

Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Yvonne van der Pol** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

(Episode 12: Cultural Bridge People)

In this last episode of Season 1, Joseph Shaules and Yvonne van der Pol explore what it means to be a cultural bridge person – someone who navigates between cultural worlds. It can be an adventure, but it can create challenges and difficult choices as well. We'll hear the personal stories of different bridge people, look back on the first season of the Deep Culture Podcast, reflect on the vision of Edward T. Hall, and look forward to Season 2.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:10	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules. Welcome to the deep culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. I am in Tokyo. I am here with Yvonne Van der Pol, who is not in Tokyo.
00:00:26	Yvonne	I'm definitely not in Tokyo, for sure. We still have all those travel restrictions and yes, I'm living in Europe.
00:00:34	Joseph	Well, Yvonne, this is the 12th episode of the deep culture podcast. It is the final episode of Season One. We'll be off in August and starting Season Two in September. How does it feel?
00:00:45	Yvonne	Wow. It's amazing. It's a year since we started on this project together and I've been really happy to connect with listeners in different countries. And to have these conversations with you Joseph, one of our main goals was to connect with cultural bridge people in different places to build community.
00:01:03	Joseph	So for this episode, we won't be focusing on science or theory. We're going to look back on the vision that started this podcast, and we're going to hear the voices of several cultural bridge people, some set off on a cultural adventure, but we'll also hear from someone raised in a multicultural environment with no choice, but to be a cultural bridge person. Yvonne and I will tell our stories as well and what we all share, and what we share with many of you listeners is this experience of navigating between different cultural worlds.
00:01:42	Yvonne	And that brings us to Part One: Edward Hall and The Cultural Bridge Person.

00:02:05	Joseph	I remember recording the first episode of this podcast last year, Yvonne, uh, there were terrible storms in Tokyo. The pandemic was starting to rage out of control.
00:02:18	Yvonne	Yes, it was not a light-hearted episode. Maybe we can listen back. Joseph: Yeah, let's listen back.
00:02:29	Joseph	That's the sound of rain outside of my apartment here in Tokyo. We've had torrential rains this year. There is a global climate change crisis. It is a dark time around the world. We're in the midst of a global pandemic with millions suffering in every part of the world, a time when we need to come together to solve humanity's shared problems, but you know who I find inspiring right now? It's Edward T. Hall. For Hall, superficial appreciation of other cultures is easy. It's interesting. But deeper intercultural understanding requires more than that. Cultural difference is not just a set of customs. It represents a different way of making sense of the world, of valuing, of being ourselves.
00:03:26	Yvonne	We've talked about Edward Hall on this podcast more than once. He was a visionary, the father of the field of intercultural communication. And we had listeners say that they were inspired to be hearing about Edward Hall's work again, all thought that intercultural understanding is harder than most people think, that you had to undergo a sort of inner transformation. You have to let go of your attachments to the way you look at the world.
00:03:54	Joseph	Oh, that sounds very Buddhist when you say it that way, although I think he was looking at it, I think he was looking at it from the perspective of the unconscious mind. You know, he said that we have an unconscious attachment to our cultural view of the world, which, which he called extensions.
00:04:12	Yvonne	And he thought you need to experience other cultural worlds to even become aware of these attachments. Experiencing cultural difference can kind of wake you up, but it's not necessarily easy. Okay. But before we go too deep, let's back up Joseph, who are we talking about here? Who is a cultural bridge person?
00:04:33	Joseph	Well, everyone knows what it's like to be part of different social worlds. You could feel like one person at home with your family, and feel like someone else with your friends at school. And that gap is what makes you a bridge person because you're going between these different worlds.
00:04:50	Yvonne	But certain people have to navigate between different cultural worlds at a really deep level.

