Difficulties and Coping Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationship Formation among Japanese Students in France: Implications for Cross-Cultural Social Skills for Studying Abroad in France

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ABSTRACT

This study examined cross-cultural difficulties experienced by Japanese students in France and their coping strategies. This study consists of 2 parts: in Study I, difficulties in interpersonal relationship formation and coping strategies were explored from the perspective of Japanese students in France. In Study II, Japanese students' coping behaviors in France were evaluated from the hosts' perspective. Additionally, expected coping behaviors in specific sociocultural contexts were examined. Data were obtained through questionnaire surveys and interviews. Study I demonstrated that interpersonal difficulties fell under three major categories: assertiveness, sociability, and schedule fluidity. These comprise eleven medium and four minor categories. In Study II, active coping, in which a guest student actively attempted to address a challenge, and receptive coping, in which a guest accepted the host's behavior and perspective, received high evaluations. Finally, the use and teaching of cross-cultural social skills with French people are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Japanese students in France; cross-cultural social skills; social support; study abroad; interpersonal relationship formation; cross-cultural adaptation

INTRODUCTION

To date, Japan has been promoting Japanese students' foreign education as part of its globalization strategy. However, because transitioning to an intercultural environment is a psychologically burdensome experience, Japanese students abroad often experience maladjustment and mental health problems (Inamura, 1980). Like immigrants, international students move voluntarily; however, students stay abroad for relatively shorter periods and are expected to return home (Ward et al., 2001). During their stay, they seek opportunities for academic and professional skills development and have relatively clear goals (Ward et al., 1994). To achieve their academic goals and have a fulfilling experience within a limited period, they must maintain their physical and mental health and smoothly adapt to a new culture.

According to the stress-buffering hypothesis proposed by Fontaine (1989), intercultural residents' interpersonal relationships with their hosts provide social support, which buffers stress and maintains psychological health. In reality, however, forming interpersonal relationships between people from different cultural backgrounds is difficult. Tanaka (2003) examined the perceived causes of difficulties in interpersonal relationship formation between international students in Japan and Japanese students and identified the international students' lack of culture-specific skills as an impediment.

Social skills primarily refer to behavioral skills, which are expected to facilitate the formation, maintenance, and development of interpersonal relationships. Because socially expected behaviors differ in each culture, cross-cultural residents may lack requisite skills, resulting in discrepancies, discord, and inconveniences in social life, including interpersonal difficulties. Although cross-cultural misunderstanding and friction can occur, appropriate social skills can facilitate the successful transition to a new environment (Furnham et al., 1982). A study of Japanese students in the US suggested that acquiring social skills helped them expand their social network, which positively impacted their cross-cultural adjustment (Takahama et al., 2008). In a practical study by Tanaka et al. (2013), in which social skills were taught to Japanese students as pre-departure training for education in the US, social skills facilitated friendship and social network development, leading to positive evaluations of their foreign education. These studies suggest that learning and acquiring intercultural social skills in preparation for overseas education can enhance social support and ultimately promote intercultural adjustment. Other studies on Japanese expatriates have reported specific behaviors considered useful in host societies and discussed their implications (Yashima et al., 2001; Chen et al., 2014, & Sako et al., 2018).

This study focuses on social skill development among Japanese residents in France. France was once a model country for Japan's 100,000 International Student Plan, which was later revised to the 300,000 International Student Plan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008). Having already received over 300,000 international students a year, France envisions to have 500,000 international students in higher education by 2027 (CAMPUS FRANCE, 2018). Accordingly, the "Welcome to France" strategy has been developed,

and laws have been amended to increase the number of English courses, overseas campuses, and scholarships. In 2014, France and Japan were globally ranked 4th and 8th, respectively, in terms of the number of international students received, and 2nd and 4th, respectively, among non-English speaking countries (Sugimura, 2015). France could be an appropriate model for Japan because it has a similar scale of student exchange—although it is a step ahead.

A survey of Japanese students' interpersonal relationships in France (Nakano et al., 2019) revealed that they had developed relationships with their hosts; however, the crucial question of how they created their relationships remains unanswered. This study aims to investigate the challenges experienced by Japanese students in France and their coping strategies and provide suggestions for acquiring appropriate social skills. In Study I, Japanese students in France reported difficulties in interpersonal relationship formation and coping strategies. In Study II, French students evaluated Japanese students' reported coping strategies from the hosts' perspectives, and the expected coping behaviors in the specific sociocultural context were examined. Finally, the applications of the findings to international student education are discussed.

Study I

Purpose

This study aims to understand the difficulties experienced by Japanese students in France in intercultural contact situations with French people and identify practical ways of coping with these difficulties to form interpersonal relationships.

