cultures in the W-curve model.

Participants

The study consists of 11 British and 11 Japanese university students as respondents. All the participants' names are completely anonymised for both the questionnaire and the interview, which was informed to the participants at the time when the study was conducted. In order to carry out the study, the following criteria were set for the selection of the respondents:

  i) The participants must be undergraduate students or recent graduates who have undergone a study abroad during the period they are/were at university;

  ii) The participants must be either British or Japanese;

  iii) The host country of the sojourn experience must be either Japan or the UK respectively;

  iv) The duration of the sojourn experience must be approximately one year; and

  v) The sojourn experience must have been completed within the last three years or less.

In addition to these criteria, a study setting was decided for reasons of convenience. The study was conducted at the University of Leeds, where I am currently sitting a Master's course, and the participants are also either students of the University of Leeds, or students who completed their study abroad programme at the University of Leeds. This setting was chosen due time constraints as it allowed information to be gathered quickly, and because it limited the number of variables which affect evaluation

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In addition, university students were chosen because they are able to provide an articulate representation of current zeitgeists in both British and Japanese society. It is also common for university students to have their first sojourn experience through study abroad programmes whilst at university. It is limited to two countries for the purpose of simplifying the research, whilst allowing for adequate representation of both Western and Eastern cultures by British students and Japanese students respectively. For the same reason, the host countries are limited to Japan for British students and the UK for Japanese students. The duration of the sojourn experience was set to be around one year, because it commonly takes around one year to go through all the stages in the adjustment process. The final criterion is set to increase the credibility of the information given in the questionnaire. It was assumed that the memory of the previous three years must be relatively precise enough for the research. In other words, it was to avoid imprecise and unclear recollection to influence the responses of participants.

Methodology

Two methodologies were employed for the study: the questionnaire and the interview. First the questionnaire was conducted via the social network service facebook. Firstly,

an event page under the heading 'Questionnaire for my dissertation' was created on facebook, which included a brief description of the research's subject matter. The invitations to this 'event' were then sent to potential participants and only those who responded to the invitations were given more detailed description. Thus, the participation to the questionnaire was entirely voluntary. The questionnaire, along with an information sheet describing the research in detail, and a participant consent form asking participants to agree to the information treatment policy was then sent to volunteers. The actual questions, the information sheet and the participant consent form used in the research can be found in the appendix. Except the first contact through the 'event' page, the entire correspondence was made completely private between the researcher and each participant via either facebook message or email. Although all the documents are in English, Japanese participants were allowed to answer in Japanese because it allows them to fully and more precisely express their thought. Therefore, the responses which are originally in Japanese are translated by the writer when quoted.

The participants for the interview were selected from the respondents to the questionnaire. The researcher selected one person from each group, based on those who had the most detailed and interesting responses. The interview was conducted through the online call service Skype. A few core questions were prepared, however due to the conversational nature of the interview the flow of the conversation was prioritise in order to elicit a natural response from the interviewee. The researcher maintained the minimum possible level of participation in the conversation to let the interviewees speak freely, and to avoid leading questions that might influence their responses.

Finally, all the correspondence was made through the internet, via facebook, email, and Skype.   This was due to practical reasons: (i) it would have been difficult to ask British students to complete the questionnaire and participate in an interview directly, as some were undergoing their final exams, and not all were present in Leeds as the time the study was conducted; (ii) all Japanese students who participated in the study were residing in Japan when the study was conducted, without the possibility of the researcher travelling to Japan to conduct the study directly.

Presentation of the findings

Questionnaire

At the beginning of the questionnaire, few questions are asked to find the basic information regarding the respondents' circumstances at the time of their sojourns: age, the length of the stay, and previous sojourn experience. British students were 19 to 22 years, and Japanese students were 20 to 23 years when they studied abroad, which means all respondents had spent at least one year at university before the sojourns. The length of the sojourn is between 10 months to 12 months for both groups. It was reported that both groups had prior input about their host cultures to some extent, as most students were provided support from their universities for the preparation. It is important to note that some quotes of Japanese respondents are originally in Japanese, thus translated by the researcher when presented. The translated quotes are indicated with [my translation] at the end of each quote.

