

To what extent HCNs are influenced by MNC's home culture?

: An investigation of Japanese HCNs working in American MNCs

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7699 words

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ABSTRACT

As increasing MNCs expand its activities around the world, the number and importance of host country nationals (HCNs) are getting higher. In order to manage HCNs effectively, understanding their cultural attributes is critical. While dominant ideas in existing studies assume that HCNs culture would be identical to that of local nationals, recent studies indicate opposite findings. To explore and understand HCNs cultural attributes in more realistic context, we conducted a qualitative study of Japanese HCNs working in American MNCs. Through comparing their cultural attributes with typical Japanese culture that is described in existing studies, we found out that some of HCNs cultural attributes are same while others are different from typical local Japanese. Our findings suggest alternative viewpoint on the taken-for-granted perception that HCNs might carry the same cultural attributes with local nationals and call for further study on this interesting topic.

Key word: Host country nationals (HCNs), National culture, Organizational socialization, Japan

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing tide of globalization and MNCs' overseas expansion have led to the growing presence of foreign subsidiaries and the local employees, known as host-country nationals (HCNs). As HCNs play a vital role to bridge between MNCs and local markets/business, studies on cultural differences between MNCs home and the host country have been actively conducted (Tsui et al., 2007, Kirkman et al., 2006). Interestingly, most of previous studies on cultural difference between home and host culture assume that HCNs are culturally identical to the locals (Caprar, 2011). However, what if the assumption is not true? For example, several IB studies have demonstrated that organization's cultures and practices such as workplace politics, acronym & slang, goals, and values are drummed into their employees through organizational socialization (Chao et al., 1994; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and MNC subsidiaries are extensions of their home cultures (Morgan, 2001). Thus, considering these existing studies, it might be not reasonable to assume that HCNs share the same

cultural attributes with the locals. Because HCNs work at the intersection of the two contrasting cultures, and they would have been subjected to influences from the culture of foreign MNCs. Specifically, when host countries' national culture (e.g., Japan) is distinctively different from that of home culture (e.g., American and European MNCs), acculturation would have occurred (or been detected) more readily (Selmer & de Leon, 1993). Nevertheless, these two contrasting perspectives have remained without enough investigation to the issues of HCNs. The large body of cross-cultural studies have given little attention to the increasing group of HCNs, and little questions have been asked so far about HCNs cultural attributes.

Therefore, our research question in this study is that "Do HCNs share same cultural attributes with the locals?" If not, "To what extent are their cultural attributes different?" In order to explore our research question, we conducted interviews with 13 Japanese HCNs working in American MNCs. Throughout our research, we found out that Japanese HCNs are not culturally identical with local Japanese and some cultural dimensions are highly influenced by their corporate's home culture while others are not. Our findings have three contributions. Firstly, we present an alternative viewpoint on the existing research of HCNs' cultural characteristics. Second, by exploring this important issue in Japan context, we can provide more practical and

widely applicable insight into how HCNs' cultures differ from the locals. Third, our findings provide practical implications to MNC managers, suggesting there are stable and unstable cultural dimensions of HCNs that need to be considered when they design HRM policies and rules for HCNs. the findings of our study.

We organize this article as follows. In the next section, literature review, we explore mainstream studies relevant to our research topics such as cross-cultural studies and HCNs-related studies. Then, we suggest the need to reformulate the research approach to HCNs by presenting recent studies. Then, in method section, we address issues such as research design and data selection that we utilized to explore our research questions. And in the finding section, we explain the result of our data analysis using Meyer (2014)'s eight cultural dimensions. Finally, we will discuss contributions and limitations of our study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2-1. Overwhelming influence of National culture on individuals

In this section, we will explain some canonical cross-culture research which are used as taken-for-granted concept and still a major influence on HCNs studies. Then,

we will suggest an alternative perspective by introducing recent studies which counterargue the predominant view on HCNs.

In this era of globalization, cultural conflicts and misunderstandings are likely to occur since employees from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds work together. Thus, it has gained much importance in modern society to understand and identify cultural differences of employees (Shenkar 2001). With regards to such a phenomenon, multiple researchers such as Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997) tried to explicate cultural differences from various approaches and labeled cultures into several measurable dimensions. Although their attempts to “measure and determine” cultures have been under criticism for various reasons (Jones 2007; Cardon 2008), the influence of their study in international business has been undeniable as their pioneering contributions provide us with valuable insights into the dynamics of cross-culture understandings,

Among these cross-culture research, a series of Geert Hofstede’s research have had a profound impact on academics and practitioners, with his landmark study which comprised of 116,000 questionnaires, from over 50 countries of IBM subsidiaries (Hofstede, 1980). After he identified each country’s cultural differences on six primary dimensions and conducted further studies, he has demonstrated that the influence of

national culture is strong and long-lasting and, thus, other organizational cultures cannot completely supersede the influence of one's national culture. Furthermore, other studies such as Laurent (1989) is also aligned with Hofstede's argument and added that the majority of national values of MNCs' manager remained notwithstanding routinely working in culturally diverse situations, and consequently, his argument in national culture's overwhelming influence and changelessness has been widely accepted.