Methods

Survey Participants

The survey sessions were held at University X in October 2014 and January 2015. Six international Japanese students (three females and three males) from University X as exchange students in a regional city in France participated in the study (Table 1). They were selected using the nepotistic method and snowball technique commonly used in qualitative studies. A, B, C, and D participated in both sessions, whereas E and F participated only in the second session.

Procedures

A questionnaire was developed based on Tanaka (2000) in an open-ended format, asking Japanese students how they related to French people (Table 2). The study's purpose and ethical considerations were explained to the participants. In the sessions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with one person at a time. A questionnaire survey was administered, and respondents were asked to elaborate upon their answers; the same questions were used in both sessions. During the interviews, the researcher asked questions from an objective standpoint as an investigator and listened attentively and actively. With permission, the narratives were recorded on an IC recorder, and a verbatim transcript was produced. The narratives were then synthesized for analysis.

Table 1

Overview of Japanese Participants

	Age	Sex	Affiliation & grade	Major	Period of study abroad	French learning history	Proficiency in French
A	23	Female	Undergraduate 4th year	Humanities	Sep. 2014-Aug. 2015	3 years & 6 months	Intermediate
B	22	Male	Undergraduate 3rd year	Humanities	Sep. 2014-June 2015	2 years & 6 months	Beginner
C	21	Female	Undergraduate 3rd year	Humanities	Sep. 2014-Dec. 2014	2 years & 6 months	Intermediate
D	20	Male	Undergraduate 3rd year	Sciences	Sep. 2014-Aug. 2015	4 months	Beginner
E	20	Male	Undergraduate 3rd year	Humanities	Sep. 2014-May 2015	3 years	Intermediate
F	20	Female	Undergraduate 3rd year	Humanities	Sep. 2014-May 2015	2 years & 9 months	Intermediate

Table 2

Questions About the Methods of Relating to the French in France

| Intention	Question
1. Cultural differences in interpersonal behavior: France	What kind of French behavior have you found difficult to understand, different from your behavior, or difficult for you to acquire? Please briefly list up to three examples of these specific situations or behaviors, and explain how you felt about them.
2. Cultural differences in interpersonal behavior: Japan	Have you ever felt that the French found it difficult to understand your behaviors as a Japanese person? Or, have you ever had your behavior misunderstood or misinterpreted? Please briefly list up to three examples of these specific situations or behaviors.
3. Interpersonal behavioral difficulties	In your interactions with the French, have the differences in how they interact with each other ever confused you? Please briefly list up to three examples of these specific situations.
4. Coping Practices	How did you behave in the above situations? What were the results? For each situation, please briefly list your main responses and the results.
5. Tips in interpersonal behavior	Please briefly list up to three things that you try to do to relate well with the French.

RESULTS

Difficulties in Forming Interpersonal Relationships with French People

Japanese students in France described situations where they felt confused, different, surprised, uncomfortable, or had difficulties interacting with French people. The results are summarized in Figure 1. The number of respondents in each category is indicated by the numbers in parentheses. The interpersonal difficulties fell under three major categories: 1) assertiveness, 2) sociability, and 3) schedule fluidity. The difficulties and how they were handled are described below, citing the narratives in quotation marks where appropriate. Words are added in parentheses for parts that require clarification.

Figure 1

Difficulties experienced by Japanese students in France in forming interpersonal relationships with their hosts
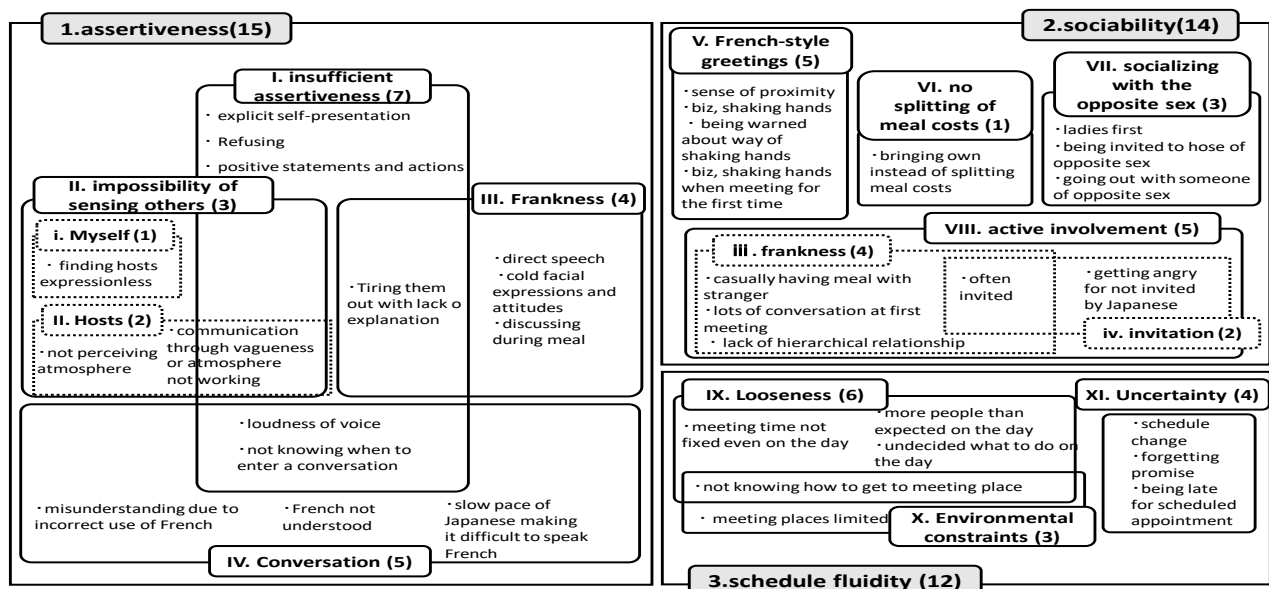
Difficulties Related to Assertiveness

