異文化教育研究所
Japan Intercultural Institute

| Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript |
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| 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 13 - Deep Culture: You can't get that the from Wikipedia! |
| Joseph Shaules and Yvonne van der Pol are back for season two! They discuss the hidden power of deep culture—unconscious cultural knowledge that is powerful because we don't notice it. We hear about deep culture experiences from the podcast team—Ishita Ray's surprise at how her French colleagues ordered food; Zeina Matar's visit to her mother's hometown—and the sheep that was almost sacrificed; how Daniel Glinz met his Japanese girlfriend's parents for the first time, and what shocked him about their behavior. We also learn how brain-mind research can help us understand the hidden power of deep culture. |

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| [00:00:00] | Joseph | Hello, this is Joseph Shaules and welcome to the deep culture podcast, where we talk about the psychology of intercultural understanding. This is episode 13, the first episode of season two, we are going to continue to explore how brain and mind sciences can help us understand things like: How does culture shape our perceptions? Why are we blind to our own biases? Why do we get culture shock? And I'm here today with my co-host, Yvonne van der Pol. Hello, Yvonne. |
| [00:00:43] | Yvonne | Hi, Joseph. Great seeing you here. |
| [00:00:45] | Joseph | Great seeing you. We're starting season two. We've done this for more than a year now. How does it feel? |
| [00:00:52] | Yvonne | It's amazing that it's already our second Deep Culture Podcast season. And I really enjoyed last season and the reactions we even kept on receiving during the summer. My family, there are a lot of things going on, but it's always great to have this time here with you and with our listeners. And how do you feel about starting season two? |
| [00:01:12] | Joseph | You know, it's a strange time for me. I've been living this kind of international lifestyle for many, many years, and… it just stopped, you know! All the study abroad students that I have been teaching are gone. Whole countries are closed off, no foreign travel. There are no foreign tourists in Tokyo. The Olympics were held under a state of emergency here in Tokyo. I was not able to visit my family this summer. So, it's a very, |

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| | | uncertain time. And that's in spite of the fact that I'm more fortunate than many, many people. |
| [00:01:55] | Yvonne | Things are hard for so many people across the globe. And if you only look at the news, you see conflicts, crises around the world. I was particularly struck by the situation in Afghanistan. Yeah it's so severe what's happening there. |
| [00:02:11] | Joseph | It strikes me that in the case of Afghanistan, this conflict is not just political or economic. It relates to very different views of the world and different values. I've also been struck by how sometimes a big crisis will bring people together, like neighbours in Germany, helping after these terrible floods. But in other cases, a crisis can just lead to conflict and extremism. |
| [00:02:34] | Yvonne | How do we tip the balance towards cooperation, collaboration, rather than competition, conflict? |
| [00:02:41] | Joseph | So, let's focus on that for season two: how can we achieve deeper forms of intercultural understanding that can lead to collaboration? |
| [00:02:50] | Yvonne | Well, the name of this podcast is Deep Culture Podcast so for today's episode, we're going to start there - with this idea of deep culture. |
| [00:03:02] | Joseph | So we'll look at what is deep culture. Why is it important and what can brain mind sciences teach us about it? |
| [00:03:11] | Yvonne | And that brings us to part one: You can't get that from Wikipedia. |
| **Part 1: You can't get that from Wikipedia!** | | |
| 00:03:25 | Yvonne | Joseph the title of your first book is 'Deep Culture - The Hidden Challenges of Global Living'. The idea that deep culture is a hidden challenge is actually interesting to me. People sometimes think that the hardest thing about living in a foreign country will be the food or the language, for example. |
| [00:03:42] | Joseph | A lot of people have a pretty superficial understanding or idea about culture and think it's like sushi or Oktoberfest. But when we talk about deep culture, deep culture is much more subtle than those obvious cultural differences in, and it's really powerful. But we don't notice it. |
| [00:04:03] | Yvonne | Powerful, precisely because we don't notice it! That was Edward Hall's insight, that culture influences us unconsciously. But let's back up a bit. We say that deep culture influences us, but what exactly are we talking about? Edward Hall used the term "unconscious culture"; in your book, you use the term "deep culture". How did you define it in your book? |

