An educational program addressing tense intercultural communication between Japanese and Chinese students: A Bakhtinian perspective on dialogue and love

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Abstract

In today's culturally diverse world, the ability to engage in effective communication with individuals from different backgrounds has become increasingly significant. In particular, overcoming emotional resistance when interacting with individuals from culturally distinct backgrounds is an important educational challenge. In this paper, we discuss the significance of educational practices that facilitate productive intercultural communication, drawing inspiration from the perspectives of the Russian philosopher M. M. Bakhtin, who valued "dialogues" between "others" who hold conflicting ideas about the same subject. Bakhtin valued the "outsideness" of others, recognizing it as a means to reveal the multifaceted nature of ideologies, which have been unquestionably accepted by individuals within the same cultural milieu. Additionally, he appreciated the positive atmosphere that could develop between speakers, which plays a key role in alleviating the emotional distress associated with reacting to perspectives from alien cultural backgrounds as a significant factor in promoting meaningful dialogues. Based on Bakhtin's insights, we designed an experimental educational approach to mediate conflicting ideas between Japanese and Chinese university students by alleviating the emotional distress they experienced when faced with conflicting viewpoints. Thus, the research question of the present study is how we can promote participants' critical investigations on each speaker's conflictive cultural view and develop their abilities to bridge the gaps in culturally divided worldviews. After an analysis of these theories and empirical data, we comprehensively proposed strategies to enhance the quality of tense intercultural communication while discussing conflicting themes. Promoting positive emotions toward partners, consistent with the concept of "professional love" proposed in this special issue, is regarded as one of the most crucial elements of our educational approach.

Keywords: *dialogue, intercultural communications, heteroglossia, carnival, estrangement, relativism ignorance, laughter, dialogic networking, emotion, professional love.*

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Introduction: Overcoming "relativism ignorance" in intercultural communication

Recent studies have revealed that individuals tend to avoid affectional conflicts by disregarding unacceptable ideologies encountered during intercultural communication (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Oh, 2017; Pian, 2017; Sakakibara, 2017; Takahashi & Yamamoto, 2020; Watanabe, 2017). Individuals often perceive emotionally unacceptable ideas presented by their conversation partners as alien or unrelated to their own beliefs. The typical response of emotional resistance to such ideas often takes a relativistic form, such as, "I accept your idea because you're a foreigner (although I don't personally agree with it)." Emotion, a fundamental human response, protects our physical and mental systems from external threats and invasions (De Dreu et al., 2011; Toda, 1993). Thus, in tense intercultural communication, experiencing emotional distress and resistance to unfamiliar perspectives is expected because individuals instinctively protect their own ideas from ideological invasion.

Humans have the capacity to obtain novel insights from alien perspectives that belong to different cultural contexts by managing the inherent emotional discomfort associated with such encounters (Matusov & Sullivan, 2020; Tajima, 2021b). However, if individuals accept conflicting ideas as foreign and irrelevant to their own lives to avoid emotional distress, their intellectual growth is stunted despite their efforts at communication. This approach to different viewpoints can result in disregarding diverse cultural perspectives (Engeström, 2001, 2008; Tajima, 2017).

M. M. Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher known for advocating the value of "dialogue" – signifying communication between individuals with divergent perspectives – addressed similar problems in the early 20th century. He suggested that the tendency of speakers to avoid engaging with alien ideas may be a consequence of either "dogmatism" or "relativism." He posited that "relativism" is as un-dialogic as "dogmatism," which forcibly suppresses these ideas because "relativism" excludes the opportunity to understand alien perspectives and prevents speakers from revising their existing beliefs through interactions with external perspectives.

> "We see no special need to point out that the polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism (or dogmatism). But it should be noted that both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p.69).

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Consistent with Bakhtin's insights, we use the term "relativism ignorance" in this paper to describe the attitude of avoiding contact with the ideologies of communication partners who have alien perspectives in intercultural communications. Previous studies about intercultural communications have not identified a method for educating students about effectively managing this form of relativism ignorance, which intends to avoid emotional distress against unfamiliar ways of thinking.

To understand the challenges posed by relativism ignorance during intercultural communication, we examined Bakhtin's theoretical framework, often referred to as "dialogism." Furthermore, we analyzed the outcomes of our educational approach, which was designed to promote comprehension of culturally alien ideas among university students, thereby moving beyond the constraints of relativism ignorance from the perspective of Bakhtin's dialogism. The research question of the present study is how we can promote critical investigations on each speaker's conflictive cultural view through overcoming relativism ignorance by alleviating their emotional distress.

Bakhtin's ideas on "culture" and "relativism" in intercultural communication

As the theoretical premises of his dialogism, Bakhtin (1920-1923/1990, pp. 22–23) suggested that any perspectives of individual speakers regarding the external world are not agreed upon because the physical spaces they occupy are never matched. Bakhtin referred to this inherent uniqueness of speakers' views because of unavoidable disagreement as "excess (surplus) of seeing" (Clark & Holquist, 1984).

> "When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide… Cognition surmounts this concrete outsideness of me myself and outsideness-for-me of all other human beings, as well as the excess of my seeing in relation to each one of them, which is founded in that position of outsideness." (Bakhtin, 1920-1923/1990, pp.22-23)

However, individuals can often experience a sense of "agreement," particularly in everyday conversations with acquaintances (Tajima, 2017; Haye & Gonzalez, 2020). They behave as if they share common ideologies and use shared jargon, a form of discourse that Bakhtin termed "social language" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 275) or "speech genre" (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p. 60), which might represent so-called "culture" (Min, 2001). This practical sense of agreement with ideologies enables speakers to automatically exchange their collective perspectives with minimal reflection concerning differences in viewpoints. Consequently, the individual's unique excess of seeing can become ambiguous and less distinct under such cultural circumstances.