Questionnaire: The preventability of culture shock

Four questions (questions 4-7) were asked to assess the preventability of culture shock. It was reported that students in both groups had some prior knowledge about their host cultures before going to Japan/the UK. Most students claimed that the knowledge they had was as basic as 'negative reputation about British food' [my translation], 'British English is different from American English' [my translation] (Japanese respondents), and 'Sushi, Samurai, Kabuki and Noodles' (a British respondent). In addition to these, both British and Japanese respondents reported that they had studied Japanese/English intensively. British respondents suggested that they had had classes related to Japanese history, politics and religions at the University in preparation. Most Japanese respondents reported that they were aware of the differences in educational system in Japan and the UK. The most reported reason for studying Japanese/English was to be able to communicate with people in the host countries. The second most reported reason was that they needed to pass language tests to get a place in a university in the host countries. While all British respondents claimed that they did a preparation or research about Japan and Japanese culture, some Japanese respondents confessed that they did not do any preparation or research at all. Those who did no preparation commented as follow:

'I thought it would be a waste of time because it does not always help' [my translation];

'I was optimistic to think that everything will be sorted once I go there, but I regretted that I did not study British English' [my translation]; and

'I did not think the difference in language and living customs would be a problem for me' [my translation].

The respondent who made the last comment claimed that she had a previous sojourn experience in Canada, thus she had no major concern for this time.

When asked what difficulties they had in adapting to Japanese/British living customs, about a half of the respondents in both groups reported that they had no difficulty at all. One Japanese student expressed his positive attitude when encountering the differences that 'I rather enjoyed finding differences and found no difficulties in adapting' [my translation]. There was an interesting difference in the reported difficulties between British students and Japanese students. For British students, mainly reported difficulties are related to the way Japanese people interact with them and/or each other. For example, one British student claimed that 'the hardest custom to adapt to would have been the loss of independence from living with a home-stay family'. He pointed out that it was due to the Japanese culture of 'highlighted importance of the group over the individual'. Another respondent claimed that 'getting used to Japanese 本音と建て前 [*Honne to Tatemae*][2] took a while'. Some reported that they had difficulty in adjusting to Japanese custom that places significant emphasis on hierarchy such as 'bowing lower to those superior to you'.

On the contrary, Japanese students seemed to find practical aspects more difficult to

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[2] The definition of *Honne to Tatemae* in Wikipedia (2012) is 'Japanese words that describing the contrast between a person's true feelings and desires (*honne* (本音)) and the behavior and opinions one displays in public (*tatemae* (建前), literally "façade").

Honne may be contrary to what is expected by society or what is required according to one's position and circumstances, and they are often kept hidden, except with one's closest friends. *Tatemae* is what is expected by society and required according to one's position and circumstances, and these may or may not match one's *honne*.'

adapt. Majority reported that system for public transport is so different from the one in Japan that it took a while to understand. Some mentioned that getting used to the short opening hours of shops in the UK was difficult. Another aspect indicated is the difference in the use of credit card and cash. One student admitted that at first she could not understand why people tend to either refuse or be reluctant to accept 50 or 100 pound bank notes.

Most respondents in both groups denied the benefit of having prior input about living customs of the host culture. Some reported reasons are:

'Knowing the customs and living the customs are completely different and adapting can only be done through experiencing them I think' (a British respondent); and

'It is not possible to adapt to the customs of foreign cultures without direct exposure to them in a real world environment' (a British respondent).

However, it is commented that having prior knowledge can be beneficial in some cases. For instance, a British student acknowledged that 'Japanese culture places far more emphasis on politeness and etiquette than English culture' and knowing this would reduce the risk of causing offence.