2-2. Breaking away from the prevailing concept

However, as globalization progressed rapidly, those widely accepted perceptions that a culture is equated with the boundaries of countries has been called into questions. Because the data were collected more than thirty years ago, that concept is out of touch with the theoretical developments in modern international business (Søderberg, A.-M. & Holden, N. 2002). Moreover, further studies on HCNs as follows have advocated the argument to break away from constraints of national culture framing. For example, Selmer & de Leon (1996) reported that Hong Kong and Singapore HCNs working for Swedish MNCs adopted Swedish cultural values. In his observation, the encounter of the two national cultures in the Singapore subsidiaries of

Swedish is likely to have resulted in acculturation of the Singaporean HCNs. Likewise, Ailon & Kunda (2009) have contended that MNCs have the potential to overrule or tame employees' national culture. They discovered that a MNC's approach to make a cohesive community and standardize their HCNs can result in both behavioral taming and ceremonial taming which are supposedly imprinted by their national culture.

Last but not least, Ashraf & Arshad (2017) found that the national culture of headquarters' home country has higher impact on the behavior of foreign affiliates of multinational banks than the national culture of their host country. Based on Hofstede's framework, they revealed that foreign subsidiaries take higher risk behavior if parent bank's home country has low uncertainty avoidance. It implies that MNCs home cultural values can be transmitted to foreign subsidiaries.

As such, multiple findings of current studies are not consistent with prevailing concept from studies on national culture, and more recent studies suggested that national culture or values of HCNs are likely to be influenced by the culture of their company's motherland.

2-3. Caprar's study

Among the recent studies focusing on HCNs' cultural attributes, Caprar (2011) provides insightful findings from the rigorous study of Romanian HCNs working in American MNCs' local subsidiaries. In order to collect data, he conducted a focus group and individual interviews with 25 HCNs and 16 significant others of them such as friends and families. Subsequently, he discovered that multiple cultural characteristics of HCNs are set apart from the locals. Furthermore, based on level of adaption and attitude toward American MNCs, he claimed that HCNs can be labeled into 5 types, referred to the infatuated, the converted, the reconciled, the conflicted, and the estranged. His analysis has proven that MNCs have the potential of "switching" HCNs cultural attributes towards the MNCs' home culture and, thus, they might not subscribe to the culture stemmed from their nationality.

Although his study has provided valuable insights and enriched our understanding of HCNs, the research context of American MNCs in Rumania has limitations to be extended to other settings. Because there was a huge gap between America and Romania in terms of economy, average wage, educational standards (PISA), and the international competitiveness of local companies. In fact, according to his 5 types of HCNs, 'The infatuated type' is described as those who feel sense of privilege and display extremely favorable attitude towards the American MNCs due to their

relatively special status and better skillset than the locals. However, the question remains whether such type of employee would have emerged even when the overall level of local and foreign companies is the same. It seems more reasonable to assume that the aforementioned gap is a massive factor to arouse their extremely favorable attitude toward their company's home culture and the sense of superiority. Thus, although the research context of Caprar (2011) was relevant to highlight HCNs distinctiveness, we need more studies to examine whether Caprar (2011)'s findings can be generalizable to other contexts. After considering these points, we propose that Japan is a suitable alternative context to conduct this research for following two reasons. First, Japanese culture and the way of thinking is generally considered absolutely different from western counterpart in the findings of multiple cross-culture researches. Especially, it differs from American culture in almost the complete opposite in many aspects such as whether they are collectivism or individualism, avoiding confrontation or not (Chu et al.,1999). With these contrasting cultures, acculturation in Japanese subsidiaries of American MNCs would be easily detected because the MNCs' parent culture is obviously different from the host culture (Selmer & de Leon 1993).

Secondly, in terms of aforementioned gap, Japan is the world 2nd largest economy, and its international competitiveness of local companies and education standard

(PISA) are not far behind from U.S. Consequently, investigating into Japanese subsidiaries of American MNCs enable us to focus on pure cultural reaction, and it will bring more balanced results. For this reason, we decide to explore our question in Japanese subsidiaries of American MNCs.