Bakhtin placed significant emphasis on the importance of criticisms of existing collective worldviews by individuals who do not share the prevailing cultural agreement (Min, 2001; Tajima, 2017). He referred to these individuals as "others" who exist outside the boundaries of each cultural milieu. It is crucial to recognize that Bakhtin regarded "dialogue" as the interaction between these others who vividly demonstrate each individual's unique excess of seeing and outsideness (Dafermos, 2018; Tajima, 2017). Through critical dialogues with these others, who bring novel and alien perspectives, individuals can find the multifaceted meanings of the target ideas. Accordingly, they engage in a reciprocal exchange and assimilation of each other's unique excess of seeing. Bakhtin associated this dialogic phenomenon with the term "active understanding" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, pp. 282–283) or "estrangement" that was originally advocated in Russian Formalism (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 402), which dismantles the one-sidedness of ideologies that have been automatically accepted within specific cultural milieus (Emerson, 2005; Tajima, 2017). Drawing from his experiences as a schoolteacher, Bakhtin provided concrete examples of this active understanding through a dialogic process of integrating scientific texts learned within school cultures and the practical knowledge gained from everyday experiences outside schools (Laptun & Thihanov, 2018; Vasiliev, 2018).

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> "*Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding-in time, in place, in culture." (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p.7)

The anxiety of being misunderstood by others, particularly during intercultural communication with others, can prompt speakers to engage in deep introspection regarding their own thoughts and their communication partners' viewpoints, thus enhancing their self-awareness to identify methods for effective collaboration with these others (Harvey et al., 2019; R'boul, 2021). Bakhtin suggested that understanding one's own culture can only be accomplished through dialogues with others living in different cultural contexts.

> "It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly....A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures." (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p.7)

On the other hand, Bakhtin also highlighted a phenomenon in which individuals automatically adopt the prevailing ideologies even when they engage in intercultural interactions. He illustrated this issue using a hypothetical example of an "illiterate peasant" who used various speech genres within different cultural groups. "Languages" mentioned in the following excerpt represent the speech genres accepted within different cultural groups.

> "But these languages were not dialogically coordinated in the linguistic consciousness of the peasant; he passed from one to the other without thinking, automatically: each was indisputably in its own place, and the place of each was indisputable. He was not yet able to regard one language (and the verbal world corresponding to it) through the eyes of another language (that is, the language of everyday life and the everyday world with the language of prayer or song, or vice versa)." (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p.296)

Despite participating in multiple cultural groups, this peasant was unable to "regard one language through the eyes of another language." Consequently, he moved between different cultures automatically without critically examining the relationships between speech genres belonging to each culture. Conversely, Bakhtin envisioned an ideal form of intercultural communication in which speakers enhance their self-awareness, which indicates "internal dialogues" between culturally alien others' estranging voices and their own. Bakhtin referred to these interactions as "dialogically coordinate/implicate" because they open new layers of meaning within existing interpretations (Brandist & Lähteenmäki, 2010). When engaged in these dialogues, speakers strive to relate their ideas with others' ideas and their pre-existing beliefs, both in their external interactions and internal dialogues. Consequently, this dialogical coordination often manifests as wavers between conflicting perspectives that appeared in the speaker's indecisive utterances, as typically displayed by characters in Dostoevsky's novels.

> "We are waving. We don't know how to behave. We begin to argue with ourselves and try to persuade ourselves that our decision is justified. Our consciousness become as if they are divided into two independent and opposing voices." (Bakhtin. 2000, p.540)

Multicultural discussion accompanied by speakers' dialogical coordination is also termed "heteroglossia-for-itself" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 400) or simply "heteroglossia," in which speakers' unique excesses of seeing become more distinct. Within such heteroglossic situations, individuals can genuinely explore the differences between their own viewpoints and the viewpoints of others as their communication partners. Furthermore, they can engage in reciprocal coordination of viewpoints during dialogues (Hayes & Gonzalez, 2020).

"Relativism," which was previously discussed, that indicates speakers' tendencies to avoid engaging with alien ideas in dialogues, is also negated within this context of Bakhtin's dialogism. Relativism involves conventional and intellectual strategies that harmonize one's own perspectives with conflicting alien ideas (Emerson, 1999). However, in Bakhtin's view, relativism was an inadequate way of communication because it hindered mutual analysis of ideas between others, thereby obscuring each other's excess of seeing. In accordance with Bakhtin's discussion, Emerson argued that the superficial egalitarianism promoted by relativism, particularly through legal agreements, should be rejected. This rejection is necessary because egalitarianism attempts to erase others' transgressive outsideness between cultures, which is essential for dialogical coordination.

"Fools" who encroach on the borders of cultures in carnivals

Though speakers benefit from dialogical coordination, they might experience emotional resistance when others criticize their ideologies. This reaction is rooted in the instinctive human tendency to shield one's existing systems from alien ideas that can potentially disrupt those systems (De Dreu et al., 2011; Toda, 1993). Individuals who face criticism from others may experience anxiety as they find themselves wavering between their established ideas and the conflicting perspectives of others. Our concept of relativism ignorance, the attitude of disregarding the ideologies of communication partners with alien perspectives encountered in intercultural communications, can be regarded as an intellectual but superficial response to these emotional challenges. This tendency gets individuals to avoid direct emotional distress by compartmentalizing their own ideas and distancing them from the thoughts of outside others in intercultural communication.

Bakhtin introduced conceptual tools for promoting dialogues beyond the hindrances like relativism: "fools" as dialogue promoters and "carnival" as the arena for fools to engage in heteroglossic dialogues (Emerson, 1999). In European history, individuals later known as "wise fools" were often highly intelligent professionals who used humor to estrange cultural ideologies from an outsider's perspective (Kaiser, 1973; Tajima, 2021a). During the Middle Ages, these fools used their intelligence to take the roles of festive kings who presided over carnivals, serving as temporary festive arenas, where these mock kings engaged in comical critiques of the authoritative and prevailing ideologies in various cities.