Questionnaire: The applicability of the W-curve model

The questions regarding the applicability of the W-curve model were asked in the second half of the questionnaire (questions 8-14). First question in this part asks respondents their initial feeling in their sojourns. Most respondents in both groups report 'excitement' as it is suggested in the W-curve. However, more than half of Japanese students, and a few British students reported that they had equal amount of anxiety as

well. One Japanese student confessed that she was anxious about everything in her new life in the UK and had no excitement at all. The reasons for their anxiety seem to vary, such as 'I was nervous because I had never got out from Japan before' [my translation] (a Japanese student), 'I was worried if all the administrative work were done successfully, and nervous to see my new flat mates' [my translation] (a Japanese student). However, the most claimed reason was regarding their language ability. Majority of those reported anxiety for their initial state claimed that they were not confident in their language ability, despite the amount of learning they did before the sojourn.

The next two questions ask whether they ever felt rather depressed during their sojourn and the causes for the depression, and most students in both groups acknowledged a period of depression. It was reported that most of them experienced the depression period approximately 2-3 months after the arrival. Some British students reported that they felt rather depressed towards the end as well. Japanese students claimed that the main reasons for the depression were lack of ability in English, and the amount of assignment and assessment, while the interaction with Japanese people was the most reported reason for British respondents, and lack of Japanese ability seemed to have less effect. One British respondent expressed his discomfort caused by the way Japanese people interact/treat foreign people:

'I started to get a little irritated and depressed at the emphasis on groups and hierarchy in Japanese society and how it often felt like I was being left out of activities because I was from a foreign country. People in clubs would often treat me differently from other members and I found that most people, even friends, would only associate with me at their clubs but not

outside them.'

This person added that he could not accept the hierarchical system in Japan:

'I also disliked the extent to which it is necessary to be especially polite to people who are just one year older and to segregate different years from socialising together at university rather than just treating everybody equally'.

Another British student expressed discomfort regarding Japanese people's way of interaction with each other:

'The way Japanese groups tend to "tackle" problems (they don't), was irritating. This happened when I proposed some alterations to how the futsal club was run for example. The way Japanese people interact with each other and often with us as well, was sometimes confusing. So what puzzled me mainly was about human interaction group dynamics'.

Although many of the respondents confessed that they had depression/irritation period at some point in their sojourns, there were a few students in both groups showed no evidence of having depression/irritation period at all. Despite the number of reports which acknowledge the period of depression, most of them reported that they were successfully recovered, and got use to the living customs of the culture and felt comfortable living in their host culture by the end of the sojourn.

In the last few questions how the respondents felt when they went back home is asked. Most of Japanese students expressed positive feelings, although many of them reported sadness towards leaving the UK and friends in the UK. On the other hand, most British students expressed negative feelings such as sadness, and disappointment. It was reported that most British respondents had difficulty in dealing with British people's attitudes after coming back from Japan due to the difference in the

standard of politeness. Some sample comments are:

'I did not appreciate how casually shop attendance addressed me';

'I was amazed at people's rudeness and lack of manners. I also found people to be too forward and open';

'It was difficult when dealing with confrontational people, as I had barely experienced that for the whole time I was in Japan'; and

'People in shops were really rude'.

Interview

The interviews were conducted to gather more detailed information regarding depression stage (culture shock), which was not obtained through the questionnaire. The main focuses of the interviews were: (i) the causes of depression, and (ii) the way they recovered from the depression. The interviewees were chosen from the respondents of the questionnaire, and their names are completely anonymised. In order to make the discussion less confusing and easier, fictitious names were given to the interviewees: Hanako for the Japanese interviewee; and Jack for the British interviewee. The interview with the Japanese respondent was conducted in Japanese, in order for the interviewee to more precisely convey her thought. Therefore, all the extracts from the interview are translated by the researcher, and the translated extracts are in italics to indicate that it is translated texts.