3. METHOD

3-1. Research Setting

We determined to conduct qualitative study because it is the most appropriate approach to explore our research question for several reasons. First, qualitative method is better suited to grasp the concept of individual cultural traits. Culture is a very complex and ambiguous concept. At the same time, it is closely related to the individual's specific experiences and thoughts, expressed as "cultural patterns of behavior and interpretations cease to exist unless they are repeatedly enacted as people respond to occurrences in their daily lives" (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985: 35). Also, depending on how one perceives culture, one's perception of it may differ: "what we notice, and experience as cultural change depends directly on how we conceptualize culture" (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). To capture these concepts, it is necessary to grasp the context and detailed nuances through dialogue. This can be achieved by qualitative

interviews because meanings can be lost in the process of converting context, concepts, and thoughts of individuals into numeric data. Second, during the initial try of survey question preparation, we recognized that the questionnaires can be easily interpreted differently by different individuals. In fact, in our initial questionnaires, the same question can lead to opposite conclusions depending on how our respondents interpret it. Thus, we decided not to take the large-N survey approach. Third, at the same time, we were also aware that there is a discrepancy between the subjective perception of an individual's cultural characteristics and their actual expression. For example, even if a respondent describes his or her communication style as 'low-context', it may well be that the way he or she answers is like 'high-context'. Therefore, we opted for semi-structured interviews in order to obtain a more accurate data of HCNs cultural attributes.

We developed interview questionnaire corresponded to some scales of cultural characteristics with reference to two previous studies. First, we tried to introduce the Caprar (2011) study mentioned above to find out the subjective biased value perceptions of belonging to MNCs, such as elitist perceptions of working in MNCs and superiority to Japanese companies. We used the Caprar's study as a reference because it has much in common with the present study, focusing on cultural differences among HCNs. However, there are limitations to using the same methods as the Caprar's study

in terms of the high degree of subjectivity and the time and resources constraints for our study. Therefore, second, to overcome such limitations, we adopted another previous study, Meyer (2014)'s 'culture map'. Meyer proposed eight cultural dimensions that emerge in business settings as follows.

- 1) Communicating: low-context or high-context
- 2) Evaluating: direct negative feedback or indirect negative feedback
- 3) Persuading: principles-first or applications-first
- 4) Leading: egalitarian or hierarchical
- 5) Deciding: consensual or top-down
- 6) Trusting: task-based or relationship-based
- 7) Disagreeing: confrontational or avoids confrontation
- 8) Scheduling: linear-time or flexible-time

The details of each dimension are summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Cultural Dimensions in Meyer (2014)’s study

Dimension	Detail	
COMMUNICATING	<p>Low-Context Good communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.</p>	<p>High-Context Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.</p>
EVALUATING	<p>Direct negative feedback Negative feedback to a colleague is provided frankly, bluntly, honestly. Negative messages stand alone, not softened by positive ones. Absolute descriptors are often used (totally inappropriate, completely unprofessional) when criticizing. Criticism may be given to an individual in front of a group.</p>	<p>Indirect negative feedback Negative feedback to a colleague is provided softly, subtly, diplomatically. Positive messages are used to wrap negative ones. Qualifying descriptors are often used (sort of inappropriate, slightly unprofessional) when criticizing. Criticism is given only in private.</p>
PERSUADING	<p>Applications-first Individuals are trained to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and later add concepts to back up or explain the <u>conclusion</u> as necessary. The preference is to begin a message or report with an executive summary or bullet points. Discussions are approached in a practical, concrete manner. Theoretical or philosophical discussions are avoided in a business environment.</p>	<p>Principles-first Individuals have been trained to first develop the theory or complex concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. The preference is to begin a message or report by building up a theoretical argument before moving on to a conclusion. The conceptual principles underlying each situation are valued.</p>
LEADING	<p>Egalitarian The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is low. The best boss is a facilitator among equals. Organizational structures are flat. Communication often skips hierarchical lines.</p>	<p>Hierarchical The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is high. The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. Status is important. Organizational structures are multilayered and fixed. Communication follows set hierarchical lines.</p>
DECIDING	<p>Consensual Decisions are made in groups through unanimous agreement.</p>	<p>Top-down Decisions are made by individuals (usually the boss).</p>
TRUSTING	<p>Task-based Trust is built through business-related activities. Work relationships are built and dropped easily, based on the practicality of the situation. You do good work consistently, you are reliable, I enjoy working with you, I trust you.</p>	<p>Relationship-based Trust is built through sharing meals, evening drinks, and at the coffee machine. Work relationships build up slowly over the long term. I've seen who you are at a deep level, I've shared personal time with you, I know others well who trust you, I trust you.</p>
DISAGREEING	<p>Confrontational Disagreement and debate are positive for the team or organization. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively impact the relationship.</p>	<p>Avoids confrontation Disagreement and debate are negative for the team or organization. Open confrontation is inappropriate and will break group harmony or negatively impact the relationship.</p>
SCHEDULING	<p>Linear-time Project steps are approached in a sequential fashion, completing one task before beginning the next. One thing at a time. No interruptions. The focus is on the deadline and sticking to the schedule. Emphasis is on promptness and good organization over flexibility.</p>	<p>Flexible-time Project steps are approached in a fluid manner, changing tasks as opportunities arise. Many things are dealt with at once and interruptions accepted. The focus is on adaptability, and flexibility is valued over organization.</p>