Based on the historical context of carnivals, Bakhtin (1975/1981, pp. 402–406) positioned "rogue, clown and fool" as individuals who promote dialogues among citizens beyond their automatic adherence to their respective cultural ideologies. Bakhtin emphasized the "ambivalence" of the criticism offered by these individuals (Morson & Emerson, 1990). In his view, the folly of fools involved both negating and playfully deceiving the ideologies held by citizens from an outsider's perspective. However, they did not impose their own ideologies on others because they also negated views of their own ambivalently in the carnival play. Fools were essentially rootless individuals who did not belong to any cultural group; they primarily facilitated dialogical coordination between speakers by estranging their ideologies via the cultural periphery of the fools themselves. The comical discourse utilized by fools created a lighthearted and joyful atmosphere among citizens, alleviating their emotional distress concerning alien perspectives. Citizens could enjoy the criticisms of their ideologies by fools within the comical settings of the carnival and reflect on them from an outsiders' perspective. Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 165) referred to this ambivalent form of estrangement as "laughter," which promotes heteroglossic tendencies within dialogues (Cresswell & Sullivan, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2015; Tajima, 2017, 2021a).

> "Together with the image of the rogue (and often fusing with him) there appears the image of the fool – either of an actual simpleton or the image of the mask of a rogue. The naiveté of a simpleton who does not understand pathos (or who understands it in a distorted way, wrong side out), is counterposed to a false pathos, which together with gay deception has the effect of "making strange" any pretensions to lofty reality a discourse

of pathos might have. This prosaic "estrangement" of the discourse of conventional pathos by means of an uncomprehending stupidity (simplicity, naiveté) had an enormous significance for the entire subsequent history of the novel." (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p.402)

Bakhtin seemed to regard his carnival as frank and interdisciplinary academic discussions, for example, the dialogues between himself and his academic colleagues, often referred to as the "Bakhtin circle," who had diverse academic backgrounds (Gratchev & Marinova, 2019).

The discourses typically introduced by fools during the carnival bear a striking resemblance to role-play performances, in which participants engage with the roles and viewpoints of others both intellectually and emotionally, fostering an ambivalent dialogue with the fools present in the carnival (Tajima, 2021a). In this context, individuals are not compelled to unilaterally defend their own ideas; instead, they revel in dialogues that explore the multifaceted external world. The joyfulness elicited by the presence of fools alleviates the emotional distress experienced by participants when confronted with perspectives from outside their cultural milieu. In this joyful atmosphere, participants become more open to alien ideas, allowing them to blend these ideas with pre-existing beliefs nurtured in their everyday lives. In this carnival setting, participants begin to realize that all opinions have inherent one-sidedness, which can be subjected to criticism in dialogues. This recognition could help them move beyond the stance of relativism, which involves avoiding contact with the views of another culture.

In these contexts, Billig (2008) connected Bakhtin's concept of laughter with freedom. This concept allows speakers to examine their ideologies from their own perspectives, detaching them from dependence on customs or authority while maintaining positive feelings.

Significance of Bakhtin's discussions in the development of educational programs to resolve relativism ignorance

Using Bakhtin's perspective, we focused on resolving relativism ignorance regarding conflicting themes in educational environments, which remained unresolved in previous studies. We proposed the research question: Can we promote heteroglossic tendencies during tense intercultural communication by introducing a carnival-like situation where learners can experience the role of fools who can alleviate emotional distress owing to the differences in perspectives?

We focused on techniques used by historic fools, referred to as "quid-pro-quo," originally in Greek and Roman classic comedies and novels identified as carnival-like literary works by Bakhtin. In these literary works, the characters incorrectly identify their communication partners (Sullivan et al., 2009; Tajima, 2021a) and engage in a switching of roles of heroes/heroines and outsiders who have alien perspectives (e.g., between slaves and masters, and between foreigners and citizens). Each character gets perplexed by comical performances regarding his/her own social role from the partners who robbed their original status and expect to know strange criticisms of their original ideologies from the disguised outsiders' alien views. Such foolish deviation from original social roles is expected to create a comical situation that prompts individuals to estrange automatically accepted ideologies in their culture. Through these comical dialogues, individuals could vividly experience the estranging wavers between his/her original ideologies and outsiders' alien views of them. In addition to them, through the carnival-like dialogues, they are expected to enjoy a joyful air that alleviates the emotional distress often associated with conflicting ideas.

We expected that research participants would come to waver in their utterances between culturally alien perspectives by taking partners' roles, and this foolish quid-pro-quo situation would help them alleviate emotional distress during dialogues. Through these encouragements, participants could overcome their

relativism ignorance by considering their own cultural ideologies from the outside perspectives of their alien partners.

Experimental educational model for communications between Japanese and Chinese individuals

We focused on tense intercultural communication between Japanese and Chinese individuals, considering the significant cultural gaps between these two nations, particularly regarding value judgments about using, lending, and sharing money within familiar relationships. These differences arise from diverse perspectives regarding human relations and economic systems (Pian, 2017; Takahashi & Yamamoto, 2020). In such intercultural interactions, speakers often avoid emotional clashes by perceiving their partners' assertions as alien concepts unrelated to their own experiences (Jiang, 2015). Consequently, many individuals exhibit typical relativism ignorance, becoming indifferent to their communication partners' viewpoints.

Our approach involves designing an experimental program aimed at enhancing students' abilities to navigate the challenging perspective gaps that exist between Japanese and Chinese cultures, moving beyond relativism ignorance from Bakhtinian viewpoints on dialogue and carnival. For this approach, we used performances similar to "forum theatre" (Boal, 1983/1985) to enable participants to experience conceptual and emotional distresses during negotiations between incompatible perspectives. In the initial stages of the program, we cultivated a festive atmosphere among participants, with the goal of alleviating emotional tensions between them. Subsequently, we instructed them to create short dramas that would serve as vehicles for expressing and addressing the emotional distress arising from negotiations between conflicting Japanese and Chinese perspectives. Finally, we incorporated the carnival technique of quid-pro-quo into role-playing exercises. This involved asking participants to assume roles from the opposing culture – Japanese students playing Chinese roles and vice versa – with the aim of promoting dialogical coordination between the ideologies of others. Through these practices, we anticipated expanding participants' wavers between conflicting value judgments, alleviating emotional distresses, and consequently disrupting their relativistic attitudes toward each culture.

