

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 **Ishita Ray** 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 48 – Beyond WEIRD (Pt 2): Deep Culture Learning)

What does it mean to “learn” a culture? In this episode, Joseph Shaules and Ishita Ray talk about how insights from cultural psychology can help us answer this question. We learn about embodied culture, predictive processing, and how our intuitive mind learns new patterns of perception. We find out the four key insights that we need for deep cultural learning. This is Part 2 of the Beyond WEIRD episode.

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| 00:00:01 | Ishita | (Hook) Is kimonos and manga cultural learning? If you know about tea ceremony, do you know Japanese culture? |
| 00:00:21 | Joseph | Hello, this is Joseph Shaules, and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore the psychology of intercultural understanding. And I am here with Ishita Ray. How are you doing today, Ishita? |
| 00:00:33 | Ishita | Hi, Joseph. I'm doing great, and it's great to be here with you again. |
| 00:00:38 | Joseph | Well, we're beginning Season five of the Deep Culture podcast. How does it feel? |
| 00:00:44 | Ishita | It's exciting. We are getting close to 50 episodes. |
| 00:00:48 | Joseph | So let's just take a minute and talk about where we are with the Deep Culture podcast. And to start, our community of listeners keeps growing. |
| 00:00:56 | Ishita | And they are all over the world. We now have a big group of teachers developing classroom materials for the podcast, and we are getting great feedback. I hear people say, this podcast made me think... |
| 00:01:12 | Joseph | And I think one reason is that we focus on the psychological impact of foreign experiences. |
| 00:01:21 | Ishita | And, you know, it's easy to find information about foreign cultures. But a TikTok video at the Taj Mahal is fun, but you don't really learn that much. |
| 00:01:33 | Joseph | And on the other hand, academic articles or textbooks about intercultural communication can be pretty theoretical, pretty boring, actually. |
| 00:01:42 | Ishita | We talked about that in Episode 46 - <i>Beyond WEIRD: Approaches to Intercultural Education</i> . Let's listen back to what Emre had to say. |
| 00:01:56 | Emre | Intercultural education is dominated by the theory and methods from a few countries, in particular, so-called western countries, Europe, North America. This question relates to theorizing, too. Are the concepts used in English, for example, equally useful in other languages? |

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| 00:02:19 | Joseph | That episode goes on to talk about how intercultural education can be abstract and hard to relate to. And Liu Liu talked about how this can be a limitation. Let's listen back. |
| 00:02:34 | Liu Liu | Over the years, I have taught in over 30 countries on subjects such as management, environment, and climate change. I have found, for example, that for people from more interdependent societies, storytelling can be more effective than business models based on logic, full of squares and boxes and arrows and lines going all over the place. And many cultural models, such as the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, feel rather WEIRD to me because there is so much emphasis on categorizing, putting culture into a neat set of boxes, like when we classify animals or plants or stone tools. |
| 00:03:27 | Ishita | And this is one reason people like this podcast. We have a different approach. And, in fact, there is learning theory behind what we do. It's called the <i>Deep Culture approach</i> , and it's based in cultural psychology, which is not typical in intercultural education. |
| 00:03:48 | Joseph | And what we are interested in is how our mind handles the psychological challenges of foreign experiences. For example, today we're going to talk about predictive processing, the way that our mind interprets the unfamiliar based on the familiar. |
| 00:04:06 | Ishita | So this season will start with us getting a bit geeky, which I love. We will talk about the deep culture approach and how it helps us understand cultural learning. |
| 00:04:18 | Joseph | And that brings us to part one – Navigating Culture |
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| 00:04:33 | Ishita | So, in the simplest terms, this podcast and the deep culture approach relates to <i>cultural learning</i> . But what does that mean? |
| 00:04:44 | Joseph | And you know, what I hear is like a student will say to me, “Oh, I came to Japan because I want to learn about the culture” or “I love Japanese culture. It's so fascinating!” |
| 00:04:55 | Ishita | But that could mean so many things. Is kimonos and manga cultural learning? If you know about tea ceremony, do you know Japanese culture? |
| 00:05:07 | Joseph | Well, this is the traditional way to talk about culture and cultural learning - a kind of artistic view. So to learn about Russian culture, you learn traditionally Russian things. To learn about Thai culture, you learn Thai things - history, dance, art, food, whatever... |
| 00:05:22 | Ishita | And then people talk about learning cultural customs, like bowing, eating with your hands, or kissing on the cheek. If you look at culture this way, then learning culture means learning do's and don'ts etiquette. But does learning about kimonos or bowing mean that you understand Japan? |
| 00:05:47 | Joseph | And that is a really important question. What does it mean to understand culture? I've been to India several times, so I know some |