(I) Insufficient assertiveness

In France, higher assertiveness was expected than in Japan; however, a few Japanese students were too bashful, resulting in poor communication.

(II) Impossibility of sensing others

It was difficult for Japanese students to perceive the mood of the conversation. It seemed as if the other party was expressionless while listening to the conversation.

(III) Frankness

Hosts were extremely assertive and opinionated. A few Japanese students encountered direct speech and cold facial expressions and attitudes from French people.

(IV) Conversation

Japanese students experienced challenges owing to limited language ability, uncertain speech timing, and the loudness of the interlocutor's voice. The slow pace of their Japanese made it difficult to speak French. It was difficult for them to ascertain when to initiate a conversation.

Difficulties Related to Sociability

(V) French-style greetings

A student was puzzled by the peculiar greeting style in France—the French "biz," a greeting with a kiss on the cheek. Japanese students felt that the French were intimate with people because they shook hands and exchanged the "biz" even when meeting for the first time.

(VI) No splitting of meal costs

Japanese students were surprised at the French method of paying for meals. Unlike the Japanese, the French pay for their own meals.

(VII) Socializing with the opposite sex

Students were perplexed by the differences in behavioral patterns. They were not accustomed to the social practice of "ladies first," being invited to the house of someone of the opposite sex, going out with someone of the opposite sex, and so on.

(VIII) Active involvement

The students felt that their passivity hindered exchange. They were puzzled by the frank involvement of the French. They were surprised that the French could have a casual meal with a stranger, engage in conversations even when meeting for the first time, and disregard hierarchical relationships among students. The Japanese students could not respond appropriately to their invitations. "French people became angry for not being invited by the Japanese, saying, 'Why do I always have to ask first?'"

Difficulties Related to Schedule Fluidity

(IX) Looseness

Japanese students found it perplexing that talks proceeded without a definite time, place, number of people, and so on, and the meeting time was not fixed even on the day of the event. They were confused that the number of participants continuously increased, and most remained unaware of the agenda.

(X) Environmental constraints

Geographic unfamiliarity restricted the students' activities. "The meeting places were limited." "I did not know how to reach the meeting place."

(XI) Uncertainty

The students had difficulty with the flexibility of schedules. They were also perplexed that plans changed along the way. "At first, I was puzzled by their lack of punctuality. They did not show up at the venue for 20–30 minutes. I realized that was just how it was." "When I promised to meet someone, I thought it would be just the two of us, but it often happened that some of his friends came along."

Coping with Difficulties in Forming Interpersonal Relationships with French People
The narratives about the students' coping with challenging situations and tips for building good relationships with French people were extracted and organized by major categories of difficulty. The approximate levels of difficulty were evaluated and presented in ascending order. There were four types of coping: 1) active coping—actively trying to resolve difficult situations or

anticipating them; 2) receptive coping—accepting a difficulty with a positive attitude; 3) passive coping—passively responding to another person's approach; and 4) avoidant coping—avoiding a situation or giving up on a response. The following are brief descriptions of the applicable types of coping.

Coping with Difficulties Regarding Assertiveness

(1) Dealing with coldness

"I kept the conversation to a minimum and did not meet with them afterward" (avoidant coping).

(2) Listening again

"I listened again and understood the conversation" (active coping).

(3) Unconcernedness

"I did not think they meant more than what they said; therefore, I did not dwell upon it" (receptive coping).

(4) Non-verbal communication

"I compensated my lack of linguistic expression with facial expressions, gestures, and body language" (active coping).

(5) Instrumental aids

"I conveyed what I was about to say in the end by reinforcing it with tools, such as another language, a dictionary, or the Internet" (active coping).