We summarize the concrete outline of our practice and propose a hypothesis based on our research question. First, we fostered a joyful atmosphere among students, in which speakers were allowed to examine each other's ideologies safely. Second, we instructed participants to play short theatrical exercises to resolve conflicts between each cultural perspective. Third, we instructed participants to exchange their nationalities in the assigned foolish carnival-like role-plays. We hypothesized that we can observe the development of students' attitudes toward partners' opinions from relativism ignorance to heteroglossic ambivalent estrangement by alleviating their emotional distress against alien ideas through our carnival-like program.

Methods

Program setting: The program was conducted for 8 hours within a single day in January 2019 at the seminar room of the national university located in Beijing.

Program design: The program was designed as an optional English lecture that provided no course credit. Participants were required to express their ideas in English during the program. We designed the program according to the "action research" model that creates the method through interactions with interested parties in the targeted field (Nakamura, 2008). We conducted a preliminary study conducted in 2018 in order to find out the cultural gaps that are difficult to solve between Japanese and Chinese. Then, we invented the program intending to bridge the targeted gap according to these interviews. We also referred to the practical

methods of promoting communication between speakers with different cultural backgrounds (Oh, 2017; Pian, 2017; Sakakibara, 2017; Watanabe, 2017).

Targeted tense intercultural communication: Our preliminary study found tense intercultural communication arising from differences in Japanese and Chinese approaches to "debt." Japanese people tend to avoid borrowing and lending money within private relationships to prevent potential strains on friendships resulting from financial issues. Conversely, the Chinese culture encourages lending and borrowing money among friends because it demonstrates intimacy and support during times of need. In the preliminary study, discussions among Japanese and Chinese students often concluded without agreement and with statements such as, "I understand your perspective as a foreigner's viewpoint, but I do not emotionally embrace your ideas as applicable to my own life." This response exemplifies typical relativism ignorance, which involves emotional distress and rejection of partners' ideas as irrelevant to their personal way of thinking.

Participants: Four Chinese undergraduate students and two Japanese graduate students participated in this program. Of these participants, all except J1 spoke English at a B1 level, whereas J1 could also communicate in English. These participants were motivated to participate in this program as an opportunity to practice speaking English and understanding foreign cultures. The participants were divided into two groups, each with one Japanese student and two Chinese students (Table 1). All of them except J1 had participated in preliminary study conducted in previous year.

Table 1: Participant data

	C1	C2	C3	C4	J1	J2
Nationality	China	China	China	China	Japan	Japan
Age	19	20	20	22	no data	38
Sex	female	female	female	male	female	male
Status	undergraduate	undergraduate	undergraduate	undergraduate	graduate	graduate
Group	1	2	2	1	1	2

Instructor: The first author of this study was the main program instructor, who developed and administered this program and was fluent in Japanese and English. The second author was the sub-instructor who collaborated to design this program and was fluent in Chinese, Japanese, and English.

Program instructions: We explained to the students that this program was designed to enhance their conceptual and emotional understanding of alien ideas related to the Japanese and Chinese cultures. The participants were instructed to use their critical thinking skills during the performances and subsequent discussions.

Program task: In our educational experiment, we established a hypothetical scenario that was distinct from the participants' real lives, allowing them to freely and safely express their emotional concerns. This approach was inspired by forum theatre concepts (Boal, 1983/1985). We created a scenario in which two individuals work at a fictitious international company in China, where employees from various cultural backgrounds collaborate in English. Within this scenario, one Chinese colleague approaches his / her familiar Japanese coworker to borrow money, citing the urgent need to pay for his/her sister's university admission fees in the United States. Participants were tasked with enacting the dilemmas arising from differences in perspectives on debt and friendships, expressing their emotional discomfort with their partner's opposing viewpoints, and attempting to resolve these predicaments through their performances.

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Task stages: To create a carnival-like atmosphere and foster dialogical coordination between participants with differing cultural perspectives, we devised a three-stage process. During the first two stages, participants crafted their own scenarios and presented them in performances. However, during the third stage, they were encouraged to ad-lib without the use of prepared scenarios. After each stage, we allocated time for discussion to reflect on the performances. Each group's performance lasted approximately 10–15 min.

> **Stage 1)** A Japanese student assumed the role of the Japanese worker, and a Chinese student played the role of the Chinese worker. Another Chinese student acted as the supervisor, overseeing the entire interaction and narrating the episodes. Participants were not compelled to find a resolution to the dilemma presented in the scenario, if they were unable to do so.

> **Stage 2)** The role assignments remained the same as in Stage 1. However, in this stage, participants were instructed to explore ways to resolve the conflicts between the Japanese and Chinese workers, if these conflicts had not been resolved in the previous stage.

> **Stage 3)** Japanese participants took on the role of the Chinese worker, and a Chinese assumed the role of the Japanese worker. Participants were expected to attempt to resolve the conflicts.

Ice-breaking: We initiated an ice-breaking session for participants before beginning Stage 1, during which they were encouraged to introduce themselves to each other. This session provided an opportunity for participants to engage in conversations about their life experiences in both Japan and China.

Evaluation meeting: In the following day of the main session, we had a 2 hours long evaluation meeting, in which all the participants reviewed their experiences during the program.

Ethical codes: We provided participants with a comprehensive explanation of the ethical codes governing our research. We made four key commitments to the participants as follows. First, we assured participants that our research would be conducted with the utmost consideration for human rights and the mental well-being of all individuals involved. Second, participants were guaranteed that their involvement in the research would not result in any personal loss, including any impact on their academic records. Third, the data collected during this research would be used in academic papers, presentations, and books while attempting to safeguard the participants' personal information. Fourth, participants were informed that all data, including sensitive private information, would be securely stored to prevent any potential loss or breach. These commitments were explicitly detailed in the letter of agreement, and every participant signed the agreement.

Data collection: In our study, data pertaining to participants' verbal expressions and actions during the program sessions were recorded using two video cameras and two integrated chip recorders, with each set of devices dedicated to one group. The primary source of data was the audio recordings obtained from the integrated chip recorders, which were transcribed into text. Video data were used to determine participants' physical movements. Additionally, the first author wrote detailed field notes throughout the instructional sessions. The statements from participants cited within this paper were reviewed for grammatical errors and extraneous fillers or repetitions; when necessary, the statements were corrected while considering the context of the discussion.

