Will the Bow-Pulling Model Be Repeated? - Analysis of Cases of Reverse Culture Shock During Two Overseas Stays

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Abstract

The bow-pulling model assumes selective adaptation of culture, and assumes a reactionary psychological reaction that causes reverse culture shock after returning to Japan if it becomes familiar with the culture of the destination. In this study, we conducted an interview survey of two Japanese female college students who stayed abroad twice for study abroad or internship. We examined case-by-case whether the pattern of reverse culture shock after returning to Japan corresponds to the bow-pulling model and whether it is repeated as a stable characteristic. It was confirmed that a psychological burden occurred when some discontinuity occurred in culture and life and the person's response was unsuccessful. Initially, both participants corresponded to the bow-pulling model, but the second time they reacted differently. Informant P showed reverse culture shock and was interpreted as an alienation model that did not find peace in either culture, and Informant Q was interpreted as a bird's-eye view model that had a light reverse culture shock and objectively viewed both cultures. Reverse culture shock is caused by the interaction of internal factors such as dissonance of cultural values, with external factors such as lifestyle preferences and evaluation of the external environment, and is a negative view of the mother culture which is believed to strengthen the degree of shock. Hypothesis-generating research using qualitative psychology techniques, which interprets the process of reverse culture shock, is in the beginning stages, and it will likely be verified by studying a number of cases.

Keywords: Bow-Pulling Model, Reverse Culture Shock, Japanese Students, Cultural Acceptance, Second Stay in an Overseas Country

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Introduction

Reverse culture shock refers to the psychological confusion felt after returning to your home country, as opposed to culture shock which occurs during a stay in a different cultural country. Let us consider a case where an international student studied abroad alone. When moving, they will prepare for language inconvenience, cultural incomprehension, and the absence of friends and family, and expect to experience a culture shock. However, when they return to their home country, language is understandable, culture is supposed to be familiar, and they are reunited with friends and family. Therefore, it is hard to intuitively understand why coming back causes shock. It is difficult for the person and surrounding people to predict the shock of returnees and to understand what happened, before they can address these problems. The reality is that time has passed between departure and returning home. The people and environment have changed and thus, they face discontinuities. Since their perception of self is continuous, they hardly notice their change. It is difficult to predict the transformation of others who lived in another country. Thus, these psychological properties make the shock invisible.

This psychological phenomenon has been known for a long time. The U-curve hypothesis and the W-curve hypothesis are well-recorded (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). U-curve depicts culture shock as a U-shaped change of emotion. The W-curve hypothesis has one more drop after returning to the original country, which reflects reverse culture shock. It has been confirmed that reverse culture shock occurs when Japanese students study abroad even for only one year (Takahama & Tanaka, 2011). They missed their study abroad destination and wanted to return after going home. They felt that the original environment is unsatisfactory, uncomfortable, and unstimulating. They felt emptiness and dissatisfaction. They felt lonely because they didn't have a place that was comfortable where they could stay. This feeling gradually starts to dissipate, but the pain may be great and prolonged. Some universities with a lot of experience in study abroad exchange programs provide commentary on reverse culture shock on their website as part of their information provision, such as Hokkaido University (2021), the Evergreen State College (2021), and the McGill International Student Service (2021). They are intended to prepare the students' minds before returning home and to support prompt re-adaptation.

Although it is a well-known phenomenon in some educational fields, it has been pointed out that research into reverse culture shock is less than the culture shock itself at the first transfer (Szkudlarek, 2010). In Japan too, such research is overwhelmingly small (Takahama & Tanaka, in press). At the offset, fact-finding and empirical research are required to understand the phenomenon. However, research is still lacking in the next step which investigates the psychological mechanism of its occurrence. In response to this unsolved question, this study focuses on the concept and attempts to decipher it. This is the idea behind the bow-pulling model (Akashi & Tanaka, 2005).

The bow-pulling model interprets why culture shock occurs, by linking the culture shock at the destination to the culture shock after returning home. In other words, if you are familiar with your new environment, it will be difficult to readjust to your home environment after returning. From the perspective of the heart, it is a metaphor for the power that causes the arrow to fly far, if you pull the bow strongly. However, another interpretation might be available. If you could adapt well to a new environment with a different culture, you might be able to quickly re-adapt to your culture, because you could exert the same flexibility again. Which interpretation is true? As a result of the verification attempt, corresponding examples