Interview: Hanako, Japanese

Hanako confessed that she had a depression period from the beginning to the middle of her sojourn in the UK. She explained that the main reason for the depression was the

high expectations she had before going to the UK. She was hoping to join student union societies and make a lot of friends. However, the reality she faced in the UK was not as great as she expected. In particular, students' way of socialising in the UK made it difficult for her to make friends and it became her major concern. She explained the reasons for the difficulty as follow:

'*I found it difficult to find people who share the same taste. Everyone goes clubbing and gets drunk, and I didn't like it. Not only English students, but other international students as well. I didn't join any student union society, because every society goes night clubs and pubs as their socials.*'

She added that she tried to avoid interacting with Japanese people, because otherwise she would end up with being stuck with them all the time. Moreover, she said that she was not getting on very well with her flatmates. She shared a flat with two Chinese students and two Spanish students. Those who speak the same language spoke in their own languages, thus she did not have much opportunity to interact with them. Having no friends, avoiding Japanese people, and not getting along well with flatmates made Hanako feel very isolated and it caused the depression. However, she began to recover from the depression period at approximately 5 months of her sojourn.

'*I met some international students, Asian students, at Global Café. They understood my feelings because we were in the same circumstances. I was determined to make friends with native speakers to improve my English, but realised that it didn't have to be native speakers. We had the same taste and became good friends, and I started to enjoy my life in the UK.*'

She said that she realised how she was stressed by her own expectations, and learned that she needed to accept the reality as it helps to reduce the stress.

Interview: Jack, British

Jack did not acknowledge any difficulties in adapting to Japanese culture, therefore he did not experience a depressed or irritated period, but he added 'It doesn't necessarily mean I enjoyed adapting to it.' Thus I asked him what he did not particularly enjoy to adapt. Jack gave me an example: 'Japanese people refusing to use Japanese when asked questions in Japanese'. It happened when he was at a train station. He asked an attendant 'where are the coin lockers' in Japanese and the attendant replied in 'broken English' instead of Japanese, which confused him even more as he 'couldn't really figure out what they're saying'. He was not able to obtain the answer for his question in the end. Jack claimed that he experienced similar incidents many times and even when Jack asked them to speak in Japanese, they did not speak in Japanese.

> 'It's annoying, because, in my opinion, it's their duty to treat me as if I were another Japanese customer. If they can't answer me correctly, or accurately, or precisely in English, they're not doing their job. They're not helping me.'

He said that he was told by his friends that Japanese people are 'trying to be helpful' by responding in English, but it was clearly not helpful at all for him. In fact, he commented that it was 'source of unnecessary stresses', 'rude', and 'the most frustrating thing'. As the response to those incidents, Jack became 'a not big fan of asking people for help in Japan'. He decided to solve problems by himself and avoid interacting with Japanese people. It seems that the issue for him was the way Japanese people deal with foreign people. Additionally, he confessed that he 'constantly moaned whenever possible' about what he did not 'enjoy' adapting. Jack summed up his experience in adapting to Japanese culture: 'I can deal with the stress but I need to be moaning about it at some point,

it's not a difficulty'.

<u>Discussion</u>

The preventability of culture shock

Many respondents commented the direct exposure to the culture is crucial in adapting to a new culture. Therefore, it can be said that culture shock cannot be completely prevented by preparation. Nevertheless, there was evidence that preparation or having background knowledge is beneficial in reducing the impact of culture shock to some extent. For instance, a British respondent, who learned Japanese social etiquette related to politeness and hierarchy before going to Japan, reported that it 'came in handy' when interacting with elder people as he knew how he was supposed to behave, although it still took while for him to become used to it. This is evident from the fact that a number of writers give suggestions or tips, for instance, researching the host culture in advance to their sojourn, for a quicker and smoother adjustment to a new culture (Cushner and Brislin, 1996; Lewis and Jungman, 1986; Kohls, 1984). Moreover, having language ability which is sufficient to communicate with people in the host country makes the adaptation easier. The findings demonstrated that the ones who were less confident or competent in Japanese/English experienced greater stress during their sojourns. However, it is important to note that preparation or having background knowledge can cause a danger of essentialism, while it can be beneficial in adapting to new culture. This is because the information obtained through textbooks, books, or the internet is not necessarily authentic, and often stereotypical. Having stereotypical information about a culture may cause a

greater difficulty in adaptation than having no background knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that culture shock is not preventable, but the effect of it can be lessened by preparation. However, the danger of having stereotypes needs to be taken into account when preparing.

