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Adapting to a New Culture

YOUNG YUN KIM

One of the dramatic changes we are witnessing today is the enormous interface of different cultures in human affairs—from politics and economics to the arts and leisure activities. At the forefront of this global reality are the countless people who are on the move across cultural boundaries. Each year, millions of immigrants and refugees change homes. Driven by natural disaster or economic need, or hoping for freedom, security, or social and economic betterment, people uproot themselves from their homes and embark on a new life in an alien and sometimes hostile milieu. In addition, numerous temporary sojourners, such as diplomats, military personnel, and other governmental and intergovernmental agency employees, are on overseas assignments. Peace Corps volunteers have worked in nearly 100 nations since inception of the program in 1960. Researchers, professors, and students visit and study at foreign academic institutions; missionaries carry out religious endeavors. Many business employees are given overseas assignments; and a growing number of accountants, teachers, construction workers, athletes, artists, musicians, and writers find employment in foreign countries.

These individuals and many others like them are, indeed, contemporary pioneers opening new frontiers. They face, at least temporarily, the drastic and all-encompassing challenge of having to construct a new life. This essay presents a brief account of their experiences in confronting the difficult task of adapting to a new cultural and communication

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As we are witnessing the process of different cultures meeting, politics and economics to the fore. At the forefront of the movement are people who are crossing boundaries. Each year, thousands of refugees change homes for economic need, or political, or social and economic reasons. They uproot themselves from their old life in an alien land. In addition, numerous people such as diplomats, government officials, and employees, are on overseas assignments. Volunteers have been sent since inception of the program. Teachers, professors, and foreign academic institutions are religiously endeavoring to give overseas a number of accommodations, athletes, artists, and employment in the field.

Others like the pioneers opening up the country temporarily, the process of having a new presence in the country, presenting a new face to the community, and communicating the differences and commonalities.

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system. (For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Kim, 1988, 1995, in press; Kim & Ruben, 1988).

Stress, Adaptation, and Growth

Individuals move to another country for varied reasons, under differing circumstances, and with differing levels of commitment to the host society. Most immigrants plan the move as permanent in the sense that they now expect the host society to be the primary setting for their life activities. For many short-term sojourners, on the other hand, contacts with new cultures are mostly peripheral, requiring less overall engagement. Foreign students, for example, can limit their adaptation to the bare minimum required to fulfill their role as students and can confine their informal social contact to fellow students from their home country. A similar pattern of self-imposed social isolation is seen among season migrant workers and military personnel and their families in foreign countries. (See Berry, 1990; Brislin, 1981; Dyal & Dyal, 1981; Furnham, 1988; Volkan, 1993, for discussions of various situations of cross-cultural migration.)

Despite such differences in the degree of adaptive demands, most people in a foreign land begin life in the host society as *strangers* (Gudykunst & Kim, in press; Simmel, 1950/1908). Many of their previously held beliefs, taken-for-granted assumptions, and routine behaviors are no longer relevant or appropriate. Faced with things that do not follow their unconscious "cultural script," strangers must cope with a high level of uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 1995). They are challenged to learn at least some new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting — an activity commonly called *acculturation* (Berry, 1990; Broom & Kitsuse, 1955; Padilla, 1980; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965; Spicer, 1968). At the same time, they go through the process of *acculturation* (Bar-Yosef, 1968; Eisenstadt, 1954), of learning some of their previously acquired cultural habits, at least to the extent that new responses are adopted in situations that previously would have evoked old ones.

The experience of acculturation and deculturation inevitably produces *stress* (Barna, 1983; Dyal & Kim, 1988, 1995, in press; Moos,

1976) — in the form of temporary psychic disturbance or even a "breakdown" in some extreme cases. Stress experiences are particularly acute during the initial phase of relocation, when strangers face the severe difficulties and disruptions amply documented in studies of "culture shock" and related issues (Adler, 1975, 1987; Furnham, 1984, 1988; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Oberg, 1960; Taft, 1977; Torbiorn, 1982). Internally, strangers are temporarily in a state of disequilibrium — undergoing an inner struggle between the desire to retain their original identity and the desire to forge a new identity more in harmony with the changed milieu (Boekstijn, 1988; Chan & Lam, 1987; Ford & Lerner, 1992). Strangers often cope with such a state of flux through various "defense mechanisms," such as selective attention, denial, hostility, cynicism, avoidance, and withdrawal (Lazarus, 1966).

