

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 34 – Thoughts on Season 3)
Is the Deep Culture Podcast “digging deeper” into culture and mind? Is it exploring complexity and challenging conventional wisdom? Yvonne van der Pol and Joseph Shaules share their thoughts and choice excerpts as they look back on Season 3, including: Daniel Glinz’s view that there’s “no such thing as a global citizen”; the podcast team’s feeling that many intercultural trainers are wrong about ethnocentrism, and; Zeina Matar’s reflections on the complexity of being a cultural bridge person.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:10	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. And I am here again with Yvonne Van der Pol. Greetings, Yvonne from hot and humid Tokyo.
00:00:25	Yvonne	Greetings, Joseph. Greetings from the Netherlands and it has been hot here too, but finally it started raining after a long period of drought and I've been on sabbatical in the recent months. But of course I've been following the team and I've really enjoyed listening to the episode co-hosted by the other team members, Ishita Ray, Emre Seven, Daniel Glinz and Zeina Matar.
00:00:49	Joseph	And of course, we couldn't do it without the behind the scenes work of Robinson and Ikumi Fritz. And so, Yvonne, this is episode 34, the last episode of season three. You and I started this podcast together almost three years ago and it is still going.
00:01:08	Yvonne	It's wonderful. It's really good. So since this is the final episode of the season, we are going to look back and see how we've done.
00:01:17	Joseph	Now, at the end of season two, we got together with the team and talked about the direction for season three and we came up with a theme which was digging deeper. We wanted to look for topics that may sound simple but are more complex when you take a closer look. For example, in episode 33 we looked at stereotypes, which may sound as simple, but in terms of the cognitive processes involved, there's a lot of complexity there.
00:01:47	Yvonne	And sometimes digging deeper means challenging everyday assumptions. For example, I loved how Episode 27 challenged the idea of being a global citizen. So for this episode, the team shared their thoughts about season three. What stood out for them and did we actually manage to dig deeper?
00:02:07	Joseph	So we've picked out a few bits from season three to listen back to, and we'll talk about what's to come in the future.
00:02:16	Yvonne	And that brings us to Part 1 - Hidden Complexity.

Part One – Hidden Complexity		
	Yvonne	So one way that season three tried to dig deeper was to do an episode on the idea of complexity itself.
00:02:48	Joseph	And that was fun. Although it wasn't easy for us to turn such an abstract concept into a podcast episode. Complexity theory is an approach to understanding systems in which a phenomenon emerges from the interaction of different parts.
00:03:06	Yvonne	A language for example, develops and changes over time through the interaction of its speakers.
00:03:12	Joseph	But the beauty of complexity theory is that it can be found in so many places in everyday life - in nature, in the movements of a flock of birds or a school of fish.
00:03:24	Yvonne	And we talk about complexity in our Culture, Brain and Mind Masterclass because understanding a little bit about complexity can really help us understand cultural patterns.
00:03:36	Joseph	And so episode 28 was called <i>The Complexity of Culture</i> . And we wanted to show the connection between complexity theory and our everyday lives including culture.
00:03:48	Yvonne	Let's take a brief listen back...
00:03:57	Joseph	So first of all, complex systems have no clear boundaries.
00:04:01	Ishita	Which means culture isn't contained within national borders. It's hard to say exactly who is and isn't a member of a cultural community. Rather we participate in communities.
00:04:15	Joseph	Also, complex systems can be both very dynamic yet highly stable.
00:04:20	Ishita	For example, a tropical storm is very dynamic but also moves in a predictable fashion. Cultural communities are constantly evolving over time, but can have great continuity.
00:04:34	Joseph	And the behaviors of complex systems are very hard to predict and can't be described perfectly in cause-and-effect terms. And this is why culture cannot be reduced to etiquette rules. Culture is just far too dynamic for that.
00:04:50	Ishita	And we have to mention the fractal nature of some complex systems.
00:04:55	Joseph	And this is also a bit abstract, but fractals describe things that are self-similar at different scales.
