

Cross-cultural Health Psychological Perspective of Eating Behaviors: Developing Cross-cultural Dietary Education for Sojourners

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1. The traditional Japanese way of living a healthy life

There is an abundance of interesting material available regarding the traditional Japanese way of living a healthy life. The person is **Kaibara Ekiken** who lived in Japan about three hundred years ago. He was alive from 1630 to 1714, who was a Confucian scholar and a scholar of herbalism. He was a scholar of Confucianism and of herbalism. In 2007, at the third Asian Congress of Health Psychology in Tokyo, Professor Yutaka Haruki made a presentation about his philosophy of health in a symposium entitled “Health Psychology in Asia.” The health-promoting methods of Ekiken are still effective today and could be considered to be treasure of tradition.

There is his book, which is called "Yojo-kun (Figure 1)." The name means “the indicator for health maintenance.” A translated English version is also available. Some example of the book’s precepts are as follows. We should enjoy a healthy life carefully avoiding sickness. The length of a lifespan is dependent on your diligent attention. If you maintain peace of mind and reduce anger and anxiety, you can achieve mental health. Live without over- or under-indulging in exercise, nourishment, or rest. Modest eating and drinking and the use of light seasoning are recommended. A hot spring works for injury. Smoking is harmful. You should choose a doctor carefully. Medicine can be both effective and harmful. Develop knowledge about how to spend old age and how to care for elderly persons.

The philosophical background of Japanese healthy lifestyle traditions can be used to ensure mental and physical health throughout a life time.

2. The status of Japanese health today

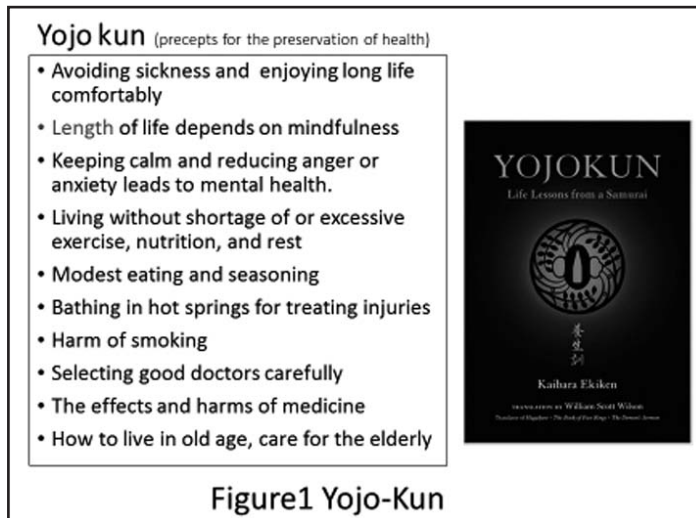
So, what is the status of Japanese health today? According to WHO, the average length of life in Japan is the highest in the world at 83.7 years in total. However, the world average of one hundred and eighty three countries is seventy one point eight years. The average life

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span of Japanese women is particularly long at eighty six point eight years. Japan also has the highest average healthy life-span. In addition to lifespans of individuals, aging societies also have health and social problems. Anyway, we could say living longer with health is a Japanese strength.



The following factors may be the reasons for the extended lifespan in Japan. The tradition, modernization, And the natural environment seem to be basic factors. The factors include the following: the development of medical technology, the establishment of a national health insurance program, and the spread of medical examinations; the lower infant death rate, the medical care and insurance for elderly persons; the high interest in health information and the availability of this information provided by media sources, like TV programs; a hygienic environment; and, as part of the daily lifestyle, baths and meals. Let's examine these daily behaviors.

A modern part of the Japanese healthy lifestyle is the habit of taking a bath. The hot spring is a blessing of nature; it called an onsen. One of the popular Japanese vacations is the trip to take the hot spring cure. Wild animals on a snowy mountain also enjoy onsens. Everybody becomes warm and relaxed. We also enjoy small natural trip. Because Japan is located in the circum Pacific volcanic belt, onsens can be found flowing throughout the landscape. This geographical condition also brings earthquakes.

We enjoy bath time at home. There is a bath tub for each family. A private room with a bath is the standard type of apartment for a university student. Many Japanese people take a bath every day. It is helpful to maintain cleanliness. The ingredients of the hot spring were analyzed and scientifically compose, and we can buy onsen powder.

3. Japanese food and food education

Meals are representative of the healthy way of life in Japan. Japanese food has been registered with UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Japanese food has four characteristics: 1. Respect for a variety of fresh ingredients and characteristics. 2. Balanced nutrition to support healthy eating habits. 3. An expression of the beauty of nature and the changes of the seasons. 4. A close relationship with annual functions, such as the New Year holiday. Please be aware that a healthy meal demonstrates balanced nutrition.