of the bow-pulling model were found, so it can be said that the model was verified (Akashi & Tanaka, 2005; Tanaka, 2021). However, other types have also been found. Although some people were familiar with their destinations, after returning to Japan, they did not stick to the continuation of the destination culture they accepted. They did not deny or dislike their mother culture. They were supposed to be a type that objectively accepted both cultures. This was named the bird's-eye view model. It can be said that it is an opposing model to the bowpulling model. In addition, some people displayed a different experience. They had a strong tendency to maintain their home culture, and their acceptance of different cultures was limited. In this type, re-adaptation was rapid and reverse culture shock was inconspicuous. It was named the maintenance model, due to them maintaining their original culture even when abroad. These findings provided clues to the psychological mechanism of how and why reverse culture shock occurs. Next, the following question arises. Will the same pattern be repeated if one moves abroad again? If reverse culture shock is due to a person's nature or characteristics, the same person may repeat the same reaction. No matter where you go or how many times you go, is the response fixed? The answers to these questions will offer further clues about the mechanism of reverse culture shock.

In this study, the research question is whether the occurrence pattern of reverse culture shock represented by the bow-pulling model is repeated. Specifically, the cases of individuals moving overseas twice were focused on, and it explored the occurrence of reverse culture shock during the first and second time.

Method

Research participants

Two Japanese undergraduate female students studying Humanities participated in this research. They stayed abroad for more than half a year and returned home twice. Ms. P was 21 years old. The first time abroad, she studied at a university in North America for a tenmonth exchange program. The second time, she participated in an internship at a company in North America for six months. At the time of this survey, fifteen months had passed since her first return and two months had passed since her second return. Ms. Q was 23 years old. Her first time abroad, she went to a high school in Oceania for thirteen months for a privately funded study abroad program. The second time, she studied at a university in Europe for a ten-month study abroad exchange program. At the time of the survey, sixty-six months had passed since her first return and seventeen months had passed since her second return.

Procedure

Those who had studied abroad were called to cooperate in this research, and those who consented to participate were included. As an ethical consideration, the researcher explained the purpose of this research and the way their data would be handled, and promised the protection of their privacy and the freedom to withdraw without any disadvantage. A semi-structured interview was conducted for about one to two hours at a convenient time for the participants and was recorded and transcribed with permission.

Guidelines

Depending on the questions by Tanaka (2021) and Takahama & Tanaka (2011), we asked the following questions about the difficulties associated with the environmental transition between Japan and the destination.

<Before studying abroad>

1) The opportunity to study abroad (Why did you decide to study abroad? Why did you decide to study abroad in the relevant country?), 2) Feelings before studying abroad (What did you think about your life while studying abroad? Did you have any anxiety about your life while studying abroad?).

<While studying abroad>

1) Life at the study abroad destination (school life, daily life); 2) Relationships at the study abroad destination (closest person, friends, teachers, Japanese people, other international students, Japanese friends and family in Japan); 3) Cultural differences between the two countries (differences and surprises about local customs/culture/lifestyle, feelings and thinking about different cultures, local customs and cultural behaviors adopted during study abroad); 4) Mental health during study abroad (changes in emotions, problems and coping strategies, stress and how to relieve it); 5) At what point did you become accustomed to your life while studying abroad (time, opportunity)?

<After returning to Japan>

1) Life after returning to Japan (school life, daily life); 2) Relationships after returning to Japan (Japanese friends in Japan, closest people and local friends during study abroad); 3) Perceived differences between the two countries after returning to Japan (what they felt in terms of their Japanese life after returning to Japan, the difference in Japan compared to the destination, the customs and cultural behaviors they adopted during their study abroad, experiences/discomfort/surprises in Japan, depression/emptiness/anxiety after returning to Japan); 4) Mental health after returning to Japan (feelings immediately after returning to Japan, changes in feelings on the returning day and until the present, the way to deal with the problem after returning to Japan); 5) When did you get used to your original life in Japan (time, opportunity); 6) How much do you think you had adopted the local culture/values/ways of thinking?

<Summary>

Reminiscing on the whole study abroad experience (thoughts about the country where you stayed for studying abroad, your changes due to studying abroad, what you learned from studying abroad).

Analysis

We organized the contents using the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967), divided data into the first and second stay, summarized the situation before/during/after returning to Japan, and examined the process and factors leading to reverse culture shock.

Result

The outline and features of the narrative are shown below. To ensure privacy, details, nouns, and information that lead to personal information were hidden. The following descriptions were underlined depending on whether they were focusing on re-adaptation and negative evaluation of Japanese culture; 1) acceptance of different cultures during their stay, and maintenance of different cultural behaviors in Japan, 2) non-acceptance of different cultures during their stay, maintenance of Japanese culture during their stay, and suppression of different cultural behaviors in Japan, 3) switching of cultural behaviors in Japan, 4) readaptation after returning to Japan, 5) and negative evaluation of Japanese culture.