00:05:03	Ishita	For example, at the microscale of our cognitive processes, you find that East Asians process information more holistically and westerners more in terms of objects and categories. And that difference can be found at the larger scale of how people act. Asian societies are more collectivistic while westerners are more individualist.
00:05:27	Joseph	So the cultural patterns we find in people's minds are reflected at larger scales in how people act and even the structures of the society at large.
00:05:42	Yvonne	I really liked how you and Ishita used examples from everyday life to make the connection between complexity and culture.

00:05:50	Joseph	For me, learning about complexity made me start noticing complex patterns in the world around me. And this resonated with team members Zeina Matar as well. Who is joining us from Beirut. Hi Zeina.
00:06:04	Zeina	Hi Joseph. Learning about complexity made me think of the country I have my roots in - Lebanon. I do consider cultures as “a complex system which can be both very dynamic yet highly stable”. And Lebanese society is very dynamic and volatile in so many ways, but also highly stable in other ways - in terms of the values, which different people have, different ethnic groups, different religions. So there is continuity. Values held by various groups are perpetuated and very few people question them. This makes “their community quite steady and stable”. In my case, I have tried to leave certain of these values behind, those I didn't agree with. This is where people rebel, quit or resign. Some try to induce change - some succeed, most don't. For Lebanon, positive change is desperately needed, but I don't see it coming at all. Rather the opposite. The forces which are needed to bring change are too divided themselves and they face this huge complex wall of corruption, crime and evil. And this is all embedded in a tightly knit social fabric with different layers that protect each other in order to keep their privileges. Complexity indeed.
00:07:47	Yvonne	It's so interesting to listen to Zeina. She captures something many bridge people face, the complexity around us in the societies we live in, but also the complexity within us because both people in societies can be divided against ourselves. Since we are on the subject of complexity, some listeners may wonder if the episode about complexity was the most complex episode this season, Joseph?
00:08:18	Joseph	And oddly enough, I don't think it was. I think the most complex topic this season was one that you and I worked on together, Yvonne - Episode 26: <i>The Trouble with Cultural Difference</i> .
00:08:32	Yvonne	And this is really a case of something that may look simple, but once you dig deeper, you find lots of complexity. One part I liked about that episode was when we described the different ways to talk about cultural difference. Let's listen back just a bit...
00:08:57	Joseph	A lot of the confusion about cultural difference comes from different ways of talking about culture. And to remember these three ways, just keep in mind three keywords: Culture can be seen as a way of <i>being</i> , a way of <i>doing</i> , and a way of <i>seeing</i> .
00:09:17	Yvonne	And none of these is better than the others, but some ways of talking about culture and cultural difference are simpler than others. Being is the simplest, then comes doing, then comes seeing - which is the most complex way of talking about cultural difference.
00:09:35	Joseph	So let's go through each one. As we said, the simplest is culture as being. And this treats culture as a kind of essential quality to talk about who I am or who we are or who they are. So when I say, “I am Californian and

		proud of it”, I am saying that my culture is who I am. But talking about culture as doing is also common.
00:10:01	Yvonne	And by this we mean seeing culture as a set of behaviors or a description of how they live, like “In Italy, people kiss each other on the cheek”, or like “French people eat baguettes”. And the third way to talk about culture as a way of seeing relates to a shared way of understanding things. You hear this when people say: “from the Turkish point of view... or “I don't really understand the local perspective about this”.
00:10:36	Joseph	Talking about culture as seeing means looking at culture as patterns of shared meaning. And so culture doesn't cause people to act in a certain way. Rather culture helps us understand how behavior should be interpreted.
00:10:53	Yvonne	Okay, so let's get this all straight. If culture as being “I'm very Dutch” or “I'm not very Dutch”, then culture as doing “Chinese eat with chopsticks” or “Californians love surfing”. And then culture as seeing, “Let's look at this from the Lebanese perspective...”.