00:04:56	Joseph	Yeah, and it's not so much being a world traveller as it is living and functioning in different cultural worlds. I mean, it could be an expatriate who's living in a foreign country or working abroad, but it could be a migrant, or an immigrant who has come to country, could be someone working internationally or working in an international environment, or sometimes you hear about what are called third culture kids, which is someone who grows up in many different places around the world.
00:05:25	Yvonne	Yes. And of course, some people live between different cultural worlds without traveling internationally. Think about people with the multicultural backgrounds whose parents are immigrants, or have a multicultural family, or people who grow up in a minority community, a religious, ethnic, or racial minority. When you live between different cultural words, you face a certain dilemma or contradiction
00:05:52	Joseph	It's a feeling of being connected to different worlds, but you feel this kind of distance. I mean, I remember after being in Japan for three years, I went back to visit my family. And one of my brothers said, "So Joe, how's Japan?" And I started to talk about my experience and he listened politely for a minute, but then he changed the subject. He just, he couldn't really relate. I had discovered this other world in Japan, but there were people back home who couldn't really understand my experience. Yvonne: It sounds like an odd feeling... Joseph: But you too, right? I mean, you grew up in a small town in the Netherlands, and then you went off and were living in a village in central America.
00:06:32	Yvonne	I can recall similar reactions when I was back. People are interested in your stories, but only to a certain extent. And can they really grasp what happened to you? I must say I often felt alone in dealing with how I had changed, like reverse culture shock coming back home. Everything is familiar, but at the same time, it looks different too. So we could say on the one hand you experienced different worlds, but on the other hand, you have to manage, these different worlds.
00:07:03	Joseph	And there can be hard choices. You discover new places, but you want to have roots too. And how much should you adapt yourself to a foreign way of living, or what if your values change and your family back home doesn't understand, or maybe your partner has no idea about the cultural world or worlds that you grew up in, or maybe you spend huge energy learning a new language and trying

		to fit into another society. But people still treat you like a foreigner.
00:07:36	Yvonne	So you want to connect, but you may feel separate. And this is why I like the term bridge person. Because if you are a bridge, you can feel connected even when there's a separation.
00:07:48	Joseph	So as Edward Hall knew, these things could be hard, but there are a lot of rewards.
Part 2		
00:07:54	Yvonne	And that brings us to Part Two: The Voice of Experience. Okay. Speaking of experiences, the introduction of your book <i>The Intercultural Mind</i> , Joseph, talks about the deep cultural experiences of the students you teach at university in Tokyo. Could you read that section to us?
00:08:29	Joseph	Sure. Be happy to. I love Tuesday afternoons. That's the day I teach 40 or so international students from more than 15 countries about cultural difference, and adapting to life abroad. Many are study abroad students living abroad in Japan, others have international backgrounds, perhaps they've moved around the world with their family, or have parents from different countries. Some have not travelled much, but aspire to international careers. They share stories about their experiences, cultural surprises, the excitement of foreign places and people, cross-cultural misunderstandings and the ups and downs of intercultural stress. At the end of each class, I have more energy than when I began.
00:09:18	Yvonne	That's lot of cultural experiences.
00:09:21		It's very intense to hear about these experiences, and I do talk to them about this idea of being a cultural bridge person. I'll, I'll have a student say, you know, when I heard you talk about being a cultural bridge person, I thought, yes, that's what I am. It says though, putting a name to this experience is very meaningful for them. And often they've never had a chance to talk about them in this way with anyone. Yvonne: Wow. That's really great for them. Joseph: Feels like family because I feel connected to their stories. I've been living away from where I grew up for more than 30 years. And it gives me energy to hear about all of their cultural adventures, and I'm really sympathetic to all their ups and downs.
00:10:07	Yvonne	And I wonder though, are young people growing up with the internet and social media, having a different kind of intercultural

		experience, it's quite different to when we started travelling and living abroad.
00:10:20	Joseph	No, that's really true. When I first went to Mexico, I was not physically that far away, but it was really like being in a totally different world.
00:10:29	Yvonne	And what are your students saying these days?
00:10:32	Joseph	Well, one thing I hear is that popular culture online can be a first step towards this deeper kind of cultural exploration. So let's hear from one of my students. This is Ami, she's ethnic Malay from Singapore, fascinated by Japanese culture from a young age.
00:10:53	Ami	Hi everybody. My name is Amira. You can call me Ami, and I am from Singapore. So, I'd like to talk a bit about my experience being a cultural bridge person. So, I guess my experience that, that since I was really young and it kind of take place at my own home actually. So, I come up a Malay family. So in Singapore, Malay is a minority, and everyone in my household loves watching, well, Malay dramas basically. And, on the other hand there was me. I started watching, Doraemon at first. And then I watched Crayon Shinchan and then I realized I actually like Japanese media more than Malay media. So, but at the same time, I do enjoy Malay classical dramas and movies. So it's not like as if I was discarding my own culture. So that's kind of, being a cultural bridge person for me, it is trying to renegotiate all these boundaries that society kind of sets upon us like a Malay person has to like Malay culture, things like that.
00:12:09	Joseph	One of the interesting things she mentioned was feeling a cultural difference between generations.
00:12:17	Ami	One of the most memorable experiences that I had was when I was speaking to my grandparents, actually. So my grandma, she, she went through the Japanese occupation in Singapore, and her experience wasn't really that good. And then I had my late grandfather who did not experience the Japanese occupation. In fact, he was in Japan when the war happened. He was a sailor back then, and seeing these two very, very different experiences happening in two different countries, it's a really interesting thing. These experiences, I would say they, they really have affected me in a way. It kind of gave me a very different sort of worldview. Different experiences open my eyes for so many different possibilities. It has really influenced how I look at my life in the future. I don't intend to just stay here in my country and I intend to go all around the world possible meeting friends that I meet