The applicability of the W-curve model

All the stages of the W-curve model were acknowledged in the responses of both the questionnaire and the interviews. However, each stage has at least a few responses which did not show any evidence of experiencing the stages at all, and surprisingly, there were only 5 out of 22 respondents who clearly experienced all the stages. It can be said that the W-curve model is overgeneralised as it was not applied to most of the respondents. For example, the W-curve model suggests that the typical reaction for the beginning of a sojourn is excitement. This was proved to be authentic in the research as 20 out of 22 respondents reported that they were rather excited upon arrival in the host countries. However, negative feelings such as anxiety and nervousness were witnessed as frequent as positive feelings such as excitement and satisfaction. In other words, feeling of anxiety is also typical for the first stage of a sojourn. As already noted, Brown and Holloway (2008) argue that stress and anxiety as the initial feeling is more understandable than optimistic feeling. Therefore, the W-curve model's indication that the feeling of excitement is the only typical reaction to a new sojourn experience is overgeneralisation.

In the research, there is another aspect which possibly affected the applicability of the model. The respondents, either consciously or unconsciously, denied or ignored the fact that they experienced difficulties in adjustment to both the host cultures and the home

cultures. It was revealed by two questions: Question 6) 'did you have any difficulties in adapting yourself to British/Japanese living customs?' and Question 9) 'did you ever feel rather depressed/irritated/emotional during your stay in Japan/the UK?' They seem different, but actually ask the same question. Question 9 is followed by a question 'what do you think made you feel depressed/irritated/emotional?' The answers for this question are the aspects which the respondents had difficulties in adapting, and feeling depressed/irritated/emotional is a symptom of culture shock, which means having difficulties in adaptation. However, the outcome was different. For Question 6, about half of the respondents denied having difficulties, whereas only 3 out of 22 respondents answered *no* to Question 9. It was evidenced in the interview with Jack as well. Jack did not acknowledge difficulties in adapting to Japanese culture, but the incident he told me demonstrates that he had difficulties in adapting to Japanese people's way of interacting. Moreover, his reaction to the incident, which was avoidance of interaction with Japanese people and constant moaning, are also the clear evidence of 'the rejection to host culture', a typical first reaction to culture shock.

Interestingly, the denied aspects were different for British students and Japanese students. In the findings, there was a tendency that British students denying the difficulties in adapting to the host culture and acknowledge the difficulties in re-adaptation, and Japanese students' response was in the other way round. This may illustrate how much the respondents were determined or willing to adapt to the host cultures. Another interesting point is that the difficulties many British students had in re-adjustment to UK culture was exactly the same difficulties they had had when adapting to Japanese culture: the standard of politeness. It was reported that Japanese

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culture of placing a significant emphasis on politeness was hard to get used to. Similarly, British students claimed that British people, especially shop attendants, are surprisingly rude and they seemed to be disappointed with the low standard of Britain's social etiquette. These may demonstrate that British students were better adapted to Japanese culture than Japanese students did because Japanese students seemed to have struggled more in adapting to UK culture and less struggled in re-adapting to Japanese culture.

Except the difference in the applicability of the depression and frustration stage and the re-adaptation stage, there was no major difference acknowledged in the application of the W-curve model between British and Japanese respondents. This probably indicates that the W-curve model is equally applicable to both the West and the East. Alternatively, the W-curve is equally inapplicable both in the West and the East. As already noted, the model was fully applied to only 5 out of 22 respondents. The occurrence of depression and frustration in the second stage, and struggle in re-adaptation stage were not necessarily acknowledged by all the respondents. It appeared that the outcome of the study confirmed what Church (1982), Brown and Holloway (2008), and Pitchard (2010) argue in their studies: the W-curve model is 'inconclusive', 'overgeneralized', and 'not universal'. Therefore, I would conclude that the W-curve model may be applicable to a certain number of sojourners, but not universally applicable in the present day. However, the applicability of the model in the West and the East, in terms of the equality, is universal as West-East difference does not affect the applicability.