Why is Japanese food said to be healthy? The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries explains it in this way: "A meal is constituted in a good balance with the side dishes, such as rice, miso soup, fish and vegetables, and edible wild plants. It does not use many animal oils and fats. It contributes to longevity and the prevention of obesity." The ingredients of some natural foods provides "the taste" and enables a meal to taste good with little animal fat. Mineral-rich seaweed is used for soup. Miso is fermented using beans. Tofu is a soybean product. Green tea, which is rich in catechin, is well liked. Japanese eating habit help to prevent obesity and aid in the realization of longevity in Japan. The obesity rate of Japanese people is 4.1%, which is very low.

Food education is prominent in Japan. We have the Basic Law for food education. This excellent model explains what and how we should eat each day. Foods are divided into five groups. The quantities of each food group are shown by categories. Generally, we can achieve balanced nutrition by roughly following this guidance.

Well, one question has come up for me. Do the foreigners living in Japan adopt the healthy dietary habits of the Japanese model? Could studying abroad in Japan prove to be a natural opportunity for health education? If so, how can we promote this further, and if not, why, and is there anything we can do? Let's focus on international students in Japan in order to think about these questions.

4. Eating gaps among international students in Japan

It is necessary to find implications for cross-cultural eating education from a health psychological perspective. In Japan, engaging in eating education is a lifelong activity. On the other hand, cross-cultural eating education is undeveloped in Japan. We need empirical studies of the eating habits of international students, at first. We explored the gaps and changes in eating habits in the new environment, examined students' eating activities, and

collected suggestions for cross-cultural food education for visitors.

In our previous survey (Tanaka and Takahama, 2014), we asked about their eating habits before and after coming to Japan. We found some characteristics and problems pertaining to eating habits among International Students. When international students first arrive in Japan, they encounter discontinuities with eating habits they had practiced in their native countries; these are referred to as “eating gaps.” They begin living alone, preparing meals for themselves while keeping to a budget, eating their native cuisine on their own, and gradually developing their cooking abilities.

5. Case Studies for precise knowledge regarding dietary life.

We made the case studies for precise knowledge regarding dietary life (Hatanaka & Tanaka, 2015, 2016). The participants were 21 Chinese students and 14 Korean students, who have shorter cultural distances. In addition, there are ten students from Western countries representing students with wider cultural distances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Let’s see some examples of summaries of narratives (Table1). Interesting descriptions related to 1) health behavior; 2) convenience, enjoyment, and problems, 3) social function were marked by three different colors. The letter “C” at the beginning means a student from China, “K” means the students is from Korea, and “W” means the student is from a

CE	1) Health behavior: self-catering, awareness of nutrition valance 2) Convenience, enjoyment, problems: eating out, sweets, price 3) Social function: social interaction, culture
CJ	1) Health behavior: self-catering, awareness of nutrition valance 2) Convenience, enjoyment, problems: eating out, sweets, price 3) Social function: social interaction, culture
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Western country.

Ms. CE said: I frequently invite a Japanese friend to the dormitory and often serve Chinese dish. Because there are many sweets in Japan, I feel that I have gotten fat. When I eat out, I often go to a school cafeteria or cheap chain restaurant. Traditional Japanese cuisine is healthy, but I am anxious about the amounts of greasy food available in the dining room of the school. Fruit and vegetables are expensive in Japan. Mr. CJ talked about eating out, less greasy food, high and prices in Japan. "Because eating out is convenient in this country, Japan, I eat out more when I am busy." Ms. KK talked about reducing self-catering. She knows it is not proper nutrition for the body. "I drink more than I did in home country." "Here, we eat together, sometimes with foreigners." Ms. KH said: "I really love delicious Japanese sake."

Enjoys Japanese food, rather than looking after own health. These four people were from neighboring countries.

Mr. WC, from a western country, said: I cook dishes from my home country and Japan. Because vegetables and fruits are more expensive, my consumption of vegetables and fruits had decreased. I would like to be conscious about my health, but I give priority to the financial aspects and sacrifice health. Mr. WG said: I do not care about health very much, but am all right because the Japanese food is healthier than that of my home country. I challenge myself to eating Japanese food and eat dishes even if they do not look delicious. Mr. WH said: Japanese ingredients are more expensive than those in my home country, and ingredients are different from the ones in my home country. I am interested in the Japanese culture. While I am in Japan, I want to eat Japanese dishes because I love them.

From the descriptions, we found that difficulties depend on differences. International students face to difficulties with eating, are confused about food, exhibit weight changes with relocation. Students from neighboring countries also experience difficulties in eating. Western students experienced more differences of dishes and ingredients, and problems owing to small serving sizes.

It was acknowledged that participants sometimes prepared food for themselves. Those who are familiar with cooking techniques cook their own meals, manage making cheap dishes, and enjoy merging the food culture. However, it may decrease when they do not have enough time or energy, and when they engage in social exchanges with friends.