00:11:21	Joseph	And for the intercultural geeks out there, you should know that culture as being, doing and seeing is an application of the Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning, which has its roots in Complexity Theory and Dynamic Skill Theory.
00:11:40	Yvonne	But we didn't talk about that in episode 26. That might have been too much complexity for just one episode.
00:11:48	Joseph	Indeed. Which brings us to part two: Body and Mind.
Part 2: Body and Mind		
	Joseph	So Yvonne, in season three, uh, we were also digging deeper by exploring what is sometimes called embodiment. And that's the idea that mental phenomena are not separate from our bodies. That thought, for example, is not separate from feeling.
00:12:31	Yvonne	I thought the team did a marvelous job on showing the mind-body connection in episode 31, the one about Values.
00:12:40	Joseph	Well it was an interesting episode to work on, uh, because cultural values are a really important part of intercultural experiences, but we often think of them as a kind of personal philosophy or our political stance.
00:12:56	Yvonne	Well, I really appreciated how in episode 31, you and Ishita explored moral intuitions. The idea that our feelings of right and wrong do not come from our rational minds. They are largely intuitive and they have their roots in our animal nature as social primates, they run deep. Let's listen back a bit to where you talk about research into moral intuitions.
00:13:32	Joseph	And this is a relatively recent field of research and I have learned about it through the work of Jonathan Haidt. And I'm going to read directly from the back cover of his book, <i>The Righteous Mind</i> quote, “Why do people hold such wildly differing beliefs and why can others' views seem so illogical? Jonathan Haidt reveals that moral judgments arise not from reason but intuition.”

00:14:01	Ishita	And Haidt's fundamental insight about moral intuitions starts with the idea that our feelings of right and wrong have their roots in evolutionary psychology
00:14:14	Joseph	We talked about the capuchin monkeys that were enraged when treated unequally, how this seemed to trigger a feeling of unfairness. And that these feelings of right and wrong are part of our evolutionary heritage as social primates.
00:14:31	Ishita	And Haidt talks about six moral intuitions - care, fairness, loyalty, liberty, authority and sanctity - that human beings have an intuitive feeling about. For example, whether something is fair or not, someone is loyal or not, or whether something is pure or impure.
00:14:55	Joseph	And he argues that these intuitions developed as a response to evolutionary pressure. As social primates, for example, caring for others is an important part of what allows us to survive as a species. So it's natural that we value caring and feel critical of people who we feel are uncaring. And he makes an evolutionary argument for each of his six proposed moral intuitions.
00:15:28	Yvonne	I like how this episode challenges the idea that cultural difference is only skin deep. Our most fundamental cognitive processes are shaped by experience. You and Ishita explained this very well.
00:15:52	Ishita	What might not be clear here is that our moral intuitions are a universal aspect of human nature shared with other primates at least. But there is also great cultural variation. And this can seem like a contradiction. You might think that if it's part of our animal nature, then it should be the same across cultures.
00:16:19	Joseph	And this question is something that uh, Haidt addresses directly. He compares our moral intuitions to our taste buds. Everyone's tongue has the same taste receptors. We can all taste salty, sweet, sour, bitter and savory flavors. But at the same time, our experience of food depends heavily on the cuisine we grew up with.
00:16:42	Ishita	So just as different cuisines may have different flavor profiles, different cultural communities can have different value profiles. The basic categories of values - care, fairness, loyalty - are universal. But the specific cultural emphasis or the particular cultural logics related to those values are cultural. So our moral taste buds can be the same. Yet we develop very different kinds of moral cuisines.
00:17:16	Joseph	And ultimately that gives human communities a lot of flexibility. And that has been a key to our survival as a species.
00:17:32	Yvonne	I like this idea of value profiles, like flavor profiles. And overall, I deeply enjoyed this episode. I found it, what's the word? Refreshing. Yeah, that's it.
00:17:46	Joseph	Refreshing?