Main data analysis: Though all the participants showed similar development, we mainly analyzed the data of Chinese students C2 and C4, who showed more obvious change through our program. We additionally analyzed data from other Chinese and Japanese students.

Results and Discussion

Introductory Ice breaking session

The participants enjoyed ice-breaking session; we expected that this would enable participants to effectively bridge ideological gaps, thereby alleviating any emotional distresses arising from exposure to unfamiliar or alien ideas.

Stage 1: Collision between alien perspectives

However, contrary to our expectations, the emotional distress experienced by participants was still intense in our practice. In Stage 1, participants exhibited impressive negotiation skills and effectively conveyed their emotional distress through verbal and physical expression. However, the participants encountered difficulties in reaching a resolution when expressing their thoughts in their role-play performances. They were ultimately unable to overcome the impasse arising from divergent views about the intersection of familiar friendships and financial debts in their performances. Whereas Chinese participants remained resolute in their stance that one should provide financial support to familiar friends in times of need, Japanese participants continued to reject the notion of financial indebtedness within personal relationships. Both groups adhered to their deeply ingrained ideologies shaped by their respective cultural backgrounds and showed their emotional distress (see Case 1 below).

Case 1: Conclusion of group 1 performance in Stage 1

C4: Would you please lend me 10,000 yuan?

J1: What? (surprised)

C4: I will pay you back by next month. ・・・You are the only friend who I can ask for help. My sister needs help urgently to go to the USA! (eagerly)

・・・

J1: I'm sorry to hear that, but you know, Japanese people usually do not lend money.

C4: But we are friends! Friends should help each other in times of need. (angrily)

J1: Isn't there any public loan system in China? You can borrow money there. (embarrassed)

C4: I'm so surprised. You are so cold toward me.・・I think you do not treat me like a friend. (sadly)

During the reflection period after Stage 1, participants exhibited distinct perspectives concerning this dilemma. Japanese students expressed concern about potential damage to their friendships in the event of repayment failure. Conversely, Chinese students maintained a firm belief that they could affirm the familiarities of their friendships by providing financial assistance to their partners (see Case 2 below). Intriguingly, although each student intellectually recognized their partner's ideology, they reacted emotionally with anger or confusion when confronted with these differing viewpoints. They remained firm in their insistence on what they considered the correct answer, aligned with their individual sense of justice in terms of human relationships, which had been automatically accepted within their respective cultural contexts. Consequently, all of them failed to find the solutions between conflictive perspectives. In this context, participants viewed the ideologies of others as unrelated to their own native belief systems.

Case 2: Participants claimed each ideology in parallel while reflecting on Stage 1

J2: ・・・What would you think about a friend who cannot repay money that you lent them? Isn't it no good situation? I mean, if you want to maintain a good relationship with them?

C4: This is not a problem. I have a rich friend・・who has greater financial responsibilities, but we don't think that our relationship is unfair. I tend to help him in other ways.・・

J1: If I borrowed money from a friend, I would feel too much pressure to avoid doing anything that they find offensive.

> C3: ··But in China, borrowing money indicates the depth of a relationship. I consider it to be a simple but effective way to strengthen our relationship.

Stage 2: Blaming for the superficiality of ideas bridging the cultural gap (relativism ignorance)

In Stage 2, participants were tasked with finding concrete solutions to address the cultural gaps identified in their performances. The objective was to move beyond their tendencies toward relativistic discussions. Participants eagerly engaged in discussions to develop scenarios that would resolve the issues at hand. They crafted stories that involved creative solutions, such as obtaining unexpected funds from a lottery (Group 1) and creating a borrowing book to ensure repayment (Group 2). Through these scenarios and subsequent performances, they successfully managed to resolve the conflicts, at least within the context of their scenarios and enactments.

During the reflection period after these performances, C4 expressed confidence in the ability to generate suitable solutions that can bridge the ideological differences. However, immediately after C4's statement, C2 and C3 responded with anger, rejecting the notion that their performances had effectively resolved the problems. They insisted that one cannot change their deeply held beliefs in a short span of time, such as the span of this task (see Case 3 below).

Case 3: C2 and C3 admitted that they could not resolve the cultural gap in Stage 2

> C3: On the stage of this lesson, the task was simple: we needed to demonstrate a resolution of our ideological differences within 20 min. However, in real life, this type of misunderstandings can happen, because we do not know the differences in cultural environments.
>
> ···
>
> C2: I think that the cultural gap is challenging to overcome because everyone has different backgrounds. ··You cannot change such situations in such a short time. So, I just think, if such a situation develops in real life, Chinese people would not be able to borrow from Japanese people.

In response to the emotional rejections from C2 and C3, C4 confessed to acknowledging the superficiality of his own opinion on bridging the cultural gap and conceded that the nature of the performance task did not align with real-world communication dynamics (see Case 4 below). C4 admitted that the conflicts targeted in the task were largely fictional, contending that – in his view – best friends should inherently understand the nuances of Chinese friendships. Although participants had devised resolutions within the context of their performances, they found it difficult to reconcile the differences in ideologies, and they emotionally resisted the idea of harmonizing their divergent perspectives by critiquing the superficiality of their scenarios. This emotional resistance persisted although they had created resolutions within the framework of the assigned performances; therefore, the participants remained in a sort of relativism ignorance as "I intellectually integrate my perspective and yours in assigned performances, but I do not emotionally accept your ideas as applicable to my own life."

Case 4: C4 criticized the task in Stage 2 as hypothetical

> C4: I also agree that this situation is unlikely to happen in our real life. If I need to borrow money, I will initially ask my family members or Chinese best friends. If I had a foreign best friend, they would be aware of the nuances of the Chinese culture. In that sense, if we are best friends, we do not have such a gap.

Despite the resistance voiced during Stage 2, participants began to immerse themselves more deeply in discussions surrounding the disparities in ideas between Japanese and Chinese cultures. They willingly devoted their break time to delving into these cultural differences.