Conclusion

Summary of the study

This study has discussed culture shock introduced by Oberg (1960) and the W-curve model of the adaptation process proposed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). In particular: (i) the definition of culture shock, (ii) the preventability of culture shock, (iii) the applicability of the W-curve in the current world, and (iv) the effect of the West-East difference in the applicability of the W-curve model are discussed. Oberg's definition of culture shock (1960) was re-confirmed to be still valid by a revision of a number of other proposed terms and definitions. It was found that the consequence of culture shock can be mitigated by preparation, although culture shock cannot be completely prevented. However, a sojourner needs to be sensible that the information which is obtained in preparation can be stereotypical. The W-curve model appeared to be not universally applicable because not all the stages were necessarily undergone by all the respondents. Finally, it was found that the West-East difference has no effect on the applicability of the model as the W-curve model was evenly inapplicable to most of both British and Japanese respondents. However, this result might have been influenced by the fact that both sample countries are developed countries. When comparing the West and the East, the East generally represents less developed countries. Nonetheless, Japan is one of the developed countries, and therefore, it is largely westernised. Although there are differences in terms of culture, there might exist a number of similarities in living customs as well. This possibly affected the reaction of the respondents towards cultural differences. Further research is needed to confirm this possibility.

Limitation acknowledgement and future suggestions

As mentioned above, the limitation in the sample countries resulted in insufficient conclusion. The UK and Japan as representatives of the West and the East was recognised as problematic at the beginning of the study, but it needed to be limited in order to avoid overflow of the information caused by the dynamics of samples. A few interesting points which can be discussed in the study were recognised as the study was proceeding. However, they were unable to be included due to the limitation. Those excluded points are noted below.

Culture shock is defined as 'occupational disease' which occurs when an individual is geographically relocated. The study, therefore, focused on sojourn experiences, particularly students' long term stay in foreign countries. It seems normal to assume that geographical move is crucial and is the only opportunity to be fully exposed in an alien culture, especially in half a century ago. Nonetheless, in the present day, there are more opportunities where an individual possibly encounters alien cultures. SNS (Social Networking Services) connects people from all over the world, thus it can be a place where people, who share different culture, possibly interact with each other. This implies the possibility of experiencing culture shock via SNS, without physically moving to a new environment. Based on this assumption, it would be interesting to research the impact of SNS on the concept and the practice of culture shock.

In the interview, it was found that the perception of culture shock is different in English and Japanese. Jack, English speaker, perceived culture shock as nearly equal to

homesickness, whereas Hanako, Japanese speaker, perceived it as the shock caused by cultural differences. This may be due to differences in languages, and the further research would be beneficial to improve the present study.

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<u>Appendix</u>

Questionnaire for British participants

<div align="center">Questionnaire</div>

This questionnaire is for English undergraduate students who have stayed in Japan for educational purposes with the lengths of approximately one year.
Are you an English undergraduate student and have stayed in Japan for approximately one year?   YES / NO

1. When and how long you stayed in Japan? [month/year ~ month/year]

2. How old were you when you went to Japan? [yrs]

3. Was it the first time you studied abroad? If not, when and where did you go before

going to Japan?   YES / NO

   Where [   ] When [   ]

4. What did you know about Japan before going?

   [   ]

5. Did you do any preparation, in terms of language, background knowledge, culture

and living customs etc., about Japan before going to Japan? If so, what did you prepare

in particular and why? If not, why did you not so?   YES / NO

   Things you prepared [   ]

   Reasons you prepared [   ]

   Reasons you DIDN'T prepare [   ]

6. Did you have any difficulties in adapting yourself to Japanese living customs? If so,

please give examples with detail. YES / NO

   [   ]

7. Do you think having better background knowledge would have helped you adapt to Japanese living customs? YES / NO Please give the reasons you think so.

[   ]

8. How would you describe your state when you first arrived in Japan? For example, was it excitement or anxiety?

[   ]

9. Did you ever feel rather depressed/irritated/emotional during your stay in Japan? If so, when was it roughly? YES/NO

When [e.g very beginning of the stay   ]

10. If you said YES in Q9, what do you think made you feel depressed/irritated/emotional?

[   ]

11. Do you think you eventually got used to Japanese living customs by the end of your stay in Japan? If not, what and why did you not get used to? YES/NO

What [   ]

Why [   ]

12. Did you eventually feel comfortable living in Japan by the end of your stay in Japan? YES/NO If not, why?

Why [   ]

13. How did you feel when you came back to the UK?

[   ]

14. Did you find any difficulties when you adapted back to UK living customs? YES/NO If so, what are they?

[   ]

Questionnaire for Japanese participants

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is for Japanese undergraduate students who have stayed in the UK for educational purposes with the lengths of approximately one year.