(Meyer, 2014)

Meyer (2014)’s culture map was used because of its comprehensiveness in that the dimensions were created by referring to a wide range of previous studies on national culture. It is also suitable because it is a relatively new study, and therefore, it fits the

times. However, we needed to adapt Meyer (2014)'s original dimensions to Japanese context to explore Japanese HCNs better. For example, the questions that corresponded to each item were not always suitable for understanding cultural characteristics in the Japanese context. We tried to overcome these limitations by reinterpreting the questions during translation to create questions with fewer gaps in intention, designing the questions to fit the Japanese context, and adding our own questions. When reinterpreting, we read the relevant studies, works, and references to avoid misinterpretations.

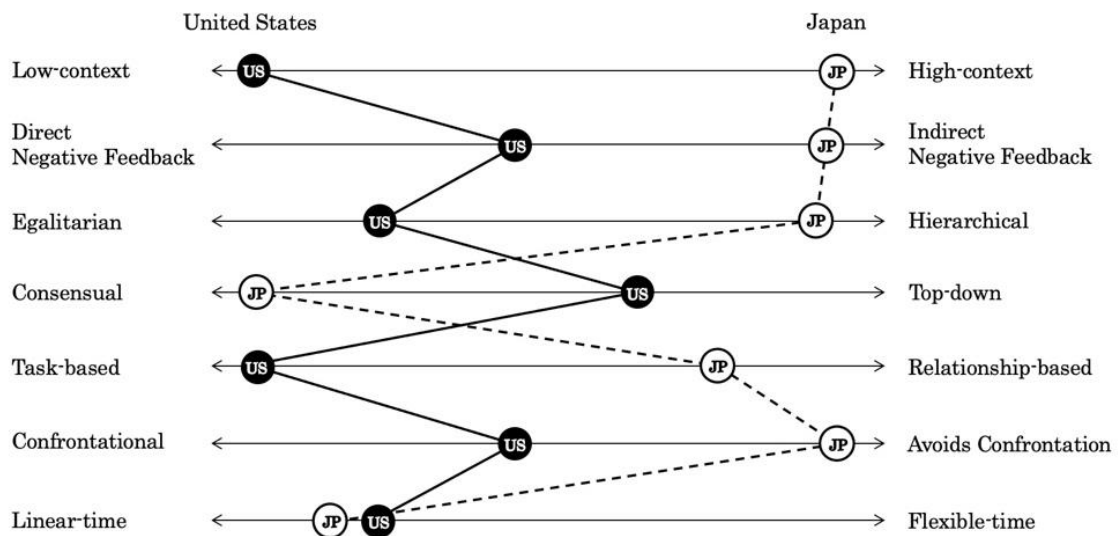
To compare cultural characteristics, we defined typical Japanese culture in seven dimensions (because of peculiarities of Asian Culture, it is impossible to compare characteristic in 'Persuading' (Meyer, 2014), so this dimension was excluded), then compare cultural characteristics of HCNs with it. Usually, it is not possible to define national culture like this because Meyer emphasizes the importance of relativity in capturing the cultural characteristics of different countries, expressed as "The point here is that, when examining how people from different cultures relate to one another, what matters is not the absolute position of either culture on the scale but rather the relative position of the two cultures" (Meyer, 2014). For example, United States is 'consensual' culture in 'deciding' when compared with Japan, but it will be 'top-down'

culture when compared with some other countries. However, because Japan is described as “extreme culture” in existing studies, we can define typical Japanese culture in each of the dimensions.

Figure 1 is the culture map of Japan and United States (Meyer, 2014). As you can see, Japan is almost on edge in almost all dimensions, showing contrasting characteristics except for ‘Scheduling’ where Japan and the U.S. show similar tendency. For analytical purpose, we define Japanese culture as follows based on Meyer (2014)’s findings.