(6) Deciphering facial expressions

"Even when they appeared expressionless, I interpreted that favorably, as evidence that they were listening to me attentively" (receptive coping).

(7) Clear expressions

"I made efforts to clearly express my thoughts, ideas, and opinions in words" (active coping).

Coping with Difficulties of Socialization

(1) Returning greetings

"If someone shook hands or gave me a 'biz,' I reciprocated" (passive coping).

(2) Receipt of invitation

"When invited to the house of someone of the opposite sex with several people, I accepted the invitation" (passive coping).

(3) Contact

"I contacted people by e-mail, SNS, phone, etc." (active coping).

(4) Smile

"I communicated with a smile" (active coping).

(5) Start of conversation

"I greeted people and engaged in conversations" (active coping).

(6) Eye contact

"I made eye contact with others, greeted them, and engaged in conversations" (active coping).

(7) Friendliness

"I practiced disregarding relationship hierarchies, willingly accepted introductions from friends, and treated others convivially" (receptive coping).

(8) Extreme joking

"I tried using profanities" (active coping).

(9) Drinking communication

"I drank and ruffled feathers" (active coping).

Coping with Difficulty in Schedule Fluidity

(1) Dealing with cancellations

"I gave up, realizing that cancellations were a matter of course" (avoidant coping).

(2) Interaction with unexpected participants

"I was introduced to friends I had not planned to meet and was passively involved" (passive coping).

(3) Schedule change

"I made alternative plans" (active coping).

(4) Tolerance for time

"I felt that they were not punctual; however, I tolerated this" (receptive coping).

DISCUSSION

This study identified three types of interpersonal behavioral difficulties. These can be discussed in terms of cultural differences in interpersonal behavior between the Japanese and the French. The first, regarding assertiveness, can be attributed to differences in expressiveness. Japanese students in France felt that they were more reserved when confronted with the frankness of the French. They felt intimidated to participate in conversations and experienced their hosts' lack of Japanese-style sensitivity. In contrast, international students in Japan were puzzled and discomforted by Japanese students' preference for indirect expressions. Yokota (1991) indicated that international students in Japan struggled to make friends with Japanese people because the latter were regarded as less assertive and, therefore, less interesting. In Iwasaki's survey of Japanese students in France (2001), subjects were asked to name words that described French characteristics, and "assertiveness" was prominently mentioned. Japanese students in the US were also puzzled by Americans' high assertiveness (Takahama et al., 2009). Thus, moving to a culture with a higher level of assertiveness creates difficulties for Japanese students.

The second difficulty, related to sociability, may reflect differences in cultural grammar in social behavior. First, in terms of formality, Japanese people greet one another with a bow that does not involve physical contact, whereas in France, handshakes and the "biz" are common. A study of Japanese and American college students comparing the degree of non-verbal physical contact with their family and friends revealed that the Japanese had less contact with those favorable to them than the Americans had with those unfavorable to them (Barnlund, 1975). It is quite possible that refraining from communication involving physical contact could lead to discomfort in greeting situations. In French, the subject may be varied to

make expressions more polite. For example, in English, "you" is always used for the second person, whereas in French, "tu (you)" is often used for family and close friends, and "vous (you)" for other people. In Japanese, honorifics are used for superiors, and the attitude toward them becomes polite. Although the subject may be changed in French, the attitude is unchanged, as in Japanese. This sense of distance may also affect the recognition of discomfort.

Regarding behavioral styles, Kobayashi (1987) noted that the Japanese and French differed in how they socialized. The Japanese place greater emphasis on internal relationships with mutual friends, whereas the French seek to expand their circle of friends and acquaintances. Japanese university students have reported feeling uncomfortable communicating with strangers or acquaintances (Goto & Daibo, 2003). Unfamiliarity with French-style interpersonal interaction—that is, students looking forward to social gatherings where they could meet and socialize with strangers—and a lack of communication involving cultural differences might have hindered their active involvement with others. The examples of Japanese students who feel apologetic about accepting active invitations and the French who become unhappy when not invited back by the Japanese can be interpreted in terms of the cultural difference in invitations. From the French viewpoint, it would be disappointing not to be invited by a Japanese student whom they had previously invited.

The third difficulty regarding schedule fluidity can be interpreted in terms of cultural differences in norms. In Japan, it is a social norm to keep one's word—it is a virtue. The Japanese proverb, "Be slow to make promises and quick to fulfill them," reflects a culture where promises are deeply honored. Meanwhile, Collett (1996) describes France as a society that is indifferent to punctuality. Iwasaki (2001), asking Japanese residents in France about words that described French people's characteristics, identified the category of "looseness." These findings support the existence of relative cultural differences regarding commitment norms.