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| [00:04:30] | Joseph | Well, maybe the simplest way is to say that deep culture is the unconscious knowledge that we need to get along in everyday life. |
| [00:04:43] | Yvonne | So, for instance, if I'm living in Ecuador for the first time there's a lot, I wouldn't understand because I just don't have that shared background knowledge. But it's not just knowledge of things like how the bus system works. Right? |
| [00:04:55] | Joseph | Right. Some cultural knowledge is more obvious. But there are a lot of other things that are much more subtle. Things like how to be polite or trying to understand how people think or what cultural values are. It's these hidden things that are powerful, but subtle. |
| [00:05:15] | Yvonne | What we are calling deep culture goes by other names. Edward Hall said unconscious culture, in anthropology you find terms like subjective, objective culture, explicit and implicit culture, big C and small c culture. |
| [00:05:30] | Joseph | And then there's that famous image of the iceberg, right? With a visible culture above the water, and then hidden culture beneath the surface. |
| [00:05:42] | Yvonne | Well, I love the diagram of the cultural iceberg that you have listed on page 40 it's by Terreni and McCallum. And it has a few things on top and a huge list below. |
| [00:05:52] | Joseph | Why don't you just read some of the items? Okay. Get ready, everybody. |
| [00:05:56] | Yvonne | Okay, I'll just read a few: notions of modesty, ideals governing child raising, cosmology, patterns of superior/subordinate relationships, courtship practices, notions of leadership, conceptions of cleanliness, approaches to problem solving, roles in relation to status by age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, and so forth, conversation patterns in various social contexts and definitions of insanity. |
| [00:06:29] | Joseph | And the list goes on and on there, I mean, there's a huge number, like arrangement of space, patterns of handling emotions, notions of adolescents, body language, conception of self, ordering of time, nature of friendship, conception of past and future, eye contact, theory of disease, patterns of group decision-making, incentives to work, definitions of sin, rules of descent, conceptions of beauty, relationships to animals, conceptions of justice, tempo of work,… it just goes on and on. |

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| [00:06:57] | Yvonne | It's amazing and it makes me imagine like a group of anthropologists sitting around a table, brainstorming about these things. |
| [00:07:05] | Joseph | It's interesting because all of those things are things that we have a feeling for, when we are in a familiar environment. So, this list really reminds us of just this enormous amount of unconscious knowledge that we have in our everyday life. |
| [00:07:22] | Yvonne | The question I have though, is "how do you learn those things in a foreign environment?" |
| [00:07:29] | Joseph | Well, then we can't study those things academically, but that kind of list is maybe an entry point to digging deeper, to paying attention to things we don't normally think about like conversation patterns or status. |
| [00:07:42] | Yvonne | Yeah. And that makes sense, but not everybody does dig that deep. |
| [00:07:47] | Joseph | That's true. And in fact, my interest in the research that I did for that book started with someone I knew who I called Jack and he had lived in Japan for many years, but he didn't speak Japanese. He lived kind of in an English-speaking expatriate bubble. And it seemed like he had changed very little in all that time. |
| [00:08:07] | Yvonne | Yes, for sure. I've met people like that. |
| [00:08:1] | Joseph | And then on the other hand, someone else may spend a much shorter time in a foreign place and they have this deep transformational experience. |
| [00:08:19] | Yvonne | And that's exactly what that book talks about. You described the process of deep culture learning. So, make it simple. What is a deep cultural experience? |
| [00:08:29] | Joseph | I guess it's just digging deeper. You know, it's having an experience that requires trial and error, to get a feeling for things. So, for example, for me to learn about Japanese politeness I needed to do more than learn some rule for bowing. I needed to participate in Japanese society. I needed to interact with people in different situations. I needed to make mistakes. And eventually, things started to make sense and you get a feel for things. So, I think it's that getting a feel for things that is what marks a deep culture experience. And you cannot get that from Wikipedia. |
| [00:09:09] | Yvonne | And that's for sure. And that brings us to part two: the deep culture experience. |
| **Part 2: The Deep Culture Experience** | | |