Stage 3: Laughter connecting alien perspectives through carnival-like performance

During Stage 3, as a quid-pro-quo task, we instructed participants to swap nationalities within their assigned roles. They were willing to act their roles in a very realistic way and enjoyed responding to the actions of their partners who took inverted nationality. As a result of our interventions, participants demonstrated a heightened level of attentiveness towards their partners' alien ideas. They connected these alien concepts with their own ideas more emotionally and were satisfied with their resolutions, despite the fact that these resolutions they ultimately reached were very similar to ideas they had initially devised during Stage 2.

Chinese students who were assigned Japanese roles found themselves in a funny predicament when they had to decline borrowing requests from their partners within the context of the task. Their performances were characterized by visible embarrassment. For example, C4 in Group 1 confronted a conflicting ideology presented by J1, who had taken on the role of a Chinese individual. C4 was emotionally perplexed as he grappled with his partner's insistent demands, which mirrored his the viewpoints he had insisted upon as a Chinese in previous sessions. His candid portrayal of this conflict was conveyed through his vocal inflections and body language, eliciting laughter from both the audience and himself (see Case 5 below). This comical situation inevitably placed C4 in a state of uncertainty as he wavered between his original Chinese ideology and the prescribed Japanese ideology within the quid-pro-quo performance. Similarly, C2 in Group 2 found herself in a state of waver during her performance, resulting in laughter from both the audience and herself.

Case 5: C4 puzzled at partner's insistence in Stage 3

C4: I think…
J1: Don't worry. Next month, I will get my salary, so… (eagerly)
C4: You can pay back? (C4 laughed)
J1: Yes, I can pay back next month, so please. ・・We are best friends. (happily; audience laughing)
C4: Yeah, best friends. (audience laughed)
C4: I can't lend you money because I'm worried that you won't be able to pay back. Our relationship has many more aspects than this financial exchange. Our relationship is pure. I consider it spiritual and sincere. (perplexed expression with a sincere tone of voice)
J1: Financial relationship isn't sincere? Sincere! (eagerly; audience laughing)
・・・
C4: I think we are best friends, but, because we are friends, I can't lend you money. (embarrassed)
J1: Why? I cannot understand what you said. (sad and angry; audience laughing)
・・・
C4: I'm very confused; what can I do about her requests? (C4 acted like he was in trouble and laughed at his own situation)

After finishing their performances, participants reflected on how to maintain sincere relationships beyond cultural and ideological differences (see Case 6 below). In this stage, the participants exhibited greater sympathy toward the challenges faced by their partners. C4 admitted that he had a vivid experience of the challenging Japanese emotional dilemma presented in the task, which revolved around the conflict between personal desires to maintain friendships and pre-existing cultural expectations.

Case 6: C4 reflected on experiencing the Japanese dilemma in his performance during Stage 3

C4: Although I refused my partner's request, I hoped to continue our friendship. It was very difficult for me.
Researcher: As a Chinese person?
C4: ・・If I did not lend money, not only our friendship might be broken, but also my life principle had to be challenged. It was a very difficult choice. Maybe, when I faced this problem, the most important thing was

> to consider why she became angry –because I thought people should lend money to their friends as a Chinese. I did not lend her money (as an assigned Japanese), it does not mean that I don't want to help her.・・・
> Researcher: You recognized Japanese conflicts?
> C4: (affirming laugh)

C2 shared her experience, revealing that she had intellectually and emotionally struggled with the challenge of reconciling her original Chinese ideology with the Japanese role she was tasked with during her performance (see Case 7 below). She admitted that, in a previous discussion in 2018 that revolved around the same theme, she had struggled to comprehend the Japanese perspective regarding friendship and debt. However, her participation in the present exercise provided a unique opportunity, and she could now empathize with the emotional struggles faced by Japanese people in maintaining a balance between being Japanese and fostering strong friendships with Chinese people. She articulated that this emotional conflict arose from the tension between her emotional views ("my heart") and the tasked views she had been assigned within the Japanese role. She revealed her internal wavers between this dilemma in her mind, and paid effort to seek a compromise in ideology with her Japanese partner, who acted as a Chinese throughout their performance.

Case 7: C2 reflected on experiencing the Japanese dilemma during her performance in Stage 3

> C2: Last year, I could not believe why the Japanese do not lend money to their friends.・・・
> Researcher: How did you feel after switching your nationality on the stage this year?
> C2: I just told myself that I cannot lend money during the performance. My heart felt that I should lend him money. I understand why the Japanese do not lend money. I partially compromised with him and so did he (Japanese who took the role of a Chinese individual).

Evaluation meeting: Confessing the trust and respect toward others' perspectives

During the evaluation meeting held the day after the main program, C4 provided further insights into his evolving perspective. He explained that, during Stage 2, he had predominantly acted in accordance with his personal sense of justice. He also expressed the emotional distresses that he experienced, which included feelings of anger as a form of emotional rejection in response to what he considered unacceptable Japanese responses (see Case 8 below). However, during Stage 3, where he was required to respond to his partner's unpredictable performances in the role of a Japanese character, C4 found himself deeply contemplating Japanese ideologies. He reported that he had inevitably laughed at his inverted situation, where the Japanese role realistically conflicted with his original sense of justice, which led to waver in his emotional resistance against alien ideologies.

Case 8: C4 confessed his hesitation regarding his sense of justice in his performance during Stage 3

> C4: When I was in Stage 2, I did just what I wanted. I was right, and I just expressed my direct emotions. In Stage 3, however, I was performing the role of a Japanese person, although I am not Japanese, and I just tried to consider what Japanese would think.・・I think J1 just acted similar to a real Chinese friend. I did not know what J1 would say or respond. It was so hard (situation for me) and made me laugh.
> J1: The stages made you laugh.
> C4: Yes.・・・I think the conflict was very real,・・it was also unpredictable.・・When they behave so real, ・・their behaviors make us imagine our lives.・・・We also experience serious conflicts, so that is why I laughed.