They showed cultural acceptance. Owing busyness, economic limitations as they are

students, taste preferences, and, in some cases, psychological reasons, they resort to modern and convenient Japanese daily food. They mainly enjoy modern Japanese foods which they are more familiar with as compared to traditional Japanese foods. They often use food from convenience stores and the school canteen, or consumes fast foods. Some consumes sweets for coping with stress, and gain weight. A variety of liquors are also enjoyed.

We recognized the social function of a meal. Meals are used for the introduction of cultures and for confirmation of cultural identities. They link people. Some cultures consider that eating together is important. A meal is used for communication, leisure, and self-expression. It is not only for intake of nutrition but has many other functions.

6. Narratives provided by Japanese students

For reference, let's look examples of narratives provided by Japanese students (Hatanaka and Tanaka, 2015). JA (21, F): When she has free time, I do self-catering, but eats out often. When busy, I sometimes do not eat. I feel terrible about my nutrition. There was a time when I consumed too much of sweet food because of stress. JE (20, M): Ate only what I

wanted to eat, but could feel my physical condition deteriorate and kept vegetable intake in mind. Has dinner with friends, and holds many pot

Table2 Health Behavior, Convenience, enjoyment and problems, and Social Function in a Japanese Student

- 1) Health behavior: self-catering, awareness of nutrition valance
- 2) Convenience, enjoyment, problems: eating out, sweets, price
- 3) Social function: social interaction, culture

parties. "There was a time when I felt sick because of the meal."

There are some pictures of Japanese students' meals. Mr. A had rice balls in the morning. They took mainly took protein and carbohydrates. It is apparent that the students are using foods that are easy to prepare and not always very nutritious.

Let's think about the possibility of natural health education while studying abroad. Not many cases were found to reflect positive influences from Japanese methods of healthy eating and health improvement. Indeed, natural health learning is not easy.

However, some students are interested in Japanese food culture and try to adopt it. Some understand that traditional Japanese foods are healthy. Studying abroad in Japan has the potential to be an opportunity to discover a new way of eating. Educational support is

expected to help students understand what is healthy and how healthy it is, instead of just believing that Japanese food is healthy.

7. Considering the cross-cultural eating education

Factors expected to affect cross-cultural eating education is supposed to include the following.

1) If the food education before coming to Japan is not sufficient, a basic introduction of the knowledge about the relationship between health and eating are expected. Some students could not differentiate Japanese foods and health foods.

2) Because it is easier to change eating patterns if they can cook their own meals, the acquisition of basic skills of serving a dish is expected before relocation. Then, an introduction to Japanese ingredients for cooking and recipes can be offered.

3) Because there are limitations such as money, time, or facilities in student life, realistic information is expected more than complicated and ideal knowledge.

Information on choosing meals in a convenience store or the school canteen is helpful.

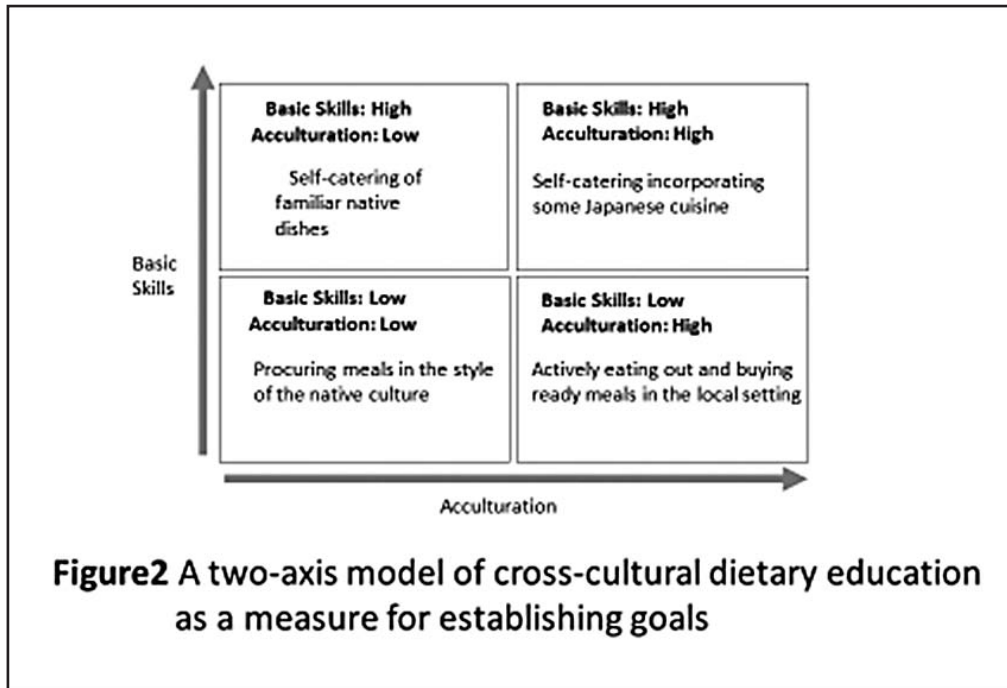
4) We should respect their original culture while setting standards or goals. They are multi-cultural persons. Therefore, recognizing gaps in their eating habits, discontinuity in meal consumption, and providing personal guidance is desirable.