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| [00:09:25] | Yvonne | Coming back to your book, Deep Culture, Joseph, you have a lot of quotations from people talking about their foreign experiences. |
| [00:09:33] | Joseph | Those quotes come from research I did. Talking to people who had been living abroad. And one thing that I learned was that if you listen closely to these stories, you can kind of spot these moments of deep cultural learning. One of the things I noticed was that they're often very small things that stick in your mind for a long time afterwards. |
| [00:09:58] | Yvonne | And the fact that you remember the experience is evidence that it had an impact. |
| [00:10:04] | Joseph | Exactly. I can't remember what I had for lunch three days ago, but I still remember the first time I tasted chili and lemon-flavored potato chips at a bus station in Mexico when I was 19. |
| [00:10:16] | Yvonne | And I remember these taxi Bruce stations in Madagascar and taxi Bruce's is like the public transportation by cars. And, but they fill up person by person. And of course, they only leave when the car is full with passengers. And that can take a while. |
| [00:10:34] | Joseph | And you know, these every day experiences can seem very minor, like chili and lemon potato chips. But the everyday-ness is kind of the point. It's this feeling like? Ah, okay! So what's normal for me isn't normal here. That's the essence of a deep culture experience. |
| [00:10:56] | Yvonne | That reminds me of a quote from your book, The Intercultural Mind, by someone visiting Zanzibar. |
| [00:11:03] | Joseph | Yes, that was one of my students. I called him Ray in my book and he was, uh, from the United States, and, this is the story that he recounted:<br><br>“I left north America for the first time when I was 21. I can remember quite clearly the first time I felt intercultural shock. I was in Zanzibar, entering the house of my Zanzibari friend. His very pregnant sister-in-law, dressed in traditional Zanzibari hijab and kanga, with arabesque foot and hand tattoos, got off the couch, which she was sleeping on and lay on the floor so that I could sit down. I had to very strongly refuse and for the first time, a very heavy lump of deep culture shock sunk down my esophagus. People in this country were different. Not in the way Chinese and American food are different. People here were psychologically completely different, and it scared me.” |

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| [00:12:30] | Yvonne | Hmm, it sounds like it was very disturbing to him. |
| [00:12:35] | Joseph | Very disturbing, you know, it's easy to say, oh yes, you should respect cultural difference. But in this case, he was experiencing a deep cultural difference that was going against his fundamental values and his feelings of what is normal and right as a human being. |
| [00:12:54] | Yvonne | And experiences like this forced us to re-examine things we took for granted, as natural or right. |
| [00:13:02] | Joseph | And so my students sometimes ask me: do I have to accept or adapt to all the cultural differences I find abroad? And I say, no, adjusting to another culture does not mean giving up your values. However, we do have a responsibility to try and understand things from the local perspective. And not simply judge people as wrong. |
| [00:13:27] | Yvonne | Yeah. So, to explore some of these deep cultural experiences, we asked members of our podcast team to recall moments when they recognize just how deep cultural difference can be. Now, first one is from Ishita Ray. |
| [00:13:42] | Joseph | Now, Ishita grew up in India, she had a talent for languages and studied French and French history and civilization extensively before moving to France to work. She tells a story about the first time she was invited out to eat by her French colleagues. |
| [00:14:07] | Ishita | When I was in France for the first time, I was invited to a dinner at a restaurant with my colleagues from a school where I had just started working. I was happy to be included. So, I gladly accepted. On the evening, when we started ordering, I realized everyone ordered only for themselves. Everyone had made the decision quite quickly and were all waiting for me to decide what I wanted. My mind froze. Back in India, when out for dinner with work colleagues or even friends, ordering food is a significant part of the evening in and by itself. Especially with people you are only getting to know. It begins with first everyone asking what do you want to eat? And then almost everyone answering I'm fine with anything, actually. It's a slow patient process of finding out what the others really want to eat, deciding who can share what with whom, how much food will be enough and so on. It is not really common to simply say what you want right away, or to disagree with someone else's choice. Somewhere it reflects how deep down you put others' preferences ahead of your own when taking decisions. If I look at what you want and hold that supreme and that cycle continues, it will lead to the |