00:17:48	Yvonne	Yeah, refreshing. Because we often talk about cultural values, Joseph, without giving the feelings behind values too much thought. And this is

		another example for me of digging deeper because the intuitive mind's key for a deeper understanding of moral intuitions and values.
00:18:09	Joseph	And speaking of feelings, uh, we did a whole episode on <i>Culture and Emotion</i> .
00:18:16	Yvonne	Yes. You know, we sometimes talk about cultural difference as what people do the food they eat, how they greet each other, but cultural difference runs very deep indeed, including in the experience of emotion.
00:18:30	Joseph	And cultural bridge people sometimes need to switch between different emotional languages, so to speak, as we heard from Zeina Matar.
	Joseph	And so do you shift between different modes, so to speak, in different contexts?
00:18:50	Zeina	Oh yes. Things are very different in Germany, especially in Swabia where I live, people are known to be more reserved, even a bit taciturn, especially the older generations. A mother and the son would not embrace when they met rather shake hands. Although these days things have changed a bit. Still this was an absolute shock when I arrived here.
00:19:13	Joseph	Well, how does it feel to you now?
00:19:15	Zeina	Well, it's not just a question of whether we show emotion or not. Everything needs to be understood in context. Even if the mother and son love each other deeply, they might be very reserved about showing it to the outside world.
00:19:29	Joseph	So like there's a different emotional grammar.
00:19:32	Zeina	And I remember something that Emre mentioned that what triggers which emotion is mostly cultural. Hugging may trigger happiness and joy for people in a very proximate culture like Turkey or Lebanon, but trigger discomfort or even disgust for some somebody from Scandinavia.
00:19:51	Joseph	So that's a challenge too because these things touch us very deeply and it's, it's not easy to change our emotional reactions.
00:20:00	Zeina	The contrast to coming back to Germany from the Middle East hits me pretty strongly. And yes, it does feel like a coldness here, but I adjust by becoming more reserved in Germany than I am in Lebanon.
00:20:19	Yvonne	I like the idea of emotional grammar. Just another example of how intercultural experiences can make us dig deeper into ourselves.
00:20:31	Joseph	And that brings us to Part Three - Unconventional Wisdom.
Part Three – Unconventional Wisdom		
	Joseph	So Yvonne in English ideas that people accept without much question simply because it's what everyone believes is called the conventional wisdom. Does that term exist in Dutch?
00:21:09	Yvonne	Well, I can't think of an exact equivalent, but we do have something called farmers' wisdom - <i>Boerenverstand</i> - which refers to things that we accept we because they've always been that way often for a reason.
00:21:26	Joseph	Okay, interesting. I bring this up because digging deeper sometimes means challenging the conventional wisdom.

00:21:34	Yvonne	And one source of inspiration for this was a survey carried out by the Japan Intercultural Institute, which asked about attitudes and assumptions held by intercultural educators and trainers.
00:21:48	Joseph	And frankly, the podcast team members sometimes really questioned some of the attitudes and assumptions that this survey found.
00:21:58	Yvonne	For example, the survey found that more than half of intercultural trainers identified more as a global citizen than they did as someone from a particular country.
00:22:10	Joseph	And we discussed that in episode 27 - <i>Are you a Global Citizen?</i> . And while all the team members had some reservations about describing themselves as global citizens, it was Daniel Glinz who spoke out most strongly.
00:22:27	Yvonne	And the interesting thing was that if anyone on the team is a quote-unquote global citizen, then Daniel is, but that's not how he sees himself. Let's listen back...
00:22:47	Daniel	Well, I'm rather skeptical of this idea of being a global citizen. When it came up in our brainstorming session with the other members of the podcast team, I flatly said that there is no such thing as a global citizen. Well, I can understand why people hesitate to call themselves global citizens. For one thing, beyond having an interest in global issues, what does it mean to be a global citizen? Is being a global citizen an attitude? Do you have to travel the world to be a global citizen? Is there a kind of global mind that you're supposed to have? Well, I think some people use the term global citizen in another way. They mean that they have somehow moved beyond their local perspective. Like saying, "I'm not just Swiss, I am a global citizen". Well, that doesn't make sense to me. Most of us have grown up in one, maybe two, or sometimes three or more different places. You have third culture kids who were raised in different contexts, but still growing up between several different countries is not the same as being global. I doubt whether being "global" or "international" is possible.