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| | | things about India. But can I say I know India? I'm just a tourist. India is diverse. I don't understand life there in any deep way. |
| 00:06:06 | Ishita | And I've spent some time in Japan. I have some feel for the things there, the train system, how people act. But do I really know Japan? Not in a deep way. |
| 00:06:18 | Joseph | So the first lesson here is that cultural learning can be shallow or deep. |
| 00:06:24 | Ishita | And this means that my feeling of knowing Japan is different from yours, for example, because you're super adapted to life there. You've spent years living there, learned all these subtle expectations, how people think; you had to go through a deep learning process... |
| 00:06:46 | Joseph | And I guess the point is, not all cultural learning is equal. Some people spend years in a foreign place and seem to be eternal tourists. Other people have a foreign experience and their lives are transformed. |
| 00:07:02 | Ishita | And sometimes it can be a small thing that causes a big shift in how we see the world, like feeling my world expand the first time I stepped off a plane in France. |
| 00:07:16 | Joseph | Right. And that's what we want to understand. What is it that makes foreign experiences meaningful? And we look for answers from cultural psychology. |
| 00:07:36 | Ishita | So let's give an example. We understand that cultural learning can be shallow or deep, depending on the cognitive systems involved. Surface culture, things like kimono and tea ceremony, are largely learnt with the conscious mind, what we call the attentive mind. |
| 00:08:01 | Joseph | But deep culture learning is different because you're not just putting new information in the brain or getting some skill, you're learning new habits of perception, like a fish learning to swim in new water. And that involves a different set of cognitive processes. |
| 00:08:18 | Ishita | So if you want to understand cultural learning, you have to learn something about how the mind works, in this case, what is called dual processing models of cognition - that our conscious and unconscious minds work in parallel. And we live much of our lives on autopilot. We do things, judge things, react to things based on unconscious habits and expectations. |
| 00:08:47 | Joseph | And you know what's fun for me, this stuff is kind of technical sometimes. But when you learn about these processes, there are so many things that make sense about cultural learning. |
| 00:09:00 | Ishita | Right! For example, why some people do remain eternal tourists. Because changing these mental habits is not easy. Foreign experiences have a lot to teach us, but they can be threatening as well. So here's another example. Deep cultural learning has a big impact because of something cognitive scientists call predictive processing. |
| 00:09:28 | Joseph | And the basic idea is that our brain interacts with the world by anticipating how things work based on a mental model that we have built up over time. So let's first look at the Wikipedia definition of predictive processing: |

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| | | <i>“In neuroscience. Predictive processing is a theory of brain function which postulates that the brain is constantly generating and updating a model of the environment. According to the theory, such a mental model is used to predict input signals from the senses that are then compared with the actual input signals from those senses.”</i> |
| 00:10:11 | Ishita | So basically, your brain is not simply taking information in from the world and reporting how it is. It has built up an understanding of the world, a mental model. And it is constantly predicting what will come next, filling in the gaps. |
| 00:10:30 | Joseph | Which is why, for example, even though you blink every few seconds, you never notice that your vision is interrupted. And why you can follow a conversation at a loud party. Because your mind can fill in the gaps of speech that are hard to hear. |
| 00:10:46 | Ishita | And we modify our mental models if there are anomalies in a foreign environment. You might experience Oz moments, sometimes called culture bumps, a mental glitch where you notice little details that make you feel like you’re in a different world. |
| 00:11:05 | Joseph | Like I still remember seeing rice fields for the first time and lots of vending machines when I arrived in Japan. |
| 00:11:12 | Ishita | Exactly. That’s because your conscious mind is trying to make sense of anomalies, but that process can also be disrupted. Culture shock comes from your mental model being overwhelmed by new information. |
| 00:11:30 | Joseph | And so that's the first lesson of the deep culture approach. Foreign experiences challenge our mental models, which can frustrate us, but it can also open our minds. |
| 00:11:43 | Ishita | And so when someone says, “I want to learn about the culture”, we say, “How deep do you want to go?” And this podcast is for people who want to dive in. |
| 00:11:56 | Joseph | Which brings us to part two: From science to experience |
| Part 2: From Science to Experience | | |
| | Joseph | So I can imagine someone saying, “Right, predictive processing or mental models are interesting and all that, but isn't that just some abstract theory?” |
| 00:12:28 | Ishita | And yes, the science can be technical, but it not only helps us make sense of our experiences, it reminds us that cultural learning is psychologically powerful. |
| 00:12:41 | Ishita | I've heard people say that they are addicted to travel, which I kind of understand. Going to a foreign place leaves a big impression. You can get hooked on that kind of experience. |
| 00:13:07 | Joseph | So the science helps explain why foreign experiences challenge us psychologically. Which reminds me of a story that Emre told in Episode 45. So let's listen back. |
| 00:13:23 | Emre | The first time that I really understood that people see things in a different way is when I went to the United States. I was shocked to find |