Are you a Japanese undergraduate student and have stayed in the UK for approximately one year?   YES / NO

1. When and how long you stayed in the UK? [month/year ~ month/year]

2. How old were you when you went to the UK? [yrs]

3. Was it the first time you studied abroad? If not, when and where did you go before going to the UK?   YES / NO

   Where [   ] When [   ]

4. What did you know about the UK before going?

   [   ]

5. Did you do any preparation, in terms of language, background knowledge, culture and living customs etc., about the UK before going to the UK? If so, what did you prepare in particular and why? If not, why did you not so?   YES / NO

   Things you prepared [   ]

   Reasons you prepared [   ]

   Reasons you DIDN'T prepare [   ]

6. Did you have any difficulties in adapting yourself to British living customs? If so, please give examples with detail. YES / NO

   [   ]

7. Do you think having better background knowledge would have helped you adapt to

British living customs? YES / NO Please give the reasons you think so.

[   ]

8. How would you describe your state when you first arrived in the UK? For example, was it excitement or anxiety?

[   ]

9. Did you ever feel rather depressed/irritated/emotional during your stay in the UK? If so, when was it roughly? YES/NO

When [e.g very beginning of the stay   ]

10. If you said YES in Q9, what do you think made you feel depressed/irritated/emotional?

[   ]

11. Do you think you eventually got used to British living customs by the end of your stay in the UK? If not, what and why did you not get used to? YES/NO

What [   ]

Why [   ]

12. Did you eventually feel comfortable living in the UK by the end of your stay in the UK? YES/NO If not, why?

Why [   ]

13. How did you feel when you came back to Japan?

[   ]

14. Did you find any difficulties when you adapted back to Japanese living customs? YES/NO If so, what are they?

[   ]

Information sheet

A research study is being conducted at the University of Leeds by ███████ as a part of a master's degree.

<u>Background</u>

I am currently conducting an analysis on the concept of culture shock, and the W-curve model of how individuals adapt to new cultures. This includes exploring how the concept and the model can be applied to both British and Japanese university students.

<u>What will you be required to do?</u>

Students participating in this study will be required to complete a questionnaire, which will take approximately 15-20 minutes. Some respondents might be asked to participate in an interview, which will last approximately 20-30 minutes.

<u>To participate in this research you must:</u>

Be either a British or Japanese university student (or a graduate who recently graduated); and

Have visited either Japan or the UK respectively for the duration of approximately at least one year.

<u>Procedures</u>

The questionnaire will be conducted online via facebook or email. The interview will be conducted through Skype. Students who agree to participate in an interview will be informed of the date and time the interview is to be held at least one week in advance.

<u>Feedback</u>

There will be no immediate feedback given as the research will be qualitative, and will therefore require analysis.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within the premises of the University of Leeds, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Yu Mizuno. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed). All responses given in either questionnaires or interviews will be made anonymous.

Dissemination of results

The results will not be published as it will only be used in the research for an MA degree.

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Participant Consent Form

1. Title of Research Project: <u>Reexamining the term 'culture shock' and the</u> <u>model of culture shock and contrasting the perceptions of them in east/west</u> <u>cultures.</u>

Name of Researcher: ▮▮▮▮▮▮

Initial the box if you agree with the statement to the left

1   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 12/07/2012 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3   I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.
I give permission for the researcher of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4   I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5   I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change.

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

(*or legal representative*)

__██████____   _____   __████____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

(*if different from lead researcher*)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

__████____   _____   ___████___
  Lead researcher   Date   Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

After completing the form, please send this form back to ████████████████████████

and save both the information sheet and this form as a copy for yourself.