00:24:26	Yvonne	And the segment from that episode that I really liked because it got me thinking was Ishita Ray talking about the idea of global citizenship from her perspective in India.
00:24:47	Ishita	Recently I was telling a friend about applying for a visa to travel abroad. To get the visa I needed to show a letter of invitation, three years of tax returns, a bank statement of the last six months, a list of my financial investments and so on. Traveling from India to a quote-unquote developed country, I'm often treated with a certain suspicion. I have to prove that I am the right kind of person, that I have the reason and the resources to be allowed to go. It's easier to be a global citizen if you have the right passport. And a big bank account. My friend recalled that his childhood image of world travel came from Hollywood romantic comedies where you suddenly realize that you simply have to meet this person who is in Paris or London because you've realized you are in love.

		So you drive frantically to the airport, arrive at the ticket counter, throw your passport at the desk and ask for a ticket. And of course, you get the ticket and then you live happily ever after...
00:26:06	Ishita	For me to be a global citizen, and I am more fortunate than many in my country, I must stand in a long queue at a crowded embassy with no guarantee that my papers will be worthy of permission to travel. And of course, the reality is worse for a working-class Indian who might have put together all their life resources for the opportunity to work as a daily wage earner in an alien far away country so his family back home can have the bare necessities. If gaining a global perspective requires going off to see the world, then only a few privileged will have this chance. The majority of people in the world have never been on an airplane, will never see Paris or London. They are busy solving challenges of daily life, and yet they have rich experiences and community knowledge. We need to find ways to connect to them as global citizens as well.
00:27:20	Yvonne	It's just so true. Daniel's and Ishita's segments challenge us to go beyond feel-good ideas - Are migrant workers global citizens? How much privilege is required to travel the world?
00:27:36	Joseph	And we also try to challenge the conventional wisdom. In episode 30, <i>Ethnocentrism</i> , which I recorded with Emre Seven.
00:27:45	Yvonne	It's one of those terms that seem very familiar with which we may not think deeply enough about. And again, we didn't agree with the opinions of many intercultural trainers.
00:28:02	Joseph	So Emre, let's start with a question from a survey carried out by the Japan Intercultural Institute. "Do you agree or disagree with this statement: I believe that ethnocentrism is something we learned from our environment, so it can be overcome with education".
00:28:23	Emre	Take a moment to think about this. Is ethnocentrism natural and thus unavoidable? Or is it something we learn from our environment? If you believe ethnocentrism is learned, then maybe education or the right attitude can overcome it. If it's a natural part of how our mind works, then it's not so simple.
00:28:51	Joseph	And this survey was given to intercultural professionals, trainers, and teachers, and 75% of intercultural educators agreed that ethnocentrism is learned and can be overcome by education.
00:29:06	Emre	I must say I was a bit surprised because personally I disagree. I think ethnocentrism is natural, but a lot of educators had a different view.
00:29:19	Yvonne	This is really challenging conventional wisdom. 75% of intercultural professionals say that ethnocentrism is learned. But this episode argues that from the cognitive perspective, that's not true.
00:29:35	Joseph	Right... Ethnocentrism is a natural part of how our mind works, which doesn't mean it's good, but it does mean that you can't (quote unquote) "overcome" ethnocentrism in any absolute way. You'd have to overcome the functioning of your own mind.

00:29:53	Yvonne	Well, that argument is a bit technical, but indeed, but I thought you and Emre did a good job of explaining that. Let's listen to a bit more.
00:30:08	Joseph	So let's take a look at the cognitive architecture of ethnocentrism. What's going on in our heads?