- 1) Communicating: high context
- 2) Evaluating: indirect negative feedback
- 3) Leading: hierarchical
- 4) Deciding: consensual
- 5) Trusting: relationship-based
- 6) Disagreeing: avoids confrontation
- 7) Scheduling: linear time

Figure 1. Comparison of cultural characteristics of United States and Japan by culture map



(Meyer, 2014)

We compare and grasp cultural characteristics of HCNs with the above. However, although Meyer (2014) introduced 8 dimensions, we finally adopted 5 dimensions (Communication, Evaluating, Leading, Deciding, Disagreeing) in our final analysis. The reasons we excluded 3 dimensions (Persuading, Trusting, Scheduling) are as follows. First, we exclude ‘Persuading’ because of holistic nature of Asian culture (Meyer, 2014) as mentioned above. As there are no dimensions of Japan proposed in the original work of Meyer (2014), we could not include this dimension in our comparative

analysis. Second, we excluded 'Trusting', because the definition of 'Relationship-based' includes "work relationships build up slowly over the long term" (Meyer 2014). In our study, we interviewed HCNs with short tenure in their early career, so we decided this dimension is not suitable to be included. Third, 'Scheduling' was also excluded, because as mentioned above, Japan and the U.S. show similar tendency on culture map.

To generate interview protocols, a pilot interview was first conducted using only the questions that referred to Caprar (2011). After that, we added Meyer (2014)'s dimensions, shifted our focus to those dimensions, and carefully examined and refined the content of the questions.

3-2. Data Collection and Analysis

To answer to our research question, we conducted interviews to 13 HCNs in total (Table 2). There are two reasons we selected these interviewees. First, because of high accessibility, we can get richer information. We got in touch through referrals (snowballing), so it was easier to build a trusting relationship. Second, we chose HCNs with fewer years of tenure because we thought that they are more likely to perceive cultural differences. This makes it easier for us to grasp cultural differences and changes they have or perceive.

Table 2. The list of interviewees and details of interview

Interviewee	Sex	Age	Tenure	Industry
A	male	20s	1 year	IT
B	female	20s	3 years	Finance
C	male	20s	1 year	Consulting
D	male	20s	3 years	Interpret service
E	male	30s	5 years	Insurance
F	male	20s	1 year	Consulting
G	male	20s	2 years	Consulting
H	female	20s	2 years	IT
I	female	20s	5 years	Consulting
J	male	20s	1 year	IT
K	male	20s	2 years	Software
L	male	30s	8 years	Insurance
M	male	30s	1 year	Consulting

(Source: Authors)

The interviews were conducted in two stages. First, to examine the interview questionnaire, we contacted HCNs, working at foreign MNCs in Japan, and conducted a pilot interview with 3 respondents. Then, second, the interview questionnaires were scrutinized and 10 HNCs were interviewed using the scrutinized questionnaire (13 people in total).

The interviews were conducted at a length of 60 to 90 minutes per interviewee. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for each interview. These materials were organized and stored in two forms: transcribed interviews and coded interviews. We referred the methods of content analysis (Arima, 2007) to analyze the data. The transcribed interviews were coded, and the responses were classified and analyzed. The responses to the interviews were categorized into five categories according to the dimensions of Meyer (2014)'s study, and then each dimension was coded to identify what cultural attributes the individual possessed for each dimension. The result of the analysis is presented in the next section.

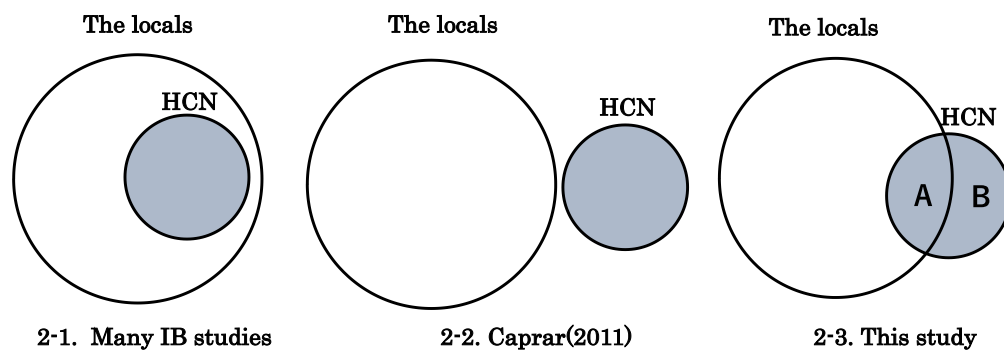
4. FINDINGS

We present our findings in this chapter. The first section, 4-1, illustrates the features of Japanese HCNs while comparing with those of existing studies. Next, in 4-2 and 4-3, we describe the same and not same parts of Japanese HCNs cultural dimensions as the local Japanese. The last section, 4-4, presents our assumption of what makes differences of cultural dimensions.