		along the way. If possible settling into another culture. Yeah. I'll see how that goes. Thanks for listening.
00:13:40	Joseph	Yeah. And there's this very optimistic feeling to her story that I like a lot, you know, you can really feel that she's inspired to want to go out and explore the world.
00:13:51	Yvonne	Well, this feeling of discovering the larger world, it reminds me of your interview with Karen Hill Anton.
00:13:58	Joseph	Well, and in case any listeners missed Episode Six, check out my conversation with Karen Hill Anton. She was one of my first intercultural role models. She wrote a weekly column for the Japan Times Crossing Cultures. And she recently published a remarkable memoir that talks about her life, adapting to a rural farming village in Japan.
00:14:21	Yvonne	And one of the things she talks about is this feeling of cultural discovery when she first left the United States, that was before the internet or social media, of course. When you left the country, you really entered into another world. Joseph: Yeah, so let's take a listen back. Karen Hill Anton: When I was 19, I went to Europe for the first time, just took off. The whole world opened up as far as I was concerned. I hitchhiked the length and breadth of France and Spain, Germany, Belgium. I went to Denmark twice. Um, I also went to Morocco just for a short time, but I, I ran. I felt like I was running all over the place in a way, taking it all in. It was just so exciting and I just absolutely loved it
00:15:11	Joseph	In your memoir, you said the first experience of living outside the United States changed me in ways I don't even know how to describe.
00:15:20	Karen Hill Anton	Probably. I would say that I realized that there was so much more than what I had been exposed to. I saw interacted with and could appreciate that there was an entire world of experience: of art, of food, of clothes, of ways to live, communicate, that I had no inkling before. I felt I could absorb it like a sponge almost, everything had meaning for me, I was definitely very much affected by absolutely everything that I was experiencing.
00:16:10	Joseph	I like this feeling she gives of wanting to drink everything in, you know, she says I could absorb it like a sponge. Of course we know intellectually that foreign places exist, but experiencing them directly is really powerful.
00:16:27	Yvonne	Things are very different now, of course, and there are some people who grow up between different cultures from the

		beginning. That's another very intense kind of bridge person experience.
00:16:39		Well, let's hear from someone like that, my student Truston, he's a bridge person to the core. I talked to Truston during my office hours, when lots of students would kind of come and hang out, and talk about their experiences. And they often have very intercultural backgrounds, but they haven't had a chance to talk about these things before, let's, let's take a listen.
00:17:05	Truston	So I was born in Singapore to Hong Kong, Indonesian parents, since then, I've lived in a lot of different places across Asia. I spent some time in Jakarta, as well as my hometown, which is Cirebon in West Java, in Asia. I also lived in Shanghai before studying in Hong Kong. And I recently came back from a yearlong exchange at Keio University in Tokyo, of course, and Yonsei University in Seoul. I'm now learning Thai, and, I speak Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese and Bahasa Indonesia, as well as English. So as you can see, there's this . . . really a fusion and even a mix of different cultures that I've been exposed to throughout my life. When I was in Keio, this was the first time I actually see or experience, the topic of culture being discussed in class, especially relating to cultural adaptation. This gave me a lot of opportunity for reflection.
00:18:07	Joseph	I asked him if he feels like a citizen of the world...
00:18:12	Truston	It's like this swinging between the feeling of being a global citizen and also being a citizen that belongs nowhere. From people that I've met in Japan and other places, people who are born to parents of different countries or people who have been living, away from the home country for a long time, they also tend to develop this feeling of belonging to nowhere. And sometimes I do feel the same way.
00:18:38	Joseph	I also asked him how it is to belong to different cultural worlds. And if he's able to bring them together: (Truston) it's already hard for me to sort of reconcile these different social circles. So what I do is instead of like switching back and forth, instead of trying to create an integrated circle, I try to keep my worlds separated, so that, so that could keep the same persona when I am interacting with any one of my friends, but not have this sort of confusion and or contradiction when different circles bridge together. So, I actually prefer not to introduce my friends to each other because of this.