The coping behaviors listed above were organized into four types. Considering the relatively modest one first, avoidant coping is a response that involves escaping or avoiding a difficult situation. Rather than changing the familiar interpersonal behavior in Japan, the troublesome situation itself is dismissed. Eliminating burdensome relationships makes mental adjustment temporarily easier; however, obtaining social support from the hosts may become difficult. In this case, the effect on cross-cultural adjustment would be partial, as no relationship formation would promote sociocultural adaptation. This response is similar to aversive coping with stress, which avoids stressors (Kamisato et al., 2002).

The other three types use cognitive-behavioral responses. They can be characterized by modeling of behavior, cognitive responses, and behavioral coping. In the first, passive coping, the guests did not actively attempt to address a difficult situation; instead, they began to cope with the situation in response to the French person's prompting. In other words, they attempted to cope with the situation through their hosts' instructions and teachings. If they were taught interpersonal behaviors in the French sociocultural context, it could be a starting point for expanding social support. Ward et al. (1999) stated that good interpersonal contact with hosts

in different cultures facilitates international students' sociocultural adjustment. This may be a useful coping strategy because there is a contact, albeit reluctant, and cultural learning is likely to occur because of that contact.

The second type, receptive coping, entails adjusting the cognitive aspects of accepting a difficult situation from a positive perspective. This cognitive coping strategy for dealing with stress reduces the threat of stress through psychological interpretation. This is similar to the cognitive coping strategy for stress, which reduces the threat of stress through psychological interpretation (Kamisato et al., 2002). Understanding the host's behavior as a reflection of the French sociocultural context facilitates a positive perception and reduces cultural discomfort. By observing French people's interpersonal behavior and striving to interact with them, guests can gradually improve their understanding of the meaning of cultural behavior, which is a useful coping strategy.

Finally, the third type, active coping, involves consciously devising a solution pre-emptively or when a difficulty arises. The Japanese students practice interpersonal behavior consistent with the culture of the society in question through individual efforts and ingenuity. They learn new methods of interpersonal interaction unfamiliar to Japanese culture by observing and imitating their hosts' behavior. They actively attempt to judge situations and assess relationships with hosts. These actions encourage the initiation, maintenance, and development of relationships and strengthen social support. Forming intercultural interpersonal relationships requires significant motivation and a willingness to expand one's behavioral repertoire. This coping strategy may be the most useful among those found in this study, as it most directly promotes sociocultural adaptation.

Study II

Purpose

Considering that interpersonal relationships are reciprocal, the views of host French students should also be explored. The purpose is to evaluate Japanese students' coping regarding interpersonal behavioral difficulties in interactions with French people from the hosts' viewpoints. This study was conceived as an independent study, based on the results of Study 1, to determine whether the coping strategies extracted in Study I were effective responses from the perspective of the French hosts.

 Methods

Survey Collaborators

Five French students (two males and three females) born, raised, and residing in France and attending the same university were recruited as collaborators in Study II (Table 3). As this was a survey on Japanese behavior, a certain level of understanding of Japanese culture was desired; thus, using the nepotistic method, the Japanese language learners were asked to cooperate in the research. Few French people study Japanese in France, and understanding the Japanese language and culture is uncommon, resulting in a small sample.

Table 3

Overview of French Informants

	Age	Sex	Affiliation & grade	Japanese learning history
H	22	Female	Graduate 5th year	5 years
I	24	Male	Graduate 6th year	5 years
J	22	Male	Graduate 4th year	5 years
K	23	Female	Graduate 5th year	5 years & 6 months
L	23	Female	Graduate 1st year	5 years

Study Period

The survey was conducted at University B in December 2015.

Questionnaire

Based on the Japanese students' coping behaviors in France obtained in Study I, 16 hypothetical situations were created in which Japanese students were likely to encounter interpersonal difficulties in their interactions with French people while studying abroad. Based on the coping behaviors identified in the previous study, three representative coping patterns were presented. The students were asked to rate each pattern's appropriateness on a 100-point scale and provide reasons for their responses. The questionnaire was prepared in Japanese and then translated into French in consultation with two individuals (one Japanese and one French) experienced in mutual language learning and studying abroad.

Procedures

After explaining the study's purpose and ethical considerations, a descriptive questionnaire survey was administered to the French survey collaborators. The hypothetical responses of Japanese students in France were presented. Participants were asked whether the responses were appropriate and effective as strategies for forming interpersonal relationships; their views on the expected behavior in such situations were elicited to provide insight into effective responses in the sociocultural context under investigation.

Results

The hypothetical situations and coping behaviors, mean scores and standard deviations (SD) of their ratings, and main comments made by the hosts are shown in Table 4. Hypothetical scenes are summarized from the questionnaire. In the following section, we consider the relatively high-graded responses for each situation and refer to the hosts' comments.