Yet the stress strangers experience also works as the very impetus for their *adaptation*. In time, most strangers manage to achieve a new level of learning and self-adjustment that helps them accommodate to the demands of the host environment and work out new ways of handling their daily activities. In the ongoing relationship with the environment, strangers gradually modify their cognitive, affective, and behavioral habits and acquire increasing proficiency in expressing themselves, understanding new cultural practices, and coordinating their actions with those of the local people. The interplay of stress and adaptation gradually leads to an internal *growth* — a transformation in the direction of increased functional fitness and psychological health vis-a-vis the host environment.

Stress, then, is part and parcel of a stranger's adaptation and growth experiences over time. Together, the three elements — stress, adaptation, and growth — help define the nature of strangers' psychological movement in the direction of an increased chance of success in meeting the demands of the host environment. As shown in Figure 1, the *stress-adaptation-growth dynamic* plays out not in a smooth, arrow-like linear progression, but in a cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" pattern similar to the movement of a wheel. Each stressful experience is responded to with a "draw back" (temporary disintegration and disengagement), which then activates

Given the basic process of cross-cultural adaptation described above, we now turn to the question of differential adaptation rates (speeds at which different strangers adapt). Even though most strangers in alien cultures have demonstrated an impressive capacity to manage cross-cultural challenges successfully without damaging their overall integrity,

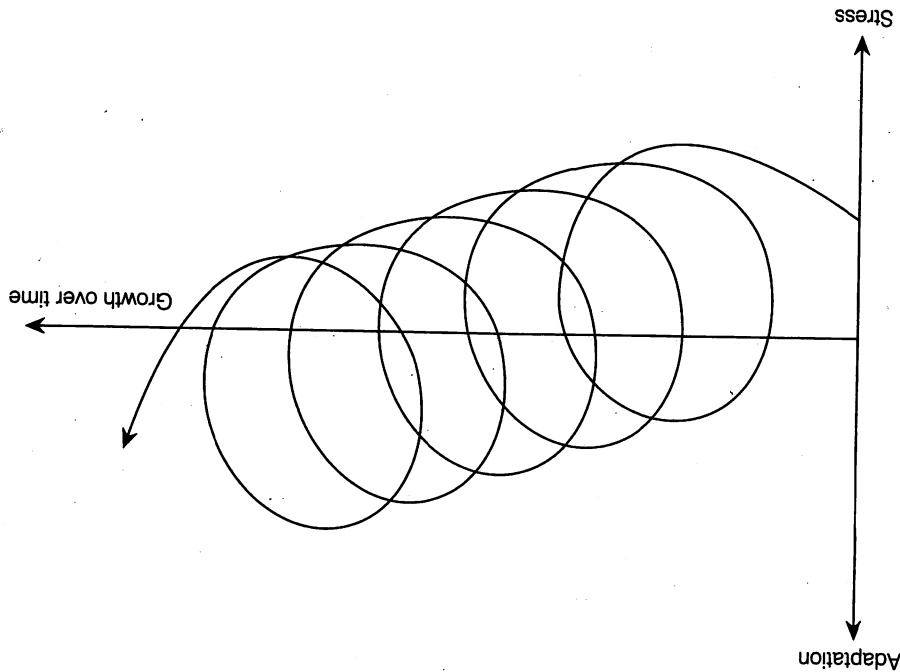
The Role of Communication

adapting energy to help strangers reorganize themselves and "leap forward" (temporary integration or engagement). This internal process reflects a dialectic relationship between new cultural learning (acculturation) and the unlearning of old cultural habits (deculturation). As strangers work through the setbacks, they come out "victorious," with an increased capacity to see others, themselves, and situations in a new light and to face challenges yet to come. Failure to work through this process results in prolonged feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

some do suffer more intensely and for a longer period due to an extreme inability to find ways to overcome the challenges of the host environment. Some may strongly resist the idea of having to change their old cultural habits, thereby raising psychological barriers that work against adaptation. Others may be ill-equipped to deal with states of panic, causing a prolonged psychological disequilibrium that leads to greater alienation from, and bitterness toward, the natives or even to a decision to return to their home country prematurely. The fact that individual strangers differ in adaptation rate leads to the question "Why do some strangers adapt faster than others?" or "Given the same length of time, why do some strangers attain a higher level of adaptation?" To explain differential adaptive changes among individual strangers, we need to focus on the process in and through which such changes take place — that is, the communication process. Communication activities of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal information lie at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation by serving

adapting energy to help strangers reorganize themselves and "leap forward" (temporary integration or engagement). This internal process reflects a dialectic relationship between new cultural learning (acculturation) and the unlearning of old cultural habits (deculturation). As strangers work through the setbacks, they come out "victorious," with an increased capacity to see others, themselves, and situations in a new light and to face challenges yet to come. Failure to work through this process results in prolonged feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

Figure 1 Stress-adaptation-growth Dynamics of Adaptive Transformation (Source: Kim, 1988, p. 56)



as the essential mechanism that connects strangers and the host society. Just as natives acquire their capacity to function properly in their society through communicative interactions, strangers come to organize their own and others' activities by learning the significant symbols of the host culture and by participating in various communication activities of the host society.