The transformation in perspective was not limited to Chinese students; it also extended to the two Japanese students. For example, J2, who had participated in the preliminary research in 2018, shared his evolving viewpoint. He mentioned that, in the past, he had only understood Chinese ideology as an

intellectual concept (e.g., solely in an informational context). However, during this recent session, he gained greater insight into the intricacies of Chinese perspectives concerning debt (see Case 9 below). Intriguingly, J2 revealed that he had initially felt anger at his partner's reactions, particularly when his partner assumed the role of a Japanese person. However, he also expressed a sense of contentment about gaining a better understanding of Chinese emotional perspectives on debt. This understanding was particularly valuable because it was acquired within the controlled context of the performance.

Case 9: J1 indicated his awareness of Chinese perspectives concerning debt in the performance task

> J2: Last year, we had a discussion, and I thought that we understood the Chinese culture in my brain. I understood their viewpoint, but I could not lend money. But, this time, I played the Chinese role in my heart and felt anger at the actions of the Japanese person.・・This time, I'm really happy to play the role of a Chinese person and felt anger when enacting this situation.

During the discussion, C2 shared her profound experience of transcending differences in cultural backgrounds, describing it as "freedom of thought" (see Case 10 below). She acknowledged that these differences in ideologies could not be erased, and a person could not compel others to change their way of thinking. However, she also emphasized that a person could achieve a sense of freedom of thought by respecting these differences, recognizing that each perspective had validity. Other students agreed with her comments during the session, and especially C4 and J1, J2 also made similar comments. They explained how they had begun to comprehend the viewpoints of others emotionally and had even experienced moments of waver in their own beliefs when faced with what they initially considered unacceptable perspectives. Importantly, all participants indicated that their sense of justice regarding debt had become more flexible. They had ceased to emotionally reject their partners' ideas and instead had begun cultivating a sense of respect toward their counterparts beyond relativism ignorance, which appeared in Stages 1 and 2. This would be the reason why they were satisfied with their final resolutions, which were almost the same ideas that they had emotionally refused at Stage 2. Then, they reflected a significant shift in their attitudes and a greater appreciation for the complexity of intercultural interactions.

Case 10: C2 proposed "freedom of thought" to explain her experiences

> C2: I think・・intercultural communication requires respect and freedom.・・Freedom means that the viewpoints of individuals are unique and rooted in their cultural background. We should accept these differences.
>
> Researcher: What is freedom?
>
> C2: I mean・・we have freedom of thought.・・・We have a right to have different ways of thinking.
>
> ・・・
>
> Researcher: Does your freedom involve respecting the culture and background of others?・・
>
> C2: I cannot change anyone's mind, (because) we think differently. Everyone is correct.・・We can have distinct ideas, but we should communicate respectfully・・・.

Summary of the results

As expected, all students who participated in our educational program developed a more profound understanding of cultural ideologies beyond the realm of relativism ignorance. In Stage 1, participants could only present their "right" ideas even when confronted with what they considered unacceptable responses from their partners. This phase was characterized by difficulty negotiating between their own perspectives and those of their counterparts.

During Stage 2, participants collectively devised solutions to bridge gaps between their respective ideologies within the context of their performances. However, they continued to experience negative emotions, doubting the practicality and effectiveness of these solutions in real-life situations after the

performances had concluded. The emotional distress against alien ideologies was not yet alleviated. Thus, participants exhibited relativism ignorance by separating intellectual solutions found in assigned performances from their own judgements including emotional responses in their real lives.

However, in Stage 3, a transformative shift occurred. Participants engaged in carnival-like quid-pro-quo comical performances and gained a greater appreciation of the internal and emotional struggles experienced by their partners, who wavered between maintaining sincere friendships and adhering to cultural expectations. They began empathizing with the challenges of sustaining friendships from their partners' perspectives. Consequently, they began to transcend the constraints of their personal senses of justice, which had previously fueled their emotional resistance to alien ideas.

Although the conclusions formulated in Stage 3 closely resembled resolutions conceived in Stage 2, a profound transformation occurred in the students' attitudes toward alien ideas. All participants expressed an understanding of their partners' emotional distress within their respective cultural contexts, and they demonstrated a commitment to maintaining open communications that would preserve sincere relationships. Participants began to intellectually and emotionally waver between their own ideas and those of their partners, particularly when faced with criticisms or disagreements. They actively sought mutually agreeable ways to address the dilemmas, as exemplified by C2's description of this state as "freedom of thought." This idea is represented in the statement, "Everyone is correct, we can have distinct ideas, but we should communicate respectfully," in case 10, which might allow them to transcend the boundaries of different cultures. Consequently, they alleviated emotional distress against alien ideologies and found satisfaction with their resolutions reached by mutual investigations, progressing beyond the limitations of relativism ignorance. These accomplishments encompassed the ability to alien viewpoints, as well as the development of resilient attitudes that could navigate between incompatible ideologies.

Comprehensive Discussion

Introduction

The research question of the present study is how we can promote critical investigations on each speaker's conflictive cultural view and overcome relativism ignorance by introducing a carnival-like situation where learners can alleviate emotional distress. We can now admit the effects of our program that promote the hypothesized developmental process of participants from relativism ignorance to heteroglossic ambivalent estrangement. We discuss the data analysis of the practice as the verification of our research question.

"Dialogical networking" promoting dialogical coordination beyond relativism ignorance

When we consider our research question regarding our educational program through the lens of Bakhtin's dialogism, we discern significant development in their capacity for tense intercultural communication.

In Stage 1, where participants' contrasting perspectives vividly clashed, we did not observe significant development in their ability to engage in dialogical coordination. They struggled to effectively reconcile their partners' divergent comments and criticisms with their own ideologies, ultimately remaining entrenched in their own respective viewpoints.

In Stage 2, participants successfully resolved the assigned conflicts arising from their incompatible perspectives, but they also rejected the perceived unrealism of the program conditions, as illustrated in Cases 3 and 4. The emotional resistance to an alien ideology remained intact because they criticized the contrived nature of the task. Their core beliefs regarding individual ideologies remained largely unchanged

through these interactions. Thus, they exhibited a relativism ignorance despite their intellectual success in resolving the assigned conflicts. At this point, the intercultural situation of the program had not yet become a true heteroglossia for the participants.