4-1. HCNs' Cultural attributes

The Figure 2 below comparatively shows HCNs' cultural attributes in existing studies and this study. Many IB studies have considered that HCNs have the same cultural characteristics as the locals (Figure2-1). Yet, Caprar (2011) questioned such a wide-spread belief about HCNs and revealed that Romanian HCNs working in local subsidiaries of American MNCs in Romania are not always culturally the same as the rest of the locals, rather very distinctive from the typical Romanians. (Figure2-2). On top of that, according to his study, some types of HCNs display extremely favorable attitude toward American MNCs and even emulate the lifestyle of American expatriates (Caprar,2011).

Figure2. HCN's cultural attributes: existing studies and this study



(Source: Authors)

However, in our study, Japanese HCNs have both the same and different elements from the locals (Figure2-3). Besides, contrary to the Caprar (2011)'s finding, above

mentioned type of HCNs who are extremely favorable to the MNC culture did not emerge from our research. Specifically, we obtained the following results based on the five dimensions of the culture map (Table3). The Table 3 below is the summary of our interviews. The horizontal row indicates our interviewees, and the vertical row shows five cultural dimensions. We compare the HCNs of our data and local Japanese in Meyer (2014)'s study. In the next section, we explain the characteristics of Japanese HCNs for each dimension based on the interview data. We labeled 'stable dimensions' when HCNs share the same cultural attributes with local Japanese, and 'unstable dimensions' when they show distinctively different cultural attributes from local Japanese.

Table 3. Summary of interview data

HCNs Dimensions	The locals Meyer(2014)	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Communicating	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Low	High
Evaluating	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Direct
Deciding	Consensual	Consensual	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down	Top-down
Disagreeing	Avoids confrontation	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational	Confrontational
Leading	Hierarchical	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian	Egalitarian

*The cells painted with the color are the different elements from typical Japanese

(Source: Authors)

4-2. Stable dimensions

In our analysis, the Communicating and Evaluating dimensions have remained consistent between Japanese HCNs and the locals.

• Communicating

Japanese HCNs exhibit a tendency to communicate in a high context, as same as the locals. Interviewee K described his communication style at the company based on his experience of working on team projects with foreign colleagues.

“Japanese language is complicated to understand. For example, even if you write a document, you have to express the subtle nuances, and some foreign colleagues are not able to adapt well to high-context culture [...].”

Regarding "air-reading" communication, which is considered to be a good listener in Japan (Meyer,2014), Interviewee G expressed the following comments based on his business stories with Japanese companies of his clients.

"If the clients in Japan have high-context culture, our direct way of communicating will

have a negative impact on the business, so we need to adjust our talking way for them, that is the tip for the success with the Japanese clients. (K)"

•Evaluating

As shown in Chapter 3, typical Japanese convey negative feedback to colleagues subtly and softly by wrapping negative messages in positive ones. Similarly, when Japanese HCNs provide negative feedback (NF) to colleagues, they tend to prefer indirect NF. Interviewee L described what he keeps in mind when giving NF to colleagues so that it does not depress them.

“Negative feedback is often useful for improvement. So, when I have to give negative feedback to someone, I always tell him that he can take it as not only his failure but also some kind of positive suggestion.”

4-3. Unstable dimensions

In our analysis, dimensions of Deciding, Leading, and Disagreeing turned out to be different between Japanese HCNs and the locals.

•Deciding

Typical Japanese are supposed to prefer the consensus-based decision-making process. On the other hand, Japanese HCNs prefer the top-down decision-making

process. Interviewee G told the reason why the decisions should be made by not all people but some persons in the following quote;

“Taking in the opinions of all the right holders in the projects make the conclusion messed-up and incomplete. I think it would be better that you do not dare to involve everyone, but ask only the real key person whom you need for this project to participate and make decisions.”

▪Disagreeing

While the locals consider open confrontation as inappropriate, oppositely, Japanese HCNs tend to think that disagreement and debate are beneficial for the team and their organization. Interviewee J told the reason why disagreeing is a valuable action for the organization in the following quote;

“Open express of dissent and questions works well in various situations. For example, when I give a new point of view for the next action on the meeting, it could lead to providing our clients best suggestions.”