Assessment of Coping Difficulties Related to Assertiveness

In the "1(1) Cold attitude" situation, in which the host was perceived as cold, the response of shifting to a topic of interest and continuing the conversation was relatively highly evaluated. In the "1(2) Conversation" situation, in which the understanding of the conversation was delayed, active responses, such as seeking explanations and relistening to understand the conversation, were preferred. The participants also suggested that guests try involving another friend in their conversation. In the "1(3) Denial" situation, in which a guest's preferences were unmet,

participants recommended not overthinking or searching for meaning beyond what is spoken. In the "1(4) Expression" situation, in which a guest could not express themselves well in French, active responses using facial expressions and gestures to express their thoughts were preferred. When using tools to complement language, interrupting the flow of the conversation should be avoided. In the "1(5) Expressionless" situation, in which the other party appeared to be expressionless, receptive coping was relatively valued, implying that the French attentively listened even when they appeared expressionless.

Table 4

Hosts' Evaluation of Japanese Students' Coping Difficulties in Forming Interpersonal Relationships

	Hypothetical scenes	Coping/Tips? Procedures?	Rating points		Comments (Recommended behavior)
			M	SD	
Assertive ness	(1) Cold attitude (given the cold shoulder)	Change the subject to something of interest.	86.0	8.9	It is awful to avoid. It is a little too early. A cold response creates a negative impression and an uncomfortable atmosphere. If there is no interest, little can be done. If you do not want to be friends, so be it.
		Keep the conversation to a minimum and leave that person.	36.0	36.5	
		Give a cold shoulder too.	24.0	25.1	
	(2) Conversation (not able to understand what they said)	Say, "I did not understand what you just said," and seek an explanation.	92.6	15.5	I want them to tell me what is troubling them. If they are friends, they should not be shy, but it is futile to overdo it. Smiling while pretending to understand, or stumbling over your words with a troubled look, is rude and obnoxious.
		Pretend to understand and smile.	42.0	23.9	
		Stumble over words with a troubled face.	16.0	25.1	
	(3) Denial (explicitly being denied one's preferences)	Accept the fact that my taste is different, and do not overthink.	94.0	8.9	Grieving over what one considers a lack of consideration or being upset when one's preferences are denied does not align with the French attitude of respecting differences in opinions and choices.
		Saddened by the lack of consideration.	18.0	20.5	
		Angry at being denied preferences.	10.0	14.1	
	(4) Expression (not able to express myself well in French)	Use facial expressions and gestures.	90.0	12.2	Using a language, dictionary or the Internet should be limited to what is significant because that interrupts the conversation flow. Stopping speech mid-sentence hinders language improvement and is disrespectful.
		Use tools (another language, dictionary, the Internet).	66.0	32.1	
		Abruptly stop whatever you are saying.	23.0	26.4	
	(5) Expressionless (being listened to without facial expression)	Assume that the listener is attentive.	62.0	16.4	They may be angry or find it boring. One should enquire whether they have a problem, are okay, and so on.
		Assume that my speech is boring.	58.0	32.7	
		Assume that the listener is angry.	32.0	30.3	
Sociabilit y	(1) Exchanging French greetings with which I am not good	Wait for the other person to shake my hand or biz me.	80.0	14.1	Words only can give a sense of distance. The French may also observe the other person's reaction. Bowing is acceptable to those who are
			78.0	29.5	
		Say a word of greetings only.	50.0	48.0	