Strangers' communication activities can be categorized into two basic, inseparable dimensions – personal communication and social communication. According to Ruben (1975), *personal communication* involves “private symbolization” activities – all the internal mental activities that dispose and prepare people to act and react in certain ways in actual social situations. Personal communication is linked to *social communication* when two or more individuals interact with one another, knowingly or not. Ruben (1975) defines social communication as the process underlying “intersubjectivization,” a phenomenon that occurs as a consequence of “public symbolization.” In Geyer's (1980) terms, the personal communication process can be compared to the “off-line functions” of a computer system, which interfaces with the environment through “on-line functions” involving input-output transactions of messages (p. 32).

Personal Communication

Personal (or intrapersonal) communication refers to the mental processes by which we organize ourselves in and with our sociocultural milieu, developing ways of seeing, hearing, understanding, and responding to the environment. In Ruben's (1975) words, “Personal communication can be thought of as sensing, making-sense-of, and acting toward the objects and people in one's milieu. It is the process by which the individual informationally fits himself into... his environment” (pp. 168–169). In the context of cross-cultural adaptation, then, personal communication can be examined in terms of *host communication competence* – that is, the overall internal capacity of a stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the communication practices of the host culture. Natives begin to acquire this competence early in life, and it is so internalized in their personal communication system

that, by and large, it operates automatically and unconsciously. For strangers, however, many elements of the same competence must be acquired, often painstakingly, through trial and error. Until strangers have acquired a sufficient level of host communication competence, they are handicapped in their ability to function and relate to the system of host cultural pragmatics. The degree to which a given stranger acquires host communication competence should be reflected in his or her overall ability to fit in the host society, while the lack of such competence manifests itself in various forms of “miscommunication” (Banks, Gao, & Baker, 1991; Gass & Varonis, 1991).

The many elements of host communication competence – from knowledge about the host language and social norms to ability to manage interpersonal relationships and solve impending problems at work – can be grouped into three categories commonly employed in the study of communication competence: cognitive, affective, and operational (or behavioral) (Kim, 1991; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The primary element of *cognitive competence* that strangers must develop is knowledge of the host language and culture, including the knowledge of the history, institutions, laws and regulations, world views, beliefs, norms, and rules of social conduct and interpersonal relationships. Knowledge of the host language means not just linguistic knowledge (such as phonetics, syntax, and vocabulary) but also knowledge about the pragmatic uses of the language in everyday life (such as the many subtle nuances in the way the language is used and interpreted by the natives in various formal and informal social engagements).

Linguistic and cultural knowledge is accompanied by development of cognitive complexity (Kelly, 1955; Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967). Cognitive complexity refers to the structural differentiation and integration in an individual's information-processing capacity. During the initial phase of adaptation, strangers' perceptions of the host environment tend to be overly simplistic and based on gross stereotypes. As strangers learn more about the host language and culture, however, their perceptions become increasingly more refined and complex, enabling them to engage in

more effective social interactions.

Affective competence facilitates cross-cultural adaptation because it provides the emotional and aesthetic sensibilities that raise communication experiences with the natives from a level that is merely technical to one that is more meaningful and thus more fulfilling. Affective competence allows strangers to empathize with the natives – to share their experiences of joy, excitement, humor, triumph, and beauty, as well as sadness, boredom, sarcasm, despair, and ugliness. The strangers' affective competence thus leads to a sense of belonging and a positive regard for the natives, which, in turn, brings the strangers closer to the local people and their culture. Conversely, strangers who lack affective competence are likely to feel alienated and marginalized, for they cannot show genuine interest in local cultural experiences or in developing close relationships with the natives. In Mansell's (1981) words:

The concept of aesthetic awareness is linked with ineffable, intuitive feelings of appreciation and celebration. This form of awareness creates a consciousness which transforms individuals' perceptions of the world and imparts a sense of unity between self and surrounding . . . It is in this transformative mode of experiencing that many people create access to the momentary peaks of fulfillment which makes life meaningful. (p. 99)

Closely linked with cognitive and affective competence is *operational competence*, or "enactment tendencies" (Buck, 1984, p. vii). This dimension of host communication competence refers to strangers' capacity to express their cognitive and affective experiences outwardly when communicating with others. As strangers try to come up with a mental plan for action, they must base the decision on their current knowledge about the host culture and language; the decision depends also on the degree of sophistication in their information-processing capacity and on their ability and motivation to appreciate the emotional and aesthetic experiences of the natives. Operational competence thus enables strangers to choose the "right" combi-

nation of verbal and nonverbal actions to meet the demands of everyday interactions – managing face-to-face encounters, initiating and maintaining relationships, seeking appropriate information sources, solving various problems they may encounter, and finding ways to succeed in accomplishing their goals.

Social Communication

Strangers' host communication competence is directly and reciprocally linked to their participation in the social communication activities of the host society. On the one hand, their social communication activities are constrained by their capacity to communicate in the host cultural context. On the other hand, each communication encounter with the host society offers strangers an opportunity to cultivate host communication competence cognitively, affectively, and operationally.

Central to the domain of social communication is *interpersonal communication*, or direct face-to-face interaction in the context of interpersonal relationships with others. As Fogel (1993) argues, individuals develop through their relationships. Interpersonal communication activities help strangers to secure vital information and insight into the mind-sets and behaviors of the local people. In interacting with the natives face to face, strangers also learn about themselves – how they think, express themselves, and respond to others. As a result, strangers' interpersonal communication activities not only enable them to carry out their daily tasks, but also provide them with needed emotional support and points of reference for checking and validating their own thoughts and actions (Adelman, 1988; Kim, 1986, 1987; McPherson, 1991; Pescosolido, 1992; Wellman, 1992).

In addition to interpersonal communication, strangers' participation in the host social communication process occurs as they are exposed to the *mass communication* activities of the host society. These activities involve a wide range of public media, large and small, from radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and movies to art, music, and drama. By engaging in such communication activities, strangers interact with their host milieu without direct involvement with specific individuals;

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they expand the scope of their adaptive learning beyond the immediate social context with which they have contact. In transmitting messages that reflect the aspirations, myths, work, and play, as well as the issues and events of the host society, the various mass communication media explicitly or implicitly convey the world views, myths, beliefs, values, mores, and norms of the culture. Of the various forms of mass communication experiences, exposure to information-oriented messages such as those found in newspapers, magazines, television and radio news, and documentaries has been found to be particularly helpful to adaptation, when compared with exposure to more entertainment-oriented media 'contents' (Kim, Lee, & Jeong, 1982; Kim, 1976, 1979b).

The effect of mass communication on adaptation should be particularly significant during the initial phase of resettlement (Kim, Lee, & Jeong, 1982; Kim, 1976, 1979b). During this phase, strangers have not yet developed a level of host communication competence sufficient to forge meaningful interpersonal relationships with local people. Direct communication experiences with the natives can be intensely frustrating or intimidating to many strangers. They may feel awkward and out of place in relating to others, and the immediate negative feedback from another person may be too overwhelming for them to have pleasurable face-to-face encounters with the natives. Under such circumstances, the strangers naturally tend to withdraw from direct contacts and instead prefer mass media as an alternative, pressure-free channel through which elements of the host culture can be experienced (Kim, 1979b; Ryu, 1978; Walker, 1993; Yang, 1988).

The Role of the Environment

The adaptation function of personal and social (interpersonal and mass) communication cannot be fully understood in isolation from the conditions of the new sociocultural milieu. Societies and communities present different environments for strangers, particularly in three key areas: (1) host receptivity, (2) host conformity pressure, and (3) ethnic group strength. Together, these factors help define the

relative degree of "push and pull" that a given stranger is likely to face in a host environment.

Host Receptivity

The receptivity of a host environment refers to the degree to which the environment is open to, welcomes, or accepts strangers into its social communication networks and offers them various forms of informational, technical, material, and emotional support. The term *host receptivity* incorporates the meaning of other similar terms, such as *interaction potential* (Kim, 1979a) and *acquaintance potential* (Cook, 1962), that have been employed to refer to the access that strangers have to the host social communication processes.