Ms. P's first time (P1)

I longed for fluent English. After three months, I was able to afford it, and I wanted to do something new, so I worked hard to make friends¹⁾. I actively participated in events¹⁾ to engage with people from various countries. I made friends from Asian countries¹⁾ who shared a common position as international students. The locals and other international students were fluent in English. They had interesting conversations, but just listening to them made me lose confidence²⁾. One of my friends noticed and told me that I could do it in my way. Then the lack of my confidence reduced. When I became more comfortable, I felt like speaking more, and I started to speak up more than before. The class was active, but I didn't say a lot²⁾. Public remarks were embarrassing, and I often left my questions to teachers until after the class²⁾. Even though I was in the new country, I thought I kept my Japaneseness²⁾. Multinational people were doing what they wanted to do freely, without worrying about others' views. It was good that there was no insidiousness to say what they thought¹⁾. A casual greeting was also preferable¹⁾. Before returning to Japan, I cried because I didn't want to go home and counted the number of days left.

After returning to Japan, my loneliness increased and it was painful⁴). The feeling of missing the country where I stayed didn't disappear for a long time⁴). I lost interest in the trendy stories in Japan and I met fewer of my previous friends¹). In order to do what I wanted, I gradually declined their invitations¹). Japanese people do not say what they think, don't say hello, and don't answer the teacher's questions⁵). I wondered if that was okay. I was frustrated because I felt that they should do what they wanted to do, and should adopt a clearer attitude⁵). I learned how to ask questions and how to behave differently¹) at my study abroad destination. I wished I could say hello more. However, the resistance to the Japanese way⁵) continued for about a week. I changed my mindset and made efforts toward my next goal, an internship. While studying abroad, I enjoyed my life for three months¹) after getting used to the life there.

Features of P1: She interacted with multinational people, incorporated different cultures within a reasonable range for her, and was conscious of preserving Japanese culture. She liked the self-selective freedom of the culture, became familiar with it, and liked the local life. Although there was a relatively short period of reverse culture shock, she rebuilt herself with a new goal of staying in a foreign country again. A certain degree of the bow-pulling model was recognized.

Ms. P's second time (P2)

Unlike studying abroad, the people around me were easygoing. My expectations were not met. However, I changed my mind. I started to think and move for myself¹⁾. I realized the sense of the value of being free even when people worked in their culture¹⁾. I felt familiar and calm when I came in contact with anything Japanese things. However, with regard to interpersonal services, Japanese-style hospitality required working hard under the direction, and I felt sorry for them⁵⁾. I wanted to gain more knowledge and ability as well as improve my English. I wanted to be recognized as the person who had such ability.

After returning, <u>living in Japan was not interesting</u>⁵⁾. The place I stayed was inspiring and it was a lot of fun to know what I didn't know 1. I tried to get a part-time job, but <u>it</u> was a kind of form-only work and I felt it was impossible for me to continue it the job. I didn't want to stay in one place. I wanted to leave Japan again soon 4).

Features of P2: The internship was disappointing, despite her expectations. Although it was not a very comfortable life at the beginning, she gradually enjoyed experiences by utilizing her freedom. After returning to Japan, the environment without freedom and stimulation was unsatisfactory and restless. She couldn't settle in either culture, and her situation looked different from the three existing models.

Ms. Q's first time (Q1)

At the beginning of my stay, I was lonely. I was frustrated that I couldn't do what I wanted to. I didn't like their way of washing the dishes poorly, so I wiped them by myself after their washing²⁾. However, gradually I started to think it was okay and accepted it¹⁾. Then, I stopped using the Japanese style. I was able to get myself in a good group of friends, and we did everything together as much as possible¹⁾. I was surprised to find that they spoke up clearly about what they didn't understand. I got the way of frankly speaking up like other students¹⁾. I often asked questions. I thought such a style suits my temperament. I also incorporated their tendency where they could easily decide on anything^{1).} Although The fulfillment of the appointment was uncertain, I thought that they cherished each moment. In the class, it was good to learn the subject depending on own choice lively and happily. I was happy to be asked where I came from 1). It was different from Japan in that they accepted me 1), a stranger, and wanted to know if we had something in common. Most of the exchange partners were local people, and there was no particular opportunity for international students to meet each other. I didn't want to go back to Japan. I felt that the people who stayed there were more like me¹⁾.