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| | | <p>out that many people had not even heard of my country, Turkey. One day, a young woman I worked with asked me, “Where are you from?” I replied, “Turkey”.</p> <p>She said, “What?”</p> <p>I repeated, “Turkey”.</p> <p>And then she burst into laughter, “There's a country with the same name as the animal?”</p> <p>I was furious, but before I could say anything, another colleague said, “Turkey. Where is that?”</p> <p>It was a shock to realize that not everyone sees the world as I do and that, in fact, we see the world in ways that are familiar. And Turkey wasn't part of the world they knew.</p> <p>It was a very humbling experience.</p> |
| 00:14:41 | Ishita | I love this story. Of course, Emre felt furious, and that's because we feel cultural patterns in our guts, as part of who we are. |
| 00:14:54 | Joseph | And, you know, he could have easily just passed judgment saying, oh, Americans are ignorant, or whatever. But I think Emory understood that his mental model was not the only one. Americans have mental models of the world that are different from his. |
| 00:15:11 | Ishita | And foreign experiences show us that there are so many things we don't know, and we can't operate on autopilot anymore. |
| 00:15:22 | Joseph | And that reminds me, Ishita, of a story you told in Episode 41 about going to dinner with your colleagues in France. Let's listen back. |
| 00:15:35 | Ishita | <p>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. When we started ordering, I realized everyone ordered only for themselves. Everyone had made their decision quite quickly and were all waiting for me to decide what I wanted.</p> <p>My mind froze.</p> <p>Back in India, ordering food is 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.</p> <p>It reflects how deep down you put others' preferences ahead of your own when taking decisions. On that evening with my French colleagues, everyone knew exactly what they wanted and were also very clear in expressing it. But from where I was looking on that day, voicing my choice out loud felt selfish.</p> |
| 00:16:58 | Joseph | So what strikes me about this story is that ordering food in a restaurant is really a minor thing, yet your internal reaction seems like it was pretty strong. |
| 00:17:09 | Ishita | That's true. Ordering food is a small thing, but I could somehow feel that the differences were deeper. You have to have an opinion for yourself, set yourself apart. And in India, things are so different. |
| 00:17:28 | Joseph | In your story, you said, “My mind froze!”. So what was going on? |