A given environment can be receptive toward certain groups of strangers and unwelcoming toward certain others. For example, Canadian visitors arriving in a small town in the United States are likely to find a largely receptive environment. Yet the same town may show less receptivity toward visitors from lesser known and vastly different cultures such as Turkey or Iran. Such differences in host receptivity toward strangers can be attributed to a number of plausible reasons, including (1) the nature of the relationship, friendly or hostile, between the host country and the stranger's home country, (2) the degree of cultural and ideological difference and incompatibility between the two cultures, (3) the perceived or actual status or power of the stranger's home country and culture, (4) the perceived or actual economic, social, and political standing (or merit) of the stranger's ethnic group within the host society, (5) the perceived or actual economic, social, and political threat to the host society posed by the stranger's ethnic group, and (6) the racial/ethnic prejudice predominantly held by the society against certain groups.

Host Conformity Pressure

Societies (and communities) also vary in the degree of "conformity pressure" (Zajonc, 1952) they exert - that is, the extent to which the natives exert conscious or unconscious pressure on strangers to change their original patterns of behavior and adopt

those of the new culture. Conversely, societies (and communities) differ in the degree to which local people are able or willing to permit, tolerate, accommodate, or appreciate cultural practices that strangers bring with them and to allow strangers to deviate from the hosts' normative expectations. Host conformity pressure should be distinguished from host receptivity in that a society that strongly expects strangers to conform to its cultural life may or may not welcome strangers with distinct cultural and ethnic characteristics.

The conformity pressure of a given host environment is not uniformly applied to all strangers. It is often more acutely felt by those strangers whose livelihood is dependent on communicating well with and being accepted by the natives (De Vos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990, p. 253). Proficiency in the host language and culture is particularly vital to immigrants whose success or failure in pursuing personal goals is dependent on the acceptance and approval of at least the relevant segments of the host population. Even some temporary sojourners, such as employees of multinational companies, Peace Corps volunteers, diplomats, and international students, are subject to some degree of host conformity pressure as they try to carry out their tasks and develop good working relationships with local people. By comparison, other sojourner groups, such as American military personnel stationed overseas, whose daily activities are largely independent of the workings of the host society are subject to only a minimal level of host conformity pressure.

Another factor influencing the degree of host conformity pressure is the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity of a given environment. Societies (and communities) that are more pluralistic in ethnic profile and mainstream political ideology (such as metropolitan centers in democratic societies like Australia, Canada, England, and the United States) tend to manifest a greater accommodation of foreign-born individuals as well as native-born ethnic minorities. A stricter imposition of dominant linguistic and cultural patterns on all people can be seen in more traditional societies with authoritarian political systems (such as China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia). In such monolithic societies, foreign-born

visitors or immigrants are likely to be subject to a greater pressure to follow local customs.

Ethnic Group Strength

Another environmental condition affecting strangers' adaptation is the strength of their ethnic group relative to the host society at large. Ethnic groups differ in their relative status within the host society. A useful insight into ethnic group strength has been provided by sociologists Clarke and Obler (1976), who proposed a three-stage theory of ethnic group development. The first is the stage of the economic adjustment, which begins upon arrival of the group and continues until the group becomes an integral part of the permanent economy. The second stage is community building, which involves the development of community leadership and institutional resources that are used to assert the ethnic group's identity and interests. This stage of ethnic community development corresponds to the concept of "institutional completeness" (Breton, 1964, 1991; Goldenberg & Haines, 1992). The third stage is the period of political growth and aggressive self-assertion, which serves to strengthen the collective ethnic identity and common interests of the group.

The phenomenon of ethnic group strength has been discussed in social psychology in terms of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles & Johnson, 1987). In research on the influences of the social milieu and the consequences of fluency in a second language, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) suggested that the influence of ethnolinguistic vitality on individual behavior can be defined in terms of three structural variables: (1) the status of a language in a community, (2) the absolute and relative number of its locuters, and (3) the institutional support (such as governmental services, schools, mass media) for the ethnic language. Ethnolinguistic vitality as an objective environmental condition has been linked to what Giles and his associates (1977) term "subjective ethnolinguistic vitality," or the perceived legitimacy of the position of one's ethnic group. For example, speakers who perceive the subordinate position of their group as legitimate are likely to adjust their communication behaviors to "converge" with those of the dominant outgroup.