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| | | interests of everyone being taken into account. It might look like a slow process, but it is also one where foundations of relationships are built. Trust is built. On that evening with my French colleagues, everyone knew exactly what they wanted and were also very clear in expressing it. It didn't matter if the choices varied drastically. In a way, looking after one's own interest is also a way of ensuring that everyone in the group has what he or she prefers. A different means to the same end. But from where I was looking on that day, voicing my choice out loud felt selfish, especially with people I barely knew. People I hadn't forged a strong relationship with yet. It was not easy to overcome the feeling that expressing my choice was not disrespecting the others. In hindsight, it was just a dinner with colleagues, but it shifted something inside me. |
| [00:17:12] | Yvonne | Wow. That's interesting. She said, “voicing my choice out loud felt selfish”. |
| [00:17:18] | Joseph | And there are a couple of things I find really impressive about this story. First of all, this was an everyday event, but it really made a big impression, but also having a negative reaction to cultural differences is really common. It's a kind of psychological resistance to the difference that feels uncomfortable. |
| [00:17:37] | Yvonne | Yeah, but even though this felt selfish, she didn't judge her colleagues or the French culture. |
| [00:17:44] | Joseph | No, on the contrary, she, actually figured out there was another cultural logic at work. So, in India, everyone takes responsibility for each individual. So, everyone gets taken care of. And in France each individual takes responsibility for themselves. So, everyone gets taken care of. |
| [00:18:04] | Yvonne | And these are really two different deep cultural logics. Let's hear from another member of the podcast team, Zeina. She grew up in Lebanon, but her mother was from neighboring Syria and she tells the story of visiting the village her mother comes from and the culture clash that came up. |
| [00:18:30] | Zeina | An Australian male friend and I set off from Beirut and we drove along the coastal road to Syria. We wanted to spend a couple of days exploring the towns and localities situated on this route and also to visit Latakia my mother's hometown. My mother had always talked about the hills above the town. And my childhood had been full of her stories about the wonderful, thick green moss on the rocks, how good the fruit tasted, the butter, the bread, how nice it was to visit the farmers’ family. As we reached |

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| | | the area, we found the farmer's family and introduced ourselves. I told them I was the daughter of so-and-so. They welcomed us warmly and invited us to stay. So we sat on cushions on the floor of a veranda, overlooking the hills. And as we sipped coffee out of tiny little cups, Ali, the farmer announced that they would slaughter a sheep for us, and we would eat with them. I refused. I was horrified at the thought of them slaughtering a sheep because of us and felt like leaving as quickly as possible. My refusal came as a result of a deep culture clash. I trampled on their laws of hospitality because something deep inside me revolted at the thought of an animal being slaughtered so that we could be properly welcomed and honored. I had just wanted to get to meet them, see the area because of my mother and my biography. I wanted all of this, according to my own rules and conditions. I didn't think of the fact that the meat would also feed the family after our visit. Of course, the visit was short, the sheep was spared, but back in Beirut I heard the complaints about my behavior, how I traveled alone with this *ajnabi* – (foreigner) wearing jeans and smoking, and how I didn't stay for a meal while they had wanted to prepare it in the memory of my grandfather. In a few words and in their eyes, I hadn't understood anything of their world. Culture clash within the same culture? |
| [00:20:53] | Yvonne | So, this is another example of resisting cultural difference because it goes against our values. |
| [00:21:00] | Joseph | There's no easy answer to what to do in a situation like this. And in this case, maybe there were also a generational difference and her personal values. So, these things touch many different parts of the self, and it can be quite tricky. So, let's listen to one more story. Daniel is Swiss and has lived all over the world. He tells a story of when he moved from China to Japan, with his Japanese girlfriend Mitsuko. |
| [00:21:37] | Daniel | About two weeks after my arrival in Tokyo, Mitsuko told me she wanted to introduce me to her parents. Mitsuko and I had met in China two years before, while we were both exchange students at Nanjing University. I was curious to see Mitsuko's parent's reaction to the formal announcement that she was now living together with a foreigner. Her parents were living in the countryside about one hour north of Tokyo, where they owned a small farm. From Ueno station in Tokyo, we took a local train to Omiya and then a bus to a village named Okegawa. It was a |