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| 00:17:33 | Ishita | Suddenly my normal way of going with the flow just wasn't working. It's like Google Maps crashed and you're on your own. |
| 00:17:42 | Joseph | And we're not talking about etiquette rules, right? Like, is the spoon on the right side of the plate or the left? |
| 00:17:51 | Ishita | Right. And that's the thing. There is no rule book for ordering in a restaurant in France. But people in France have a feel for what's normal when ordering food. Like, everyone orders for themselves. And that normal reflects some deeper things about French society. |
| 00:18:13 | Joseph | Well, I had to learn a different normal in Japan, too. If you're deciding what to order or where to eat, you don't tell everyone what you want. You try to figure out what's best for everyone. There's a different cultural logic at work. |
| 00:18:30 | Ishita | So on the one hand, these things are very small ordering food, but on the other hand, they represent cultural patterns that run deep. |
| 00:18:42 | Joseph | And so when we're talking about adjusting our mental model, we're really talking about learning new patterns. Not just new things you have to do, but new ways of looking at things, of feeling things. So let me ask, did you get used to how people organize food in France? |
| 00:19:00 | Ishita | I did. You can just say what you want, it's great. And how about you in Japan? |
| 00:19:07 | Joseph | Well, I also got used to it. It can be really nice deciding on things together. |
| 00:19:10 | Ishita | But this kind of adjustment takes time, doesn't it? Because the intuitive mind needs time to pick up on these patterns and adjust to them. And sometimes we may not like them. And resisting cultural patterns is also part of cultural learning. |
| 00:19:32 | Joseph | And this gets back to cultural patterns being embodied, which is why you have to be ready to dive in and why sometimes we decide we don't want to change in that way because it doesn't match us or it doesn't match our values. |
| 00:19:47 | Ishita | I think we should listen back to one more clip from Episode 41 by Liu Liu talking about his experience moving to the UK from China because it gives a good feel for how the process of deep cultural learning can last for years and really reshape who we are. Let's listen back. |
| 00:20:14 | Liu Liu | Growing up in China, my goals and targets were set for me. Because my dad loves math and physics. He directed me to study similar subjects. My motivation back then was to fulfill my dad's expectations of me. Later I moved to the UK. I got a low-level job in the mailroom and this felt beneath me because I come from a family of well-educated high achievers and I wanted to become someone whom they feel proud of. But I was no longer in China. I didn't have the same social expectations around me because my dad and others didn't understand life in the UK. This meant my motivation shifted from an interdependent external drive to an independent internal drive. |

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| | | It started with understanding selfness, my own identity. In Chinese culture, individualism carries quite a negative meaning. Transitioning from an interdependent culture to an independent culture is like driving with an instructor and driving by yourself. You are not told what to do anymore, but you are also responsible for your actions. Your social group doesn't make demands, but it's not there to support you either. I felt a sense of release and at the same time it was scary. I had to learn what I'm good at and what I'm passionate about. That mail room put me on a path of independent motivation and self-discovery. |
| 00:22:31 | Ishita | I love Liu Liu's story. It really shows how challenging deep cultural learning can be. |
| 00:22:39 | Joseph | And when you find yourself navigating in such deeply different ways, it can make you question your identity. You may even wonder, you know, <i>who am I?</i> |
| 00:22:49 | Ishita | And this is common for people who grow up between cultures, like children of immigrants. Often they grow up with more than one mental model of the world, for example, from the family and from the society they live in. They can feel really caught in the middle. |
| 00:23:08 | Joseph | So let's pull things together here. We started by talking about cultural learning. When people say, I want to learn about the culture, they may not realize what a big task that can be or how complex the psychology of cultural learning is. |
| 00:23:22 | Ishita | And that complexity relates to predictive processing. Our mind operates largely on autopilot, and changing our mental models is a psychologically powerful experience. |
| 00:23:38 | Joseph | But that does raise a question. If learning about our intuitive autopilot can help us make sense of cultural learning, what else should we know? What else does cultural psychology have to teach us? |
| 00:23:52 | Ishita | And that brings us to Part 3: Deep Cultural Learning |
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| | Ishita | So let's get back to the person that says, "I want to learn about the culture". What advice can we give them? |
| 00:24:25 | Joseph | And this is a question that educators ask - someone teaching intercultural communication, for example, or doing a cross cultural training. |
| 00:24:34 | Ishita | So we'd like to give a thumbnail sketch of some areas of cultural psychology that can help people better navigate intercultural experiences. |
| 00:24:46 | Joseph | And we'll talk about four questions that cultural psychology can help us answer. And these questions are simple but deep. When you start digging, you realize there's a lot of complexity there. |
| 00:24:59 | Ishita | So let's start with the four questions and then say something about each one. - How is the mind cultural? - What are patterns of cultural difference? |