5) It is a good idea to utilize rich social functions to impart information. These contexts can be used for introduction of their own cultures, understanding the Japanese culture, and confirming their cultural traditions. They also act as avenue for a beginning, maintaining, and developing interpersonal relationships. Thus, it looks “social skills” for cross-cultural relationship formation.

6) Assumption of support steps is necessary. Because the cross-cultural adjustment is a process in which change occurs gradually, suitable instructions may be different depending on the degree of acceptance of the host culture. Indeed, information that seems useful from the host’s point of view may be unrealistic for guests.

8. The four cell models of cultural balance and cooking skills

Therefore, I think we need matching acculturation and goal-setting. The four cell models of cultural balance and cooking skills is suggested as the Figure2. Food education that is tailored for individuals based on their values and needs. Providing flexible guidance by respecting personal choice. Considering both culture-general and culture-specific factors.



The host culture is not forced upon the guests, but introduced depending on their interest.

We may need another form of matching between the adjustment stage and the contents, too (Figure 3). Because cross-cultural adjustment is a changing process, the need for steps of support is expected. At the beginning, survival should be guaranteed in the "relocation support" stage, the early stage of adaptation. The aim is to decrease the inconvenience caused by relocation. It is important to offer information about food. Next is a stage of "education support" after adjustment progresses. Based on the Japanese style of eating, it is necessary to align techniques to the guest's culture. This is a major part of dietary education while staying in Japan. The knowledge and practice are guided.

In parallel, the "societal support" stage is conducted. Sojourners utilize the social function of a meal as an introduction to the host or guest food cultures, or by enjoying exchanges with multi-cultural members. It enhances improvement in their social life in the new cultural environment. The realistic support based on personal needs is a basic principle of cross-cultural eating education.

We can come up with suggestions through the consideration of cross-cultural food education. Self-management of one's own health in a foreign socio-cultural environment is an

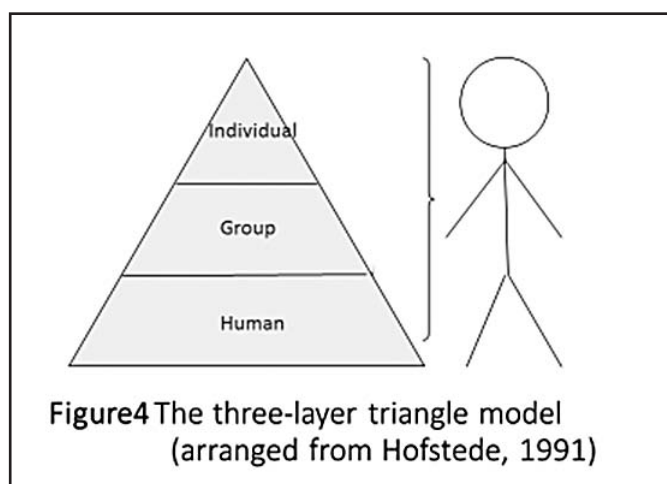
important ability in the current global era. Education for only domestic use is insufficient. It is an important task to analyze the structure of health problems for sojourners and to consider eating education with regards to cross-cultural factors.

9. Cross-cultural psychology and health

At the end, I would like to think a little about cross-cultural psychology and health. It pertains to the impact of culture in health-related matters. Comparative cultural psychology means comparison of psychological phenomena among cultural groups. Indigenous psychology provides the examination of unique phenomenon in a certain culture. Psychology of cultural encounters is responsible for investigating phenomena in cultural contact situations or in relocation.

How can we use cross-cultural health psychology? With increasing international fluidity, living in foreign countries is becoming a common phenomenon. Therefore, considering health management with reference to international relocation is not rare. We need a model for understanding the psychological phenomena of human behavior, cognition, and emotion that considers the cultural features and situations of sojourners.

The three-layer triangle model (Figure 4): Features as a human being, a group, and an individual. We reflected upon the weakness in the understanding the middle layer, the group. We need to evaluate the influence of the middle layer precisely. In a way, it tests the universality of theories. It is just the beginning of the challenge to reveal what the capabilities are of health management in the internationalization era. We have started to reconsider the abilities or skills related to health by adding cultural factors. I would like to



make progress in these studies with all of you.

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