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| | | sunny Sunday morning, and there were lush rice fields and trees all around us. From the bus stop, we walked about 10 minutes and then we were “home”. She had spent two years in China without a break. And it was the first time she visited her parents since returning. She rang the doorbell, and we waited a few minutes in suspense. When we heard some noise coming from inside, Mitsuko opened the door and we stepped into the entrance hall. In front of us stood a small and elderly woman. She was holding both her arms along the sides of her body. Mitsuko bowed to her, and simply said *tadaima* (I am back). Her mother bowed from her knees until her head was almost touching the floor. And she said, *okaerinasai* (welcome back!) Then she turned towards me and said something like, thank you for taking good care of my daughter. That was all. Mitsuko and I removed our shoes and stepped up from the entry hall into the house. Her father was watching TV in the living room. It felt so strange to think that mother and daughter had not met for two years. And when they were reunited, all they did was to politely bow at each other. Wow! My girlfriend was back in Japan after two years abroad, and she got no kiss, no hug, not even a slight touch on the shoulder. In what kind of family had I landed. How did they show their feelings towards each other? Well, did they have any feelings at all? |
| [00:24:29] | Yvonne | Deep culture difference can give us the feeling that there's something fundamentally wrong. Like what Daniel said almost inhuman about how people act. Joseph, what's your experience? How typical is this for Japan? |
| [00:24:42] | Joseph | Well, I don't think that most Japanese would find the situation bizarre. And, of course, in some cultural communities, emotion is seen as very positive and something that needs to be expressed, but in some communities, emotion is seen as something very powerful, something you need to be careful with. And I think that's my experience in Japan. People can seem very controlled, but on the other hand, there can be this great subtlety to communication. And so, I am guessing that there was actually very deep feeling being expressed in that homecoming. But it may not have been easy for Daniel to read it. And so, again, it's in these everyday moments that stick with us, because they touch something so deep. |
| [00:25:28] | Yvonne | These are all great stories and they raised the question: “What is |