▪Leading

In Japan, the ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is high. Additionally, the best boss is a strong director who leads from the front(Meyer,2014). However, all

interviewees of our study prefer egalitarian leadership. They regard a facilitator among equals as the best boss. Interviewee H is concerned about the difference in position, but she expressed relationship with her boss as follows:

“My boss and I work in relatively close relationship. Of course, we know our position is not equal, but I am not reluctant to express my opinion. My boss does not pressure us[...].”

Interviewee I also described their non-hierarchical relationship with their bosses in terms of their roles towards the client as follows:

“We are equal to the clients no matter who you are. Everyone has to play a role that is required to us, and in that sense, I think everybody is on equal footing.”

4-4. The rationale of the two dimensions

The results of our analysis suggest that, in stable dimensions, HCNs are more strongly influenced by Japanese national culture than by American culture, which is the home culture of MNCs. On the other hand, in unstable dimensions, HCNs are more influenced by American culture than by Japanese culture. Why some cultural dimensions persist while others are influenced to change? Therefore, we tried to find factors that could be related to the degrees of the influence of American culture and

Japanese culture in HCNs. As a result, in stable dimensions such as Communicating and Evaluating, we found that these factors are related with language mechanisms, the case of conversation between individuals, and worry about hurting someone's feelings from our data of the interviews. Table 4 shows example interview quotes about the factors which influences stable dimensions. In unstable dimensions, such as Deciding, Disagreeing, and Leading, we suggest that these factors are related with influence by colleagues and superiors, the cases of conversation in a group and thought valuing efficiency, which takes root in the MNCs. Table 5 shows example interview quotes about the factors which influences unstable dimensions. These factors divide 5 cultural dimensions into stable dimensions and unstable dimensions.

Table 4. Example interview quotes about the factors of stable dimensions

Similarities	Example Quotations (Alphabet of HCNs interviewees)
Language mechanism	“(In a joint project with another team), after accurately understanding the other team's situation, my foreign team member did not use Japanese words that cares for the other team [...]. The way he asked was a little rough. If I had used more polite Japanese and written it softer, it might not have been such a problem, but the way I asked gave the impression of being rude.”(K)
Interpersonal	“First of all, I would consider about which one the other person prefers, and based on our daily communication, I would give feedback in a way that suits them.” (G) “(When I do NF) If I can say in a positive way like “I have high hope for you.” or “You can do it.”, I think they could be inspired. If I am the project manager, I try to talk to each staff member at least twice every other week to find out what they are up to and what they want to do.”(K)

Worry about someone's feeling	" Basically, I do not talk with emotion[...] When I am angry, I have the feeling of frustration or annoyance. if I let it out, the person receiving the words become deflated. It is not good. So, I try to make sure that the words are conveyed word-for-word and that I do not talk with any emotion like frustration. Also, I try to say things in a way that is as mild as possible [...]. "(I)
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(Source: Authors)

Table 5. Example interview quotes about the factors of unstable dimensions

Similarities	Example Quotations (Alphabet of HCNs interviewees)
Influence by colleagues and superiors	<p>"Of course, in meetings, my bosses give us time to express our opinions and never look down on our opinions. So, I feel that they take us seriously. When I was in my first year, I tried to follow my boss's opinion, but he told me that I needed to have my own opinion. In that experience, I thought my superiors showed me that just following is not a good. "(H)</p> <p>"Even if we are young employees, People who don't voice their opinions are worthless. My boss told me "What is the value of all the time you spent for the meeting?" I felt the value insight was needed." "(I)</p>
The cases of conversation in a group	"Before I joined the company, I used to think that a boss is an authority [...]. After that, I realized there is a limit to what I can do, and in order to get the work done, I have to rely on others. Then, I started to think about how much you can delegate your authority and how you can assign work to team's members. and when I think about teams, 1 + 1 shouldn't be not 2, but 1 + 1 should be 3 or 4. From this thought, I think there are limits to respect power too much." (M)
Thought valuing efficiency	"I think it is better to have someone who plays an essential role to some extent. In terms of Japanese virtues, it is good to discuss and decide together, but it would be more beneficial and efficient to quickly decide on an opinion and talk to the person who will make it happen. "(F)

(Source: Authors)

5. DISCUSSIONS

5-1. Implication

In this paper, we have outlined an alternative perspective on the generally accepted view of HCNs that have identical culture with the locals. Our findings showed that the

cultural attributes of HCNs can differ from the host culture. Furthermore, we highlighted that some cultural dimensions are highly influenced by MNC's home culture while others are not. Our findings have largely three theoretical and practical implications.