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The preceding two views on ethnic group strength offer implications for the role of ethnic group strength in a stranger's adaptation to the host society. Integrating these views allows us to describe the strength of an ethnic group in terms of one or more of the following elements: (1) ethnolinguistic vitality, (2) economic status, (3) institutional completeness, and (4) ethnic political activism. Frequently, these community characteristics are closely associated with the size of the ethnic population and the historical "maturity" of the community in the host society. From this perspective, the Cuban Americans in Miami, Florida, for example, have an ethnic community that is stronger than the smaller Russian community in Chicago. Exceptions can be seen in a small ethnic group such as that of the Americans who recently began working and living in the former Czechoslovakia. Despite this group's small size, the fact that it is American gives it political and economic status and prestige that render it a strong ethnic group.

Because a stronger ethnic group provides its members with a stronger subculture and offers many vital services to its members, it is likely to facilitate the cross-cultural adaptation of strangers during the initial phase. In the long run, however, a strong ethnic community tends to discourage the adaptation of strangers to the host society because it encourages ethnolinguistic maintenance. A strong ethnic community is further likely to exert subtle or even explicit pressure to conform to the ethnic community norms; it thereby discourages an active participation in the host social communication activities. Empirical evidence supporting this observation is provided by Rosenthal and Hrynevich (1985), who found that the Greek immigrant community in Australia is more cohesive and organized than is the Italian; they also reported that Greek Australian adolescents placed more emphasis than did Italian Australian adolescents on their ethnic identity and maintenance of their heritage. In addition, according to the investigators, the Greek Australian adolescents placed less emphasis on adapting to the dominant Australian culture. Similar results were reported by Driedger (1976), who found, in Canada, that an ethnic group's status within the host society correlated with its institu-

tional completeness; groups high on both status and institutional completeness (the French and Jewish groups) had the strongest sense of ethnic identity.

The Role of Predisposition

The adaptation of strangers is influenced not only by the conditions of the host environment, but also by the traits that the strangers themselves bring to the adaptive journey. Each stranger begins the adaptation process with a different set of pre-existing internal characteristics that help set the parameters for their own subsequent changes. Some begin with enthusiasm and determination, while others find themselves forced into change by unavoidable circumstances. Some may be wide open to new experiences, while others may feel they are too old to make changes in their lifetime habits. The various ways in which strangers differ in their internal conditions can be organized into three categories: (1) preparedness, (2) ethnicity, and (3) personality. Together, these predispositional factors constitute a stranger's "adaptive potential" (Kim, 1979a) or "permeability" (De Vos, 1990) with respect to the host environment.

Preparedness

Strangers come to their new environment with differing levels of preparedness, or readiness, for dealing with that environment. Specifically, their preparedness is reflected in the level of host communication competence they have acquired prior to moving to the host culture. As previously discussed, host communication competence includes the cognitive, affective, and operational abilities to participate in the social communication activities of the host society — from knowledge of the new language and culture and ability to empathize with the local people's emotional and aesthetic experiences to the capacity to perform appropriately and effectively in various social situations.

Strangers' preparedness is raised when they have realistic expectations and knowledge about the host society, shaped by formal and informal learning (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990). Included in such learning activities are schooling and training in, as well as media exposure to, the host language

and culture. Education in particular, regardless of its cultural context, helps expand our mental capacity for new learning and for meeting the challenges of life in general. Many cross-cultural training and orientation programs emphasize familiarizing trainees with their host culture (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Landis & Bhagat, 1995). For some strangers, an even more effective source of language and culture learning occurs through personal contacts with members of the host society prior to actually entering the host society. Peace Corps volunteers are among the best-prepared sojourners because they go through an intensive screening process and extensive language and cultural training before being given an overseas assignment.

Strangers' preparedness is also influenced by whether their cross-cultural move is voluntary or involuntary and by how long they intend to stay in the host society. Voluntary, long-term immigrants, for example, are likely to enter the host society with greater readiness and willingness to make necessary changes in themselves than are temporary visitors who relocate for reasons (such as wars or natural disasters) other than their own volition.

Ethnicity

Strangers vary not only in their preparedness but also in their ethnicity (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). The term *ethnicity* is used here as an inclusive term to refer to various inherited characteristics that strangers have as members of a distinct ethnic group. Japanese sojourners and immigrants, for example, bring to a given host society common physical, linguistic, and cultural features that are different from, say, features of Mexican or French sojourners. Such ethnic characteristics play a crucial role in the cross-cultural adaptation process by affecting the ease or difficulty with which strangers develop communication competence in a given host society and participate in its social communication activities.

