

【レポート】

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Culture Shock: what is it, and how can we deal with it?

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After reviewing several sources on culture shock, an overall explanation of what it is and an understanding of how it affects us is shown. At the end, attempts to overcome it or reduce its effects, particularly on Baiko students in Australia, is expounded upon.

Definition and Background

The Oxford dictionary gives a definition for 'culture shock' as *disorientation experienced when suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life*. That is, it is an emotional and physical discomfort that people feel when they find their way in a new and unfamiliar culture, with different ways of life and mindsets.

The person given credit for first using the term 'culture shock' was Kalervo Oberg. He identified four stages of culture shock: Honeymoon stage, Crisis or Cultural Shock stage, Adjustment or recovery stage, and adaptation stage.

Use of the term 'culture shock' may induce negative feelings due to the harsh definition of 'shock.' Years later, Michael Winkelman used the term 'cultural adaptation' instead. This naming seems to lessen the initial impact and to aim to aid in the recovery process, also pointing out that everyone goes through these stages to some extent. He and many others include a fifth stage, about which he uses the term 'Reentry shock.' This seems to highlight the 'shock' value here, and may undermine the 'going through stages of a process' that he tries to show.

The Four Stages

The first stage of culture shock is widely identified as the honeymoon stage. This stage is also called the 'holiday' stage. At this time, the traveler (or exchange student, visitor, professional athlete, artist, musician, etc.) feels excitement and wonder. He feels very positive about the culture in which he finds himself. Often,

the traveler will be overwhelmed with impressions about the new environment, unable to take in everything at once. The new culture is exotic and fascinating, and the traveler cannot get enough. At this stage the traveler is quite passive, merely taking in everything possible. There isn't appreciable reacting or interaction at this stage. Sleep patterns may start to be upset, but it is often difficult to judge the line where overcoming jetlag and poor sleep patterns meet. The traveler is a sponge, a very willing and excited sponge, soaking up language, food and people, and has a wonderful feeling about the experience.

Oberg's second stage is that of crisis, or cultural shock. In this stage, the traveler experiences withdrawal and minor frustration. The traveler has a larger number of experiences and interactions in the culture, and is apt to find things different, strange, and even frustrating. He finds the behavior of the native people both unusual and unpredictable. He starts to dislike the culture, and may even react negatively to the behavior. His sleep patterns may be upset. His set of gestures and non-verbal communication is not valued in this new society. This leads to anxious feelings, and the traveler at times chooses to withdraw instead of choosing to fail at interacting.

In some cases, this frustration can lead to anger. The traveler has misunderstandings both ways, in that he cannot make himself understood, nor can he fully understand things around him. This can lead to outward expressions of animosity, in either mocking fashion or in criticizing the new culture.

Tabak, in his article, has a third stage titled 'depression.' This is quite different from the classic model of third stage, so Tabak's third stage is probably better thought of as a part of the second stage, prior to anger (possibly leading to it). It is a feeling of being stuck, feeling down, feeling blue, and wanting to go home. This part is often hard to recognize as a phase of culture shock, this being homesick or disconnected to the surroundings. This does deserve a place in the definition of culture shock, but probably ancillary to the second stage, and not as its own stage.

Oberg's third stage is that of adjustment. This can also be thought of as a recovery stage in overcoming the problems faced in stage two. In this stage, the traveler is able to establish daily routines, and is getting familiar with the

environment. Here, the traveler's sense of self returns, and along with it, their sense of humor. Swallow mentions that in this stage, you feel as though "you start to come out of a fog and finally begin to feel like yourself again." The traveler is aware of his surroundings, and his place in them, and it no longer leads to frustration and anger. The traveler feels less isolated than before, and has an understanding and an acceptance of the behavior of the people. Students will be more comfortable with speaking and listening to the language or the country. A general sense of comfort and relaxation will help the traveler to feel at ease in situations that were previous sources of frustration.

The fourth stage is that of adaptation. It is less perceived and recognized by the individual than the other stages, but is no less distinct. Life has reached a familiar pattern, although it may be with a new and different background. The traveler enjoys being in the new culture, and can function well. The traveler may prefer certain cultural traits of the new society to his own. A realization that he doesn't have to understand everything in the new environment in order to be happy helps in embracing the new society totally. The traveler has developed an understanding of the similarities and differences between the two cultures, and has learned to take bits of both and adapt them as his own. According to Tabak, this fourth stage "finally arrives like a warm bath at the end of a hard day." The traveler is taking and choosing the bits of both cultures that are best for him. He realizes that there is no right or wrong, but merely things that fit him best. The traveler feels as though this is a second home, and not like he is a foreigner. He may be able to laugh at things that were a source of frustration before, and realizes that he can live successfully in two cultures.