	Give a bow.			aware of Japanese culture, but it may seem rude to refuse to greet others.
(2) Interacting with the opposite sex (multiple men invited to a woman's place)	Understand it is normal in France and accept the invitation.	94.0	8.9	Daring to confirm may seem insistent and may cause negative feelings. If you decline the invitation, you will miss the opportunity to interact; thus, if you intend to integrate, accept the frank invitation.
	Ensuring that I can really enter the room.	38.0	39.6	
	Refuse because I am not intimate with them and feel embarrassed.	13.0	12.0	
(3) Invitation (wanting to invite friends, but the room is too small)	Invite them without worrying about the room size.	68.0	27.7	Not inviting them and only contacting them gives the impression of being slightly cold and rude. It is acceptable to plan a meeting without finalizing a venue, but it is advisable to decide in advance.
	Contact them, but do not invite them yourself.	50.0	7.1	
	Plan to meet without finalizing the venue.	32.0	21.7	
(4) Mental attitude (mental attitude when dealing with French people)	Treat people genially.	100.0	0.0	A smile is more comforting than a grim face. Making eye contact while talking is a sign of interest in them. However, excessive smiling and eye contact should be avoided.
	Make eye contact when talking / shaking hands.	84.0	11.4	
	Smile at people.	70.0	18.7	
(5) Encounter (meeting a friend on the street by chance)	Greet and invite them to a café.	90.0	10.0	If you have time to spare and intend to talk longer, a café is particularly suitable, especially if you are good friends. Saying hello and standing around talking is frequent in an open relationship. Leaving after just saying hello may seem slightly cold but not unfriendly.
	Greet them, and no more.	84.0	19.5	
	Greet them and walk away.	35.0	43.9	
(6) Seniority (meeting people older than oneself)	Converse without using honorifics.	90.0	12.2	If you are in the same position, it feels better and equitable not to use polite expressions. You may verify whether honorifics be used, but it may appear silly. Honorifics are avoidable among students because they make them feel distant; however, they are advisable when meeting strangers.
	Verify whether honorifics should be used.	66.0	27.0	
	Use honorifics when speaking to people in a higher grade.	18.0	20.5	
(7) Party (having a party with friends)	Wait for someone to talk to me.	42.0	23.9	Waiting to be spoken to is acceptable but not recommended; you should be proactive. Ruffling feathers in an inebriated state or jokingly uttering profanities does not leave a good impression and will not earn you their friendship, even if they laugh at your jokes.
	Drink and get out of line.	35.0	18.7	
	Jokingly use profanities, saying, "I know this word."	10.0	10.0	
(8) Meal (dining at a friend's house with several people)	Invite a friend to dinner as a host next time.	78.0	14.8	Hospitality displays good manners and good relationships that are natural and equal. In case you bring your own food, it is polite to eat a quantity commensurate with your contribution and not feel guilty about it. Paying for food for one person makes one feel uncomfortable. You should avoid unnecessary money-related issues between friends.
	Eat more than what I brought.	62.0	16.4	
	Pay for food for one person.	18.0	19.2	
(1) Last-minute cancellation	Suggest rescheduling the event.	83.0	24.4	Postponing reflects congeniality. Canceling the plan may signify that

Schedule fluidity	(cancellation of plans on the day of the event)	Go shopping alone and do not reschedule. Complain to the person about the last-minute cancellation.	70.0 42.0	21.2 37.7	you do not intend to go out together and may damage the relationship. Going alone and not postponing is acceptable and does not damage the image, depending on the nature and urgency of the situation. Complaining about a cancelation is impolite and may damage the relationship if you are not close.
	(2) Introduction of a friend (doing something with a friend of a friend with whom I meet for the first time)	Talk to that person proactively. If that person asks me something, I respond. Listen quietly to my friend talking to that person.	84.0 84.0 42.0	26.1 23.0 37.0	Talking to them is an opportunity to make friends. If people are talking, avoid interrupting or interjecting. It is not a good idea to remain a passive listener; it is advisable to enter the conversation proactively.
	(3) Being late (a friend came in late)	Tolerate their being late and not say anything. Ask why one was late. Complain about frequent tardiness.	68.0 64.0 46.0	21.7 37.8 35.8	They may wish to explain to each other; thus, if tardiness is an issue, it should be carefully interpreted. Complaining about frequent tardiness is not welcome, even among good friends.

Assessment of Coping with Difficulties Related to Sociability

In the "2(1) Greeting" situation, responses such as "waiting for the other party to shake hands," "offering a biz," or simply saying a few words of greeting were relatively highly evaluated. In the "2(2) Opposite sex" situation, in which a guest was invited to the house of someone of the opposite sex, the preferred response was to accept the situation as normal. In the "2(3) Invitation" situation, the response of inviting someone without worrying about the size of the room was preferred. In the "2(4) Attitude" situation, which is about socializing with French people, all the respondents assigned 100 points to the active approach of being friendly. In the "2(5) Encounter" situation, in which a guest met an acquaintance by chance, the active response of greeting and asking them to go to a café was preferred. This response was considered particularly effective for those who wanted to be mutually acquainted. In the "2(6) Seniority" situation, in which a friend was older than the respondent, the receptive response of talking without using honorifics was preferred. In the "2(7) Party" situation, the responses were generally not highly evaluated. Bad manners were evaluated poorly. In the "2(8) Dinner" situation, in which the participants ate at a friend's house, a combination of active and passive coping was highly evaluated—that is, when invited, the next step was to be the host and invite the friend.

Assessment of Coping with Difficulties Related to Schedule Fluidity

In the "3(1) Last-minute cancellation" situation, active coping, such as offering an alternative proposal, was rated relatively highly. In the "3(2) Introducing a friend" situation, active coping, such as proactively talking to others, and passive coping, such as responding when spoken to,

were evaluated relatively highly. In the "3(3) Tardiness" situation, the receptive response of tolerating tardiness and not saying anything was preferred.