		Yvonne: That sounds like a real challenge to manage those different social worlds.
00:19:23	Joseph	One of the things that we talked about was his future. And I asked him, well, you know, do you want to settle down ?
00:19:30	Truston	<p>In terms of my future career or my future lifestyle? I, I do dream of life where I could be well, have a certain degree of freedom, not being confined to a particular geography. It does take a lot of resources. You must be in a, in a career or in a professional position that allows for movement between geographies. Yeah, I don't need to work hard if I want to do this in terms of settling down, the more important question is not wherein, but who with, and since I do not feel I need to be fixed to a specific place, I do not have to be, living in my home country for the rest of my life. I think this actually is even better because it gives me a certain, degree of flexibility to move around, or I could settle down in a foreign place as long as it is with someone that I feel comfortable with.</p> <p>Yvonne: It's interesting how being a bridge person opens up new possibilities, but it can also create difficult choices. And that brings us to Part Three: Roots and Bridges.</p>
Part 3		
00:20:55	Joseph	Well, now that we've listened to these stories Yvonne, I'd like to hear more about your experiences.
00:21:01	Yvonne	Well, I can relate to the process of discovery that all others described. Although I still live in the country that I was born in, I've lived abroad, travelled extensively and worked interculturally all my life. I was born and raised in a typical Dutch polder, one and a half meters below sea level. Boskoop was the village I grew up in. And in spite of being small, it's renowned for its nurseries and apples, grapes and plants. My grandfather and father worked in their own tree nursery surrounded by narrow ditches. So in fact, I grew up on the small islands, and the ditches on all sides were prominent in our lives and even in our sayings. As a child, the first thing we got to learn was not how to cycle, but how to swim, as the water was a constant threat, and (DUTCH).
00:21:54		“Don't walk in seven ditches at once”. It's typical saying indicating to be cautious and self-responsible, despite it being a small island, the sense of community was, and is still very strong. If someone asked me my name, it would be phrased as “Of whom are you”? asking for my family name, not my first name. I was an insider in the community, but always longed to spread my wings, and

		discover the world, which I did. I was the first person in my family to go to university. I've worked internationally for NGOs, lived in USA and Costa Rica, in various places. And all these experiences have influenced me in many deeper ways. And even if I'm in the village where I grew up, I still have this experience of a bridge person, an insider yet outside at the same time. Over time, sometimes it has created tensions, but I also experience it being interesting and complementary. And next to my family, I'm also bridging with my foster daughter, a second generation migrant daughter with parents from Ghana. So yeah, reflecting about where is home for me, I of course strongly feel that my roots are in the lands that my grandfather and father worked on almost a century and well, actually that soon will be sold because there's no successor in the family, but that's where my roots are. And that's not necessarily where home is now. Home is mostly where my partner is, my cats are, my garden is, so I feel connected to my roots. And I'm also an outsider. And home is where the heart is.
00:23:47	Joseph	That's really powerful, Yvonne. And you grew up with a nursery, which is plants with roots in the ground. And you grew up with these canals and bridges on this island. So you truly grew up with deep roots, yet with bridges to go out and see the world. And it sounds like, like for many bridge people, the place where you have the deepest roots may not be the place that you currently feel is your home.
00:24:21	Yvonne	I feel that it has been the metaphor. This land has been the metaphor all so far. Well, mainly my life roots and bridges. What about you, Joseph? You grew up in the United States, you lived in Mexico for several years, lived in France, but you've spent many years in Japan now. Have you settled down?
00:24:43	Joseph	It's hard to give a single answer. So what I did do was take a walk in my neighborhood and I thought about the question where is home for me? Let's take a walk near my home in Minami Otsuka. It's in central Tokyo, but an older neighborhood, not a trendy part of town. That's the sound of the Sakura tram. It's one of the only two street cars that still exist in Tokyo. It runs through my neighborhood, just down the street from my apartment. Sakura means cherry blossom in Japan. And in fact, my street is lined with cherry blossom trees. So in the morning I sometimes come out onto my balcony, and I can hear the birds singing in the cherry blossom trees.