Indeed, in carnival-like Stage 3, participants displayed a remarkable forward leap in their development. They effectively adopted swapped social roles that were expected within each cultural context under the quid-pro-quo task and accepted partners' criticisms of their original ideologies from these swapped outsiders' perspectives, as depicted in Case 5. Thus, they inevitably experienced the partners' conflicting self-consciousness, a facet of internal dialogue hardly observable in typical real-life interactions. Participants came to understand their partners' internal dialogic struggles, representing their self-consciousness, particularly the tension between the desire to maintain friendships and the commitment to cultural norms, as demonstrated in Cases 6, 7, and 9. Such ambivalent wavers that participants expressed in their performances or considerations alleviated their emotional distress against alien ideas, and they came to engage in dialogical coordination of different perspectives. These moments of waver can be regarded as instances of transcending the confines of relativism ignorance, solely adhering to their pre-existing cultural frameworks. In this context, the intercultural communications during this practice evolved into a heteroglossia, characterized by the complexity of speakers' critical reflections as they ambivalently wavered between their unique and incompatible excesses of seeing.

The participants seemed to have "desires" to engage in the coordination of each other's excess of seeing after experiencing their partners' internal distressful dialogues during the quid-pro-quo performances. We term this motivation "dialogical networking," which reflects the desire to promote dialogic coordination by maintaining connections with individuals who have alien ideologies. Thus, participants realized their partners' inner efforts as "He/She had struggled against his/her cultural contexts in order to maintain our friendship." Then, they came to respect their partners' perspectives intellectually and emotionally, saying, "I want to reward their respectful efforts by admiring mutually negotiated resolutions." Although the resolutions formulated in Stage 3 closely mirrored resolutions formed in Stage 2, participants displayed greater attachment to their inventions in the process of nurturing this motivation, thereby illustrating dialogical networking based on respecting partners' internal dialogic efforts inside their wavering self-consciousness.

Our results suggest that the motivation to respect and honor their partners' commitment to maintaining relationships played a key role in sustaining complex dialogical coordination, particularly in the context of unstable value judgments. This motivation reflects a desire to preserve connections with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The development of abilities that make intercultural communication heteroglossic, as indicated by our data, requires a tough process of reflection on existing ideologies. Such internal dialogue would be crucial for effectively coordinating one's own ideas with the alien thoughts of their partners in a dialogic manner. Dialogical networking promotes this productive thinking, creating proposals that provide resilience when navigating incompatible viewpoints. Conversely, without this motivation and the accompanying reflective process, individuals might resort to relativism ignorance, as observed during Stage 2.

"Professional love" booted by dialogical networking in critical dialogues

Due to the cultivation of dialogical networking through quid-pro-quo performances, participants appeared to experience a significant reduction in emotional resistance during Stage 3. They seemed to adopt a more playful and ambivalent attitude with relaxed manners, akin to intellectual "fools," as they ambivalently engaged in critiquing each other's perspectives during the inverted role play in the carnival-like situation. As expected, students were able to liberate themselves from their emotional distresses to protect their own cultural ideas, and they came to waver between ideological gaps with a sense of

happiness. Participants came to enjoy the feeling of being unburdened by cultural restrictions, similar to intellectual wise fools in Bakhtin's discussions, and they playfully estranged ("laughed," according to Bakhtin's definition) their thoughts ambivalently as they engaged with partners who had taken on inverted nationalities. This was a complete departure from their previous tendency to reject alien perspectives with negative emotions, as illustrated in Case 8. Through these dialogues, they appeared to foster a sense of respect toward their partners, enabling the achievement of "freedom of thought", as described by C2 in Case 10, which enabled speakers to confidently navigate the complexities of cultural dilemmas.

These data remind us of Bakhtin's fragmentary references to affections simply "love" or "benevolence" toward individuals from alien backgrounds, transcending the borders of ideological communities.

> "Love loves and caresses borders. Borders have significance of getting new meanings." (Bakhtin, 1996, p.66)

> "The more demarcation the better, but benevolent demarcation. Without border disputes. Cooperation. The existence of border zones (new trends and disciplines usually originate in them)." (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p.137)

Inspired by these Bakhtin's fragmental discussions on love, Gradovski and Tajima proposed "professional love" in this special issue. Professional love can be defined as a form of affection that enables individuals to foster positive dialogues with culturally alien others, particularly in the diverse and heterogeneous contexts of activities. This contrasts with "inborn love," typically directed toward family members or familiar friends, based on shared and expected homogeneous ideological responses automatically within similar living environments (Morson, 2004; Tajima, 2021b; White & Gradovski, 2018). The distinctive qualities of professional love can be encapsulated in the sentiment: "I trust and enjoy others' alien criticisms of my opinions because I can discover the potential for developing my own worldviews through his / her critiques." Dialogical networking observed in our program should be the preceding motivation that boots this professional love.

Critical dialogues without a sense of love can degenerate into unilateral attacks and the rejection of the perspectives held by individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 66). Thus, we should enhance professional love toward culturally alien others to promote respect for each other's excess of seeing, thereby promoting a heteroglossic environment with a low risk of violence against incomprehensive cultural frameworks and ideologies.

Conclusions

Consistent with Bakhtin's dialogism, it is important to respect and embrace all related partners' excesses of seeing, which fosters the generation of new ideas and the evolution of each other's ways of thinking. Our study's significant finding was that participants were able to alleviate their emotional distress when confronted with alien ideas. They also cultivated dialogical networking and professional love, which enabled them to navigate these ambivalent dialogues beyond the limitations of relativism ignorance through our carnival-like practice.

In today's world, in reality, individuals from various cultural backgrounds engage in regrettable and violent attacks against each other. We must equip ourselves with critical skills to identify the deceptive and one-sided narratives that seek to portray others as enemies who threaten our own culture. We need to foster a sense of love that enables engagement in sustained, patient dialogues with people from around the world. The carnival-like program that we have proposed in this paper can promote learners' inclinations regarding the development of love toward alien others participating in future dialogues. Our program has the potentials to offer the practical models to develop sophisticate educational systems that promote

learners' intellectual and emotional capacities to live together with people who bring incompatible ideas in the future.

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