Discussion

The respondents were students at the same university as the Japanese students, which permitted a bidirectional perspective on the interactions. Although individual and situational differences may exist in real cases, these can be considered concrete examples of the kind of attitude that the Japanese students' hosts may have toward them. The various coping strategies collected were assigned overall high evaluations. Generally, active coping, in which a guest actively attempts to address a difficulty, and receptive coping, in which a student accepts the host's behavior and perspective as they are, received high evaluations. It is suggested that making efforts to relate well to others and accepting the behavior of people from different cultures positively impacts interpersonal relationship formation. This result is similar to that obtained by Tanaka et al. (2011), who identified that the attitudes of international students in Japan who endeavored to integrate with the Japanese culture were highly evaluated by those around them. Although there is a limit to the comprehensiveness of specific behaviors' effectiveness because the present study only examined case studies, the acceptance and adoption of positive and receptive cultural behaviors may be significant for intercultural sojourners.

In the case of French assertiveness, which seems to be stronger than that of the Japanese, a cultural acceptance approach is advised. Intercultural sojourners should actively express their opinions and adhere to the host country's cultural norms. Therefore, when conflicts arise, the guest is expected to acknowledge the host's perspective and behavior and actively express their own opinion. Meanwhile, if one habitually uses the Japanese way of "sensing" and "holding back," or exercises these behaviors because they are useful, they will likely be evaluated negatively. It has been reported that for Japanese students in the US, Japanese cultural refrains may lead to disadvantages (Takahama et al., 2009). As the cultural transition occurs, mother-culture skills may be maintained or adjusted to new ones (Tanaka et al., 2016). Although the maintenance of cultural behavior itself is not generally denied, awareness of hosts' reactions and considering explanations for them may help resolve or prevent misunderstanding.

In social situations, the active attitudes of the guests, who are initially perplexed when they encounter situations different from those in Japan but gradually accept the behavior of French people, are highly appreciated. However, bad manners, such as excessive drinking or the use of profanities, are unlikely to lead to favorable impressions. Although the present study seems to have answered general questions at relatively early stages of relationships, examining the differences in social behavior demands as relationships deepen is necessary. To avoid problems involving promise-making, clarifying promises to confirm time and schedule while paying attention to discrepancies in communication would be helpful. However, it is doubtful whether the expectation of the same level of compliance as in the mother culture is realistic. In

this study, exercising tolerance was recognized as an option. According to Hofstede et al. (2013), uncertainty avoidance varies globally. The level of flexibility in a destination country may not be the same as in the home country.

Comprehensive Discussion

In this study, Japanese students in France identified major cross-cultural characteristics they experienced as interpersonal behavioral difficulties, including strong assertiveness, skills to demonstrate sociability, and flexibility in promises and scheduling. Requirements for social skills can be influenced by the content of cultural differences and the degree of intercultural distance.

As the informants continued their education abroad, they learned through trial and error by observing and understanding how French people felt, thought, and acted. Upon experiencing difficulties in a foreign culture, they endeavor to address them via trial and error—the natural learning process for intercultural social skills. Having international students artificially acquire such social skills can be a countermeasure against culture shock and a form of cross-cultural adaptation support (Furnham et al., 1982).

The present study's findings can be applied to the education of international students to facilitate preparing a French version of the social skills learning framework by enacting specific task situations based on difficult cases and preparing a list of candidate skills based on the assessed coping strategies. Task scenes can be created based on foreseeable situations such as meeting a friend, being invited to dinner, being at a loss for expressions, having a preference denied, or wanting to return an invitation, and so on, and then roleplaying in French in small groups. Prospective students can attempt to positively interpret the cultural behavior of the other person and explain it in a supportive environment. The students would then reflect on their performances and practice, summarizing the cognitive and behavioral guidelines. Expansion of the behavioral repertoire is recommended for international students to advance incrementally. Gains and losses from emotion-focused coping strategies that aim to avoid problems should be understood, and constructive coping strategies should be encouraged as effective alternatives. A successful example is a study in the US in which students who received pre-skills training did not easily forsake relationship building because they knew what to do and how to do it positively (Takahama et al., 2013). Learning externally manifested behaviors and how to interpret cultural behaviors would support appropriate behavior choices.

Although direct, cross-cultural comparisons were not intended in the present study, positive responses to high assertiveness were found in US (Takahama et al., 2009) and Brazilian studies (Sako et al., 2018). Differences in social behavior and flexibility in promises were similar to those in Taiwan (Chen et al., 2014). These findings provide an opportunity to recognize the unique characteristics and relative position of Japanese culture. Finally, the possibility of cultural versatility skills awaits further research development.

The limitations of the present study include its limited sample size and the fact that it remains an overview survey that does not examine individual differences and diversity of

attributes. Future work should examine the changes that occur with longer stays and the psychological impact of social skills acquisition on guests and hosts.

Acknowledgments

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