After returning to Japan, I missed the destination and wanted to return there⁴⁾. I was telling my family that I would be back tomorrow. Half a year later, my regrets finally began to subside⁴⁾. I started thinking about my future. I felt that the Japanese way of schooling was boring⁵⁾, less fun, and less efficient. Studying for exams was a mechanical and meaningless process. It was an education without thinking really. It was enough, as long as we knew the correct answer in a class. We couldn't see what would be ahead beyond the class. I didn't like the Japanese education⁵⁾ because it didn't help develop individual characteristics. I started to participate in local events¹⁾ such as festivals and volunteer activities. I began to greet and chat with local people¹⁾, including the elderly. The attitude of being actively involved was what I learned when I studied abroad¹⁾. However, the easy way to decide things didn't get in touch with the people around me in Japan²⁾. Therefore, it was a pity that such a way couldn't be practiced.

Features of Q1: After overcoming the initial anxiety, she became familiar with a new place. She missed her study abroad destination after returning to Japan. The maintenance of cultural behavior was recognized. She had a negative view of Japanese culture, and the reverse culture shock was clear. It could be said that it corresponds to the bow-pulling model.

Ms. Q's second time (Q2)

Aiming for improving my English ability and enjoying the local culture, I decided to study abroad for the second time. I wanted to use my English to study specialized things this time. I also liked the music and buildings there.

At my study abroad destination, I lived in a dormitory and formed a good friend group of international students of various nationalities. I had been acquainted with local students and international students, and my friends had expanded further. I had been in contact with several people even after returning to Japan. I got used to the studying abroad life in about two weeks after arriving. I met the standard of required language ability, my housemates helped me a lot, and then I didn't have any problems in my study abroad life¹⁾. At my school, since seminars with a small number of people were suitable for me, I quickly opened my heart and adapted¹⁾. It was good to have a fun drinking party regardless of the upper or lower school year of participants¹⁾. There were a lot of ironic jokes. I wasn't used to it at the beginning, but I tried my best to get it¹⁾. Social etiquette was similar to that of Japan, but I think Japanese food was better.

There was no regret for me when returning to Japan. I was positive and focused on my next goal. I was sentimental⁴⁾, but I wanted to graduate and work. I wanted to be independent, become a member of society, and travel. I had a lot of things to do in front of me. After all, I decided to go back to Japan. I felt lonely, but I had almost achieved my goal. I got a sense of accomplishment and thought I was in the next step. If I would make money, I could go abroad. I had an environment where I was always able to contact my overseas friends. I wanted to go home early, do more and more things from now on, and start the attempt soon.

After returning to Japan, I wanted to use jokes which I got at the destination, but it was rude in Japan, so I was laughing only in my mind, and it was an incomplete combustion²⁾. I found that the points of laughter were different in the two countries. I also liked Japanese laughter. The difference was also interesting³⁾. Job hunting in Japan during college student years was doubtful²⁾. It was a more rational way to accept an application any time after graduation. I felt that I had both Japanese and the country where I stayed for my second studying abroad³⁾. When I suddenly thought that I was Japanese. I sometimes thought that I was like people in the country where I stayed for my second study abroad.

Features of Q2: She quickly got used to life in the new place. After returning to Japan, she had no particular problems. She was working positively on her life after returning to Japan, aiming for her next goal from a broad perspective. Although there was some unsatisfactory feeling that local behaviors could not be continued, she was conscious of coexisting with both cultures, and the reverse culture shock was not noticeable. She was close to a bird's-eye view model.

Discussion

Although the cases of two informants staying abroad twice mean different destinations and statuses, they both commonly stayed in different cultures and experienced re-entry to their home culture. The establishment of the reverse culture shock was followed.

P1 selectively accepted the local culture and seemed to retain her original culture well. However, she liked the local lifestyle, and it seemed to cause discontinuity in her life and it led to some degree of reverse culture shock. However, it was determined that re-traveling was set as the next goal, and the confrontation with Japanese culture became temporary. The reverse culture shock was then shortened and alleviated. The second stay was also in the same country, but the status was different. The freedom which emphasized independence also included a loose work attitude and weak involvement that did not require aspirations. The first time, she met ambitious people who took advantage of freedom, but the second time, she

saw the negative side of the cultural values. It might have been a little passive as she was dependent on the external stimulus of the environment, but after realizing that the environment did not offer much education, and there was little growth from stimulating human resources, she devised unique ways to spend her time. After returning to Japan, she felt a reverse culture shock due to the lack of stimulation and freedom. It was possible to say that she was facing the negative aspects of Japanese culture that she had overlooked when she returned to Japan. It might be called an alienation model in that it was difficult to settle down in any culture. However, since it was a suggestion and only a single example, the establishment of this model still requires verification.