Firstly, although exploratory in nature, our findings contribute to provide a new insight on the existing discussions of HCNs cultural attributes. Previous studies on this issue emphasized persistent nature of national culture (e.g., Hofstede, 1980) or pointed out highly distinctive nature of HCNs from the locals (e.g., Caprar, 2011). Building on these studies, we explored Japan as a context and showed that HCNs neither reflect a host country's culture nor have a totally distinctive characteristics from the locals. Interestingly, some cultural dimensions of HCNs got influenced from the MNC culture while some didn't. We argue that this perspective was not very clearly observed in existing studies, and our findings provide more nuanced understandings of HCNs cultural attributes. In particular, considering that HCNs will be researched more and more due to their growing presence in business, our explorative attempts to draw more attention to the cultural mix of host country and company will benefit future research.

Secondly, we claim that our study of HCNs can be more applicable to wider contexts.

Whereas Caprar (2011) conducted a valuable empirical study, we find his attempt to compare Romania and the US biased as the economic and political gaps between these nations are humongous. On the other hand, our focus on Japanese subsidiaries of American MNCs will bring more balanced results due to smaller gaps on these countries' economic and political realities. Thus, our interviewees do not have a sense of elitism or an excessively favorable attitude toward American MNCs culture as found in Caprar (2011)'s result. It adds further balance to our result compared to the previous study and proves benefits to replicate HCNs study in various contexts.

Finally, our finding suggests that MNCs must pay extra attention to stable and unstable cultural attributes of HCNs while devising HRM policies for their subsidiaries. For example, as we can see from our findings, the communication and evaluating dimensions of Japanese HCNs are congruent with the locals, and it turned out to be less affected notwithstanding the recommendations from their boss and training. Whereas, contrary to the locals, HCNs appear to have no resistance to set out objections and are predisposed to prefer top-down decision-making process and egalitarian values. If American MNCs attempt to acculturate Japanese HCNs' cultural attributes of communication and evaluation to those of America, it would cause disagreements and cultural conflicts. On the other hand, if they adopt consensual

decision-making process and hierarchical leadership style based on the host culture, it may give rise to falling productivity and job dissatisfaction. Considering that MNCs attempt cultural control in their foreign subsidiaries to create smoothly functioning organization and enhance productivity (Ailon & Kunda, 2009), they will have to consider the appropriate range or degree to penetrate one-corporate culture in their foreign subsidiaries.

5-2. Limitations

Despite the above-mentioned implications of our findings, our study has a number of limitations that call for future research.

First, although we designed our data collection from early career HCNs purposely, further data of mid-term and long-term career HCNs would provide more interesting results in a future study. Through that, we can develop further understandings on whether HCNs who worked longer than our interviewees showed cultural attributes more similar to American. Indeed, we inquired about the cultural characteristic of our interviewees' boss or those who worked longer than 10 years during the interview. Yet, since turnover is very common in foreign MNCs, we had difficulties with collecting the data.

Second, future study can extend its interviews with HCNs in more various industries than our study that focused on consulting industry. Prior studies have demonstrated that individuals' occupations are the most highly distinctive and pervasive sources of subcultures in work organizations and that they shared consciousness of kind includes social identity, values and emotional demands associated with the occupation (Sirmon & Lane, 2004). Thus, assuming that occupational culture would have an impact on HCNs cultural attributes seems reasonable. Future study can extend its occupational and industrial range to further explore this topic.

Third, there needs a further study to distinguish whether the cultural attributes of HCNs are from individual background or organizational experience in MNCs. There is a possibility that those who return home after having lived abroad for an extensive period of time displayed cultural values much more different from typical Japanese cultural attributes including communication and evaluating dimension than HCNs. In particular, given that MNCs strategically target these "returnees" in their hiring efforts and those returnees also particularly find jobs in MNCs (Lazarova & Tung 2006), advanced HRM will be required to distinguish HCNs, returnees, and the locals.

Last but not least, although we have made in-depth investigation into individual interviewees, the limited number of our interviewees can be regarded as a drawback. As we mentioned above, we initially relied on alumni of Tohoku university working for American MNCs and we managed to collect together 14 interviewees and 66 survey respondents. However, as we supplement the interview questionnaire and modified research design, we eventually had to abandon initial interview records and research data. Furthermore, our findings are likely to initiate a new debate that what if the research data was collected from non-American MNCs. Even so, we believe that our research is worth in respect of almost first approach to explore HCNs cultural attributes in Japan. Future study can develop our findings by collecting more data across various occupations and organizations to further confirm or refine our findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are deeply grateful for all interviewees.

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