The ethnicity of a given stranger influences his or her adaptation process in two interrelated ways. First, each ethnic background presents certain linguistic and cultural barriers for the stranger to overcome before developing host communication competence and being able to participate in host

social communication activities. Second, each individual ethnicity creates a certain psychological barrier (or affinity) in the minds of the natives, which, in turn, affects the natives' receptivity toward the stranger. Strangers embark on their cross-cultural adaptation process with certain advantages (or handicaps) due simply to their ethnic characteristics (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992, p. 145). Japanese business executives in the United States, for example, are likely to face a greater challenge in overcoming language barriers than are their British counterparts. Their physical features (such as height, skin color, and facial structure) may add to the challenge they face by accentuating the psychological gap between them and their American hosts.

Personality

Strangers differ from one another not only in ethnicity but also in personality – a set of more or less enduring traits and sensibilities. Each stranger meets the challenges of the new environment within the context of his or her own personal psychological tendencies. Of particular importance are three personality factors – openness, strength, and positivity – that interactively facilitate strangers' adaptation by enabling them to endure stressful challenges and maximize new learning.

Openness is defined as an internal posture that is receptive to new information (Gendlin, 1962, 1978). Openness, like a child's innocence, allows strangers to minimize their resistance and to maximize their willingness to attend to the new and changed circumstances. Openness further enables strangers to perceive and interpret various events and situations in the new environment, as they occur, with less rigid, ethnocentric judgments. It is a dimension of personality that encourages strangers to continually seek new cultural learning, to cultivate greater emotional and aesthetic sensitivity, and to expand the range of their behavioral repertoire – all of which are vital to actively participating in and accommodating to the demands of the host milieu. This term incorporates other similar but more specific concepts such as "flexibility," "open-mindedness," and "tolerance for ambiguity."

Strength is an additional personality trait that bears significance for cross-cultural adaptation.

Closely related to openness, strength of personality serves as a type of inner resolve that empowers strangers to take on intercultural challenges without losing their basic integrity. Personality strength, unlike stubbornness, includes the quality of flexibility—that is, the ability to “bend,” to empathize with others while believing in oneself, and to let go of anxiousness (MacKinnon, 1978). While stubbornness discourages adaptation, strength facilitates creative and effective responses to impending problems. The strength of personality thus represents a personal capacity to cope with various difficulties presented in an alien culture and to find what is best in each potentially problematic situation. It allows strangers to fix their sights and chart a course without depending heavily on, or blaming, external forces because they are equipped with a solid sense of self as the main agent of action and responsibility.

Personality strength, in this sense, is a broad concept that represents a range of interrelated personality attributes such as resilience, risk taking, hardiness, persistence, patience, elasticity, and resourcefulness. It represents all of the inner qualities that help an individual to absorb shocks from the environment and bounce back without being seriously damaged by them. Strangers with a high level of personality strength tend to be stimulated by new challenges and remain effervescent and confident. On the other hand, low levels of personality strength are manifested in tendencies to be shy, fearful, and easily distressed by uncertain or stressful situations.

The open and strong personality tends to be a positive one as well. *Positivity* refers to an affirmative and optimistic outlook and to the capacity to defy negative prediction (Dean & Popp, 1990). Positivity does not mean blind romanticism or far-fetched idealism. It means, instead, the enduring tendency to see the bright side of things while recognizing their dark side. When directed inward, positivity reflects a fundamental confidence in one's ability to overcome obstacles. Positivity helps one to find what is best in each problematic situation and to discover what can be learned from it (Maslow, 1969; Zurcher, 1977).

Positivity, together with openness and strength, helps define the personality predispositions that serve as inner resources. These attributes help strangers “push” themselves in their adaptation process. Strong, open, and positive individuals are less likely to give up easily and more likely to take risks willingly under challenging situations in the host society. They are better equipped to work toward developing host communication competence because they continually seek new learning and new ways to handle their life activities. In doing so, they become better able to make necessary adjustments in themselves. Serious lack of these qualities, on the other hand, weakens an individual's adaptive capacity and works as a self-imposed barrier against adaptive development (Hettinga, 1979).

Summary and Integration

In this essay, I have described the cross-cultural adaptation process as a joint, interactive venture: The strangers and the host environment co-influence the dynamic and fluctuating experiences of stress, adaptation, and growth. The adaptation process is essentially a manifestation of the ever-present human capacity to face challenges, learn from them, and arrive at a greater level of self-integration. Few individuals in an alien environment can entirely escape the necessity to adapt. Adaptation occurs naturally and most, if not all, strangers welcome it as long as they are engaged in direct and continual interactions with the host environment.