Q1 was blessed with a family, school, and local environment while studying abroad in high school, and experienced a leisurely time. After returning to Japan, she looked at her original culture negatively and experienced a reverse culture shock. Although her second experience studying abroad was in a different country, she gained the support of her colleagues, adapted her language and style of interaction, and quickly put her study abroad life on track. Returning to Japan with a sense of accomplishment, while being aware of overseas travel and exchanges, she worked towards her next goal of being independent and switched attitudes to get a bird's-eye view of both cultures. It could be said that reverse culture shock was limited in her case.

Reverse culture shock showed different aspects in the first and second episodes for Ms. Q. This study tried to find an answer to the research question of whether the bow-pulling model was repeated from the analysis of reverse culture shock in two overseas stay cases, and the answer is no. Ms. P changed from a bow-pulling model to an alienated model. Ms. Q has changed from a bow-pulling model to a bird's-eye view model.

If the bow-pulling model was not fixed, how could the occurrence of reverse culture shock be understood? Regarding the response to the discontinuity that became an issue after returning to Japan, there were various subjects and reactions, and it seemed that stable individual characteristics, a fluid posture, and the environment were involved. Dissonance occurred when something was not continuous and the unfolding response did not fit it. Referring to the previous research on the bow-pulling model (Tanaka, 2021), let us consider the occurring mechanism.

A noteworthy point was the evaluation of home culture. Tanaka (2021) pointed out that if a person was familiar with the place of stay, whether they showed denial of their original culture or showed a bird's-eye view to the two cultures, including their home culture after returning, would make a difference in terms of the degree of their reverse culture shock. Both Ms. P and Ms. Q adapted well to the culture of the destination. However, denial of original culture in P2 was obvious. Q2 had a bird's-eye view including her original culture with a weak culture shock. The interpretation could apply to the fact that the two patterns of reverse culture shocks were divided into heavy and light shocks.

The other point was the evaluation aspect. Both P1 and Q1 highly evaluated their local lives. Regarding culture, P1 selectively, and Q1 highly, accepted the new cultures. In P1, the discontinuities faced after returning to Japan might be stronger in terms of lifestyle than in terms of culture. It could be said that reverse culture shock occurred not only in cultural differences but also in discontinuities in lifestyle differences. Not only differences in internal values but differences in the external environment caused confusion in re-adaptation. In this sense, it might be more accurate to call it a re-entry shock. Looking at the second time, Q1

was moderately evaluated for life and culture everywhere and settled on a bird's-eye view model. However, Q2 aligned to the alienation model because the evaluation of both culture and life was sluggish, and the existence of an alienation model which showed uncomfortableness due to these factors was recognized. The alienation model was this study's discovery. Elements of life other than culture could not be underestimated. This study suggested that factors related to the evaluation of the external environment, such as suitability for lifestyle and personal preferences, were involved in the reverse-culture shock. Identification of cultural values and alternative selection of value frames could be said to be internal factors. Evaluation of the social environment might be an element in between internal and external factors.

Conclusion

The bow-pulling model assumes selective adaptation of culture, and assumes a reactionary psychological reaction that causes reverse culture shock after returning to home country if it becomes familiar with the culture of the destination. It was confirmed that a psychological burden occurred when some discontinuity occurred in culture and life and the person's response was unsuccessful. Initially, participants corresponded to the bow-pulling model, but the second time they reacted differently. Reverse culture shock is caused by the interaction of internal factors such as dissonance of cultural values, with external factors such as lifestyle preferences and evaluation of the external environment, and is a negative view of the mother culture which is believed to strengthen the degree of shock.

The remaining issues and future prospects were as follows: regarding reverse culture shock, there were not many studies that explain the psychological mechanism. There were some studies that focused on demographic traits such as gender and age (ex. Rohrlich & Martin, 1991), and those that evaluate specific properties such as the transformation of cultural identity (ex. Cox, 2004), but the evaluation of multiple factors was sparse. In particular, there were few studies examining longitudinal changes. Hypothesis-generating research depending on actual cases like this study which looked at the process of occurrence of reverse culture shock in detail, and explored the mechanism using qualitative methods would be promising. Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall (1992) suggested the involvement of intercultural distance, but in this study, it was not clear how the difference of destination was involved. All destinations were English-speaking countries with Western culture, in this study. In Japan, the majority of study abroad cases are linked to Western European countries. However, it is desirable that the move to other countries be made fully clear. This study was an attempt to trace the case of a limited number of people in detail, but it is desirable to obtain a larger number of samples, verify the generalizability of the findings, and make the subclassification more reliable.

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