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| | | happening in the mind during these moments?" Is there mind and brain research about deep culture? |
| [00:25:43] | Joseph | Well, that brings us to part three, the science of deep culture. |
| **Part 3: The science of deep culture** | | |
| [00:25:52] | Yvonne | If we talk about deep culture as an iceberg, it's easy to understand, but it's just a metaphor. Same with the more modern variant of a sand dune, stable in the essence, but more dynamic at its flanks. Yet it's it isn't really any kind of scientific explanation, is it? |
| [00:26:11] | Joseph | No, it's true. Those are simply metaphors. They're not scientific explanations, but I do think that they give us some starting points. The iceberg metaphor, for example, reminds us that culture is largely unconscious. So that kind of gives us three starting critical questions that we can look at scientifically. And the first one is, how does the unconscious mind work? And then, how does our cultural environment shape our unconscious mind? And then third, how can the unconscious mind learn new deep culture patterns? |
| [00:26:50] | Yvonne | It might be too much to answer in one podcast. There's a lot of research out there. Right? |
| [00:26:58] | Joseph | Yeah. When I was researching my book, The Intercultural Mind, I found there was a lot of research about the first question: "How does the unconscious mind work" and a lot of research about the second question: "How does culture shape the mind", but not so much about the third question: "How do we learn new deep culture patterns?" |
| [00:27:18] | Yvonne | And let's skip the first question for the moment. And if you, our listeners, want to have more info about that, check out Episode five of this podcast series, it is called Three Brains, Two Minds, and One Person. And that talks a bit about the structure of the unconscious mind. And now let's continue then with question two, how does culture shape our unconscious minds? First of all, Joseph, who does research like this? |
| [00:27:46] | Joseph | Well, a pretty wide range of people: psychologists, neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, just the people who study brain and mind. The academic fields would include cultural neuroscience, cultural psychology, cognitive neuroscience, social psychology. You might hear some big names like Shinobu Kitayama or Richard Nisbett for example. |

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| [00:28:10] | Yvonne | Yes, it's interesting research, but this is a topic you need to spend some time getting into because you won't find simplistic answers. You need to be ready for some complexity. |
| [00:28:22] | Joseph | The brain is complex. Cognitive processes are complex. So any talk about cultural difference of these things is going to be complex just as one kind of example, one line of research uses FMRI, brain scans to check patterns of brain activation during different cognitive tasks. So, for example, when Chinese people think about their mother, their brain lights up as though they're thinking about themselves, whereas when an American thinks about their mother, their brain lights up as though thinking about a stranger. |
| [00:28:57] | Yvonne | Yes. And from an American perspective, it might sound like Chinese aren't independent. And from the Chinese perspective, it sounds like Americans don't love their mothers. |
| [00:29:07] | Joseph | Right. And this is fascinating that that they find these results, but it can be a little bit frustrating too. They have come up with evidence for cultural variation in lots of different areas, information processing, emotion identity, but at the same time, we have to take this all with a grain of salt. FMRI studies do not tell you how the brain works. They simply provide a snapshot of brain activity. There's tremendous variation between individuals. So even when you do find the patterns, it's just an abstraction. |
| [00:29:43] | Yvonne | And let's bring the conversation back to where we started: deep culture. It's safe to say that research supports this basic idea that culture shapes our mind at deep levels of self. |
| [00:29:56] | Joseph | And that is, as we keep saying the key insight of Edward Hall, and of course his work was my starting point and the starting point for this podcast too. |
| [00:30:04] | Yvonne | We talked about three questions. So as for question three, how do we learn deep culture patterns? We talked a bit about the need to recognize patterns, but there's a lot more we could talk about. |
| [00:30:16] | Joseph | Things like predictive processing, which is very important or embodiment or pattern recognition of the intuitive mind. |
| [00:30:27] | Yvonne | And that's all too much to go into now, but let's hope we can get to them into another podcast. I guess it's about time to wrap up this episode. |
| [00:30:35] | Joseph | It was nice to have a break in August. But it is even better to be starting this new season with you Yvonne. So, it has been great. |
| [00:30:41] | Yvonne | Yeah, wonderful to kicked off the new season today. |

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| [00:30:55] | Joseph | The deep culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. If you are interested in going deeper into these topics, you can do that at JII's brain, mind and culture masterclass. To find out more search for the Japan intercultural Institute. We'd really like to hear from you. Write us at dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org.<br>Also, we are on YouTube. Please subscribe, please add comments. And today a special thanks to today's contributors, Ishita Ray, Zeina Matar and Daniel Glinz, all members of the podcast team. And thanks to our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, and everyone at JII. And of course, as usual, thanks to you Yvonne for spending this time with me. |
| [00:31:55] | Yvonne | Oh, thank you, Joseph. Thank your listeners and see you all next time. |
| [00:31:57] | Joseph | See you next time. |