At the heart of the adaptation process are communication activities that link strangers and the host environment. As strangers undergo continual interaction of push and pull with the new environment, they become more functionally fit and psychologically healthier. These adaptive changes hinge on the psychic movement of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic strangers experience as they cope with the challenges of the environment. As a result, they acquire new cultural elements (acculturation) and unlearn at least some of their old cultural habits (deculturation). Because of the central role of communication in the adaptation process, the quantity and quality of strangers' interpersonal and

mass communication activities contribute critically to, and are facilitated by, the development of their host communication competence. The strangers' host communication competence serves as the internal "engine" that carries them along the adaptive journey, while their participation in host social communication processes serves as the very "fuel" that ignites the engine. Realistically, few strangers can ever adapt completely, no matter how long and how extensive their communication with the host environment. Most of them, nonetheless, do make a workable adaptation given sufficient time and are gradually able to attain a higher level of proficiency in managing their daily affairs.

As strangers participate in various forms of interpersonal and mass communication activities, they are both encouraged and pressured by the host society as well as by their ethnic community. The three environmental conditions—host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength—help define the "push and pull" dynamics that a receiving society offers strangers. An environment influences stranger adaptation optimally when the native population welcomes and supports the strangers (receptivity), while expecting them to conform to the local norms (host conformity pressure). In facing these environmental forces, the strangers' own predisposition plays an important role. Strangers who are better prepared for the new environment, whose ethnic backgrounds are more similar to the dominant ethnicity of the local people, and whose personality is more open, stronger, and more positive are better able to facilitate their own adaptation process.

Should strangers choose successful adaptation, they must be prepared and willing to face the stressful experiences of coping with the uncertainties and anxieties in the host society. They must concentrate on acquiring new communication habits and putting aside some of the old ones. They must recognize the importance of host communication competence as the fundamental mechanism by which they adapt successfully, and they must work to develop it to the fullest extent possible. They must also take maximum advantage of opportunities to participate in the interpersonal and mass

communication processes of the host society. Finally, they must work toward achieving a greater openness, strength, and positivity in their personal disposition.

However, strangers cannot accomplish their adaptive goals alone. Adaptation is an interactive process involving both strangers and the new environment. Indeed, members of the host society can help facilitate strangers' adaptation by maximizing receptivity toward the strangers—by accepting their original ethnicity and providing them with a supportive interpersonal environment. The host society can actively encourage strangers to adapt through communication training programs. Such programs should facilitate the strangers' acquisition of host communication competence. In addition, the ethnic community can provide a significant adaptive service for the strangers in their early stages of resettlement. Ethnic communities can provide support systems to assist new arrivals in coping with stresses and initial uncertainties and can guide them toward effective adaptation. At the same time, however, strangers must realize that exclusive and prolonged reliance on their ethnic community will delay and eventually limit opportunities for them to adapt to the host milieu.

Ultimately, the adaptation of strangers, particularly long-term immigrants, is of vital interest to the host society as well. Through communication, the host society is able to engender mutual trust and good will among its diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Amir, 1969) and thereby maintain the necessary societal unity and integrity. As long as common channels of communication remain, consensus and patterns of concerted action will persist in the society (Mendelsohn, 1964). Communication, then, makes it possible to merge the incoming new members into a cohesive social organization of commonly shared ideas and values.

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Aesthetics as a Bridge to Multicultural Understanding

JAMES STEVEN SAUCEDA

Bicentennial celebrations were taking place throughout Australia, but in Townsville, a remote section of Queensland, a "counter" festival was being staged by aborigines. The people of Townsville were outraged; hostilities ran high. Even before opening ceremonies could begin, the local newspaper's banner headline had proclaimed "Festival Fiasco."¹ And the tension continued to escalate as aborigines from all over Australia poured into Townsville. Some tribes, in fact, traveled hundreds of miles on foot to attend, only to be met by suspicion, distrust, and even hatred.

Yet just five days later the headlines gushed: "Wow - What a Festival!"² An extra supplement added to the paper featured human interest stories about many of the participants and highlighted the importance of ancient aboriginal art forms such as sand painting. Few of us are likely to realize that the Australian aborigine is said to have the world's oldest continuous tradition of visual art. Westerners, for example, are seldom aware that aboriginal cave paintings date back at least 30,000 years (making them twice as old as those found in France).³ In one short but remarkable week, the people of Townsville had moved from strident intolerance to open acceptance of and authentic pride in the aborigines. What had happened?

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