Is there a Fifth Stage?

The case for a fifth stage is intriguing. This stage would be called 'reverse' or 'returning' culture shock. After returning to the home country, this 'home' is no longer comfortable, because the new habits and lifestyle (picked up abroad) aren't easily shed. Much has changed in the traveler's life, and some age groups (especially those in the midst of their 'coming of age' period) suffer more than others. The individual has chosen bits of both cultures to embrace, but now in his 'home'

environment, some of these acquired customs might not fit into society seamlessly. This can lead to a feeling of being torn between two cultures, and a restless desire to travel and live abroad again. The traveler may have a reluctance to be pinned down into one culture, and thus will have difficulty finding and maintaining a job. This 'torn' feeling can further manifest itself in dissatisfaction with his home country, but rarely does the traveler reject his home environment completely.

Combating Culture Shock: Baiko students in Australia

The best advice for travelers and students studying abroad is to recognize and be aware of the stages of culture shock. Baiko students should take care to acknowledge what they are experiencing, and how they are feeling. Total prevention or avoidance of culture shock is impossible. The vast majority of people that live in a new culture do, in fact, go through the stages in a noticeable pattern. Culture shock does exist, in four or five stages, and while complete avoidance is impossible, being aware of how you feel and what you are experiencing can greatly lessen the effects.

In the first stage, all is blissfully wonderful. If possible, a journal should be kept, paying close attention to details about life in general, but at the bare minimum regarding sleeping patterns and foods. Keeping a log of feelings and experiences can also aid in future stages, because the student can look back and recall these positive attitudes.

In the second stage, being proactive can be helpful in reducing the effects of culture shock. Participating in the new society, reading papers, magazines, bulletin boards and websites can help. Baiko students should know the importance of talking to people about what is happening, to meet others and to develop a support system is valuable. The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has a knowledgeable support staff that is always willing to help. Also, the homestay families can arrange nights together with other students and families, which will reduce the isolation or withdrawal feelings. USQ offers a variety of weekend trips where students can travel together and experience Australian culture as a group. This group experience will aid in lessening the effects of culture shock. Students will have troubles, but overcoming these troubles will enrich their experience and

help them to form lasting fond memories. Troubles occur both at school and at the homestay, and in both cases communication is the key factor in rising above these troubles. The majority of the issues stem from cultural differences, often differences that are not noticed by one or both parties. It should be repeated that communication is the key. All too often (especially Japanese, and Baiko) students will want to avoid confrontation. Avoidance will not solve a problem. If there is a problem with a homestay family, avoiding it, or switching homestay families will not solve the problem. More likely than not, the same problem will arise again with the next homestay. Thus, communication is the key to overcoming many of these cultural misunderstandings, and eventually to combating culture shock. As in the first stage, keeping a journal can be of assistance in understanding what the students are going through.

In the third stage, continued attempts at being proactive help. In this stage, connecting with other people who share the same interests (not merely going through the same culture shock process), and engaging in school activities can be of great assistance. Here, many of the Baiko students will branch out and meet other international students on a regular basis. Outside of the homestay family it is difficult at USQ to make friends with native Australians, but the interaction with other people of roughly the same age, and doing the same thing (study abroad at USQ) creates a strong bond that helps the Baiko student adapt to life in Australia. Students often abandon their journal at this point, although others will continue writing the journal. If at all possible, all effort should be made to continue giving the necessary time to writing it, and to writing it in English.

Baiko students are only in Australia for two months. More than half of the students will reach the third stage of culture shock, but very few will reach the final stage, because they simply aren't in the foreign country for long enough.

It cannot be overstated how advantageous it is to realize that everyone goes through these stages to a certain extent, and that it is a process. Each stage is just that—a stage—and will be passed through. Recognizing that you are experiencing culture shock is one step to dealing with it. Dealing with it helps to lessen the possibility of becoming so disillusioned with the new country that 'going home' is the only solution. Care should be taken to not make rash changes or

judgments. Time spent during a study abroad experience is often a highlight of the university years, if not of a lifetime. Spending too much time while abroad either frustrated or angry is counter-productive and unnecessary. So being aware of the effects of culture shock, as well as taking the time to acknowledge time spent in each of the stages of culture shock will help in lessening its effects.

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