00:25:47		<p>And if you walk down my street and turn right at the tram tracks in about a hundred meters, you'll find Tenso, which is a Shinto shrine. It has a Cedar tree with a blackened trunk that have burned marks left over from the firebombing of Tokyo. In front of the shrine, there are narrow shopping streets. When I moved in, there was a third generation shoe store that originally sold <i>geta</i>, Japanese wooden sandals. That closed and now it's a pharmacy. There's also a second generation hardware store that recently went out of business. But my dentist is a third generation local resident. His father and grandfather were both dentists. There's also a shop selling Monaka, which is a traditional Japanese bean paste sweet. That's been around for more than 70 years. Around the corner from the shrine there's Titans, which is a new craft beer pub, and off to the right there's a new halal market.</p>
00:26:53		<p>One of the only mosques in Tokyo is a couple of blocks over. There are five Vietnamese restaurants, four Indian restaurants, a McDonald's, a Burger King. There's Riddle, which is a specialty coffee shop that sells Kombucha. Last fall, I got stuck in California. I couldn't come back to Japan because of COVID restrictions. When I did make it back, the husband and wife that run my local bread shop, it's called Sun Road, they asked me about how it felt to be shut out of this country, even though I have permanent resident status. I mean, I got caught by changing regulations. If I had been a Japanese citizen, however, I would have been allowed to enter.</p>
00:27:44		<p>I like high context living, it means having lots of background information, when there's rich detail that you share with others. I want to live in a neighborhood where I can feel that. I love knowing local shop owners. I can't quite explain why I get satisfaction from the simplest interactions in my neighborhood. Like checking out my groceries at the local supermarket. And somehow I'm still very pleased that interacting in Japanese feels so natural to me. All of this really is a different world from where I grew up in San Diego, in California, after having spent years discovering new places, I find having a neighborhood deeply gratifying. So part of me wants to go out and explore the world. But part of me wants to have local roots, but I think both of those desires reflect a need for connection. Sometimes people ask me, can you ever really be accepted in Japan? The language is really hard for English speakers. And of course I don't look Japanese. So people want to know, do I feel at home here? My standard answer</p>

		is I am at home as a foreigner in Japan. I'm well adapted. I'm an insider here. Of course I'm always an outsider too. So what does that make me, an inside outsider, an outside insider. I do still feel out of place sometimes.
00:29:53	Yvonne	When we first started the podcast, we promised to give it a try for six months.
00:29:57	Joseph	I remember that we had no idea if anyone would even listen, are we going to have, you know, like 22 downloads,
00:30:05	Yvonne	But we've had great responses and we've got thousands of listeners and we've made it through 12 episodes, and there's a lot more to do. Next season we'll continue to dig deeper into the science of culture and the mind's special interviews and lots getting planned.
00:30:24	Joseph	So to make this happen, we are expanding the podcast team. We've got an amazing group of bridge people collaborating to bring you the deep culture podcast next season, Rob Fritz, of course, who does the sound design. He has been with us since the first episode. New to the team are Zeina Matar, Daniel Glintz, and Ishita Ray. We are grateful to have them with us. So thanks to the whole team, we're looking forward to working on Season Two together. Season Two will start on September 15th.
00:30:59	Yvonne	Please let us know what you'd like to hear in the coming season. And most of all, thanks to everyone who has spent time with us this year.
00:31:07	Joseph	The deep culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I am the director of JII. The book we quoted from is <i>The Intercultural Mind</i> , published by Intercultural Press. Also, you can now hear the Deep Culture Podcast on YouTube. Please subscribe to our YouTube channel, do a YouTube search for Deep Culture Podcast. Also, there are transcripts of the Deep Culture Podcast, we've been hearing from educators who are using them in classes. That's great. You can find them on the website of the Japan Intercultural Institute. Just do a web search. You can also learn about online courses and JII's Learning Circle. You can become a member of JII. If you like the Deep Culture Podcast, recommend us on apple podcasts. And if you have an idea for a future episode, or just want to get in touch, please write us at DCpodcast@Japanintercultural.org . Thanks again to our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, our podcast team, Zeina Matar, Daniel Glintz, Ishita Ray. And another shout

		<p>out to Karen Hill Anton, check out her memoir <i>The View from Breast Pocket Mountain</i>. And a special thanks to my students. Truston Yu, and Amirah Binte Amiruddin; thanks to all the members of JII. And of course, thanks to you Yvonne, it is always a pleasure to connect with you and share this time with you and our listeners. Thanks so much for hanging out with me during Season One, and I'm looking forward to Season Two .</p>
00:32:51	Yvonne	<p>Thanks Joseph, it is wonderful to have worked with you throughout this season. Let's have a break now for summer and see you all in Season Two.</p>