00:30:15	Emre	And as usual, the closer you look at it, the more complex things become. In fact, we are talking about ethnocentrism as though it's a single thing. But the experience of ethnocentrism is related to a whole constellation of cognitive processes. And perhaps the most fundamental process related to ethnocentrism is something referred to as <i>predictive processing</i> .
00:30:46	Joseph	Our mind navigates the world using internal models. We're constantly making unconscious predictions about what we experience. We're constantly anticipating what will happen next. And ethnocentric reactions are a natural result of predictive processing because our expectations about how the world works or how it should work come from our previous experience.
00:31:11	Emre	So predictive processing is kind of the starting point for ethnocentrism.
00:31:17	Joseph	It is also deeply rooted in our mind and it is held in place by a number of natural cognitive biases.
00:31:26	Emre	One cognitive bias that is closely related to ethnocentrism is the familiarity bias. This is sometimes called the mere exposure effect - and that refers most simply to the fact that what is familiar is often experienced as more positive than something that is different or unknown. And then there is the confirmation bias.
00:31:53	Joseph	And that's the tendency to look for information that confirms what we already know or believe.
00:31:58	Emre	Their foreign experiences reinforce their feeling of cultural superiority.
00:32:04	Joseph	And then there's a desire for cognitive ease.
00:32:07	Emre	Cognitive ease refers to the fact that things that are familiar to us require less cognitive processing, and that gives us a sense of comfort and reassurance.
00:32:22	Joseph	So ethnocentrism is rooted in predictive processing and it relates to a number of cognitive biases - familiarity bias, confirmation bias, cognitive ease. And together with all this, we have one of the most powerful of human biases, the in-group bias.
00:32:41	Emre	Yes, we have a natural tendency to favor people that are similar to ourselves. We are social primates and the in-group bias triggers a sense of togetherness. And this is a core survival mechanism.
00:33:09	Yvonne	I think this last line is good example of challenging the conventional wisdom. Many people think that ethnocentrism is learned, but here we are describing it as "core survival mechanism".
00:33:24	Joseph	Well, I do think that episode worked well, but it is a challenge for us to dig deeper like this. Every episode has a learning curve and we choose a topic, we explore it from the cognitive perspective, we share our experiences, but somehow it comes together.

00:33:43	Yvonne	Well credit to you, Joseph, for taking all those different threads and weaving it all together.
00:33:48	Joseph	Well, thank you, Yvonne!
00:33:52	Yvonne	Now that we've looked back on season three, what's ahead for the Deep Culture Podcast next season, Joseph?
00:33:58	Joseph	Well, we will take some time off in August, but we are discussing possibilities for season four. We may kick off with a tribute to Edward T. Hall in September and we have a special summer treat. While we are gone, we will replay some of our favorite episodes from Seasons one and two.
00:34:18	Yvonne	That sounds great.
00:34:20	Joseph	And I think that's a good place to bring this episode to a close. Uh, we mentioned the <i>Developmental Model of LinguaCulture Learning</i> . If you want to learn more, we will send you for free excerpts from my book, <i>Language, Culture and The Embodied Mind</i> . Just send us an email to dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org . The Deep Culture Podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I am the director of JII. If you like this podcast, but want to go deeper still, you should take the "Brain Mind and Culture Masterclass" sponsored by JII and taught by Yvonne and me. It's a blended learning course and online community of cultural bridge people. The next one starts in October. To find out more, just do a web search for the Japan Intercultural Institute and click on masterclass. If you like the Deep Culture Podcast, please share it on social media and thanks so much to the whole team for all your help during season three - Zeina Matar, Ishita Ray, Emre Seven, Daniel Glinz, sound engineer, Robinson Fritz and JII's administrator Ikumi Fritz. And of course, thanks to you Yvonne, for everything and for sharing this time with me.
00:35:48	Yvonne	Well, it was a pleasure, Joseph. I greatly enjoyed being here with you today and thanks everyone for listening. Wishing you a wonderful summer.