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| | | - What are our natural biases? - How can we deepen our cultural learning? |
| 00:25:22 | Joseph | The first question is, how is the mind cultural? And we've started talking about that in this episode. And the simple answer is that our perceptions of the world are shaped by culture. Scientists find cultural differences in many psychological domains, and we look at the world based on our previous experience. We have a mental model that we rely on. |
| 00:25:49 | Ishita | Check out Episode 39, <i>Culture and the Unconscious Mind</i> . We talk about how psychologists used to think that people's minds worked the same everywhere in the world, but now we know that's not true. Also check out Episode 21, <i>Culture in the Cradle</i> , where we talk about cultural differences in parenting. |
| 00:26:13 | Joseph | So if the human mind is cultural, then that brings us to the second question. What patterns of cultural difference are there? |
| 00:26:22 | Ishita | And this is really a huge topic because cultural psychologists have found difference in many different domains, and we talk about that a lot in this podcast. |
| 00:26:36 | Joseph | For example, Episode 22 talks about culture and how we experience the self. Episode 26 talks about how hard it is to measure cultural difference. Episode 29 talks about culture and emotion. Episode 31 talks about cultural difference in values. Episode 41 talks about cultural difference in motivation. Episode 43 talks about cultural difference in use of space. |
| 00:27:03 | Ishita | Getting a deep understanding of cultural difference is probably the biggest challenge for cultural bridge people. |
| 00:27:22 | Joseph | And that brings us to question three. What are our natural biases? As we explore cultural difference, we need to understand that our minds are naturally biased. Maybe the most important bias to understand is ethnocentrism, which we talk about in Episode 30. But there are others to learn about as well. In Episode 33, we talk about stereotypes. And in Episode 14, we talk about cultural resistance, our natural tendency to have negative reactions to foreign things. |
| 00:27:56 | Ishita | And learning about bias can be kind of depressing because it's such a natural part of how our minds work. And that brings us to question four how can we deepen cultural learning? |
| 00:28:11 | Joseph | In other words, what can psychology teach us about minimizing our bias and going beyond our normal perceptions? |
| 00:28:19 | Ishita | And to get an overview of this, check out Episode 45, <i>Who needs intercultural education?</i> |
| 00:28:27 | Joseph | And because we need to learn how to read the air, so to speak, in foreign environments, check out Episode 42, <i>Cultural Intuitions and the Feel-good Fallacy</i> . |
| 00:28:39 | Ishita | And we need to think about cultural learning goals. Are we trying to become like the locals? Are we trying to go beyond culture in some way? So check out Episode 27, <i>Are you a Global Citizen?</i> |

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| 00:28:54 | Joseph | And we need to understand how stressful cultural learning can be. We look at that in Episode 18, Culture Shock. And Episode 25 talks about how cultural learning can take us out of our comfort zone. |
| 00:29:11 | Ishita | Also, we want to learn how to connect with people who think and feel differently than we do. For that, you can look at research into empathy, the ability to look at things from other people's perspective. We are planning a new episode on that in the coming months. |
| 00:29:33 | Joseph | So now we've dumped a bunch of information on you here, but for us, it's worth it. The things we learn from cultural psychology have helped us understand our cultural learning, and they've made us better educators. |
| 00:29:49 | Ishita | The deep culture approach is very different from traditional pedagogy, so we asked some of the podcast team members to share their thoughts about this. |
| 00:30:00 | Joseph | Let's hear what Sanne Bosma, our newest podcast team member, has to say. |
| 00:30:08 | Sanne | In my work as a teacher and trainer, I became intrigued by individuals who understood concepts and theories but failed to apply them in the real-world. I see this disconnect even among highly experienced professionals. When I discovered approaches that bring together the brain and mind, it seemed like this was the missing piece. On a personal level, a brain-mind approach has deepened my understanding of why I perceive the world as I do. It also helps me to better understand my emotional responses when encountering foreign environments. This approach fosters humility, reminding me that my perspective is inherently limited and that I always have much to learn. |
| 00:31:10 | Ishita | I really relate to the idea that cultural learning fosters humility. |
| 00:31:17 | Joseph | Well, for me, the starting point of cultural learning is recognizing that we have so much to learn. It's not simply a way to brush up your resume. |
| 00:31:27 | Ishita | Let's hear from Emre about this as well |
| 00:31:33 | Emre | I like how the deep culture approach balances theory and practice. It is grounded in research, and we are constantly learning new things. And it also gives us a lot to think about when we are having intercultural experiences. With the podcast, we try to give real stories from the lives of the people in the kitchen, not just giving recipes, but showing what they cook and what they eat and how you can make the most of your ingredients. |
| 00:32:07 | Ishita | And this is what we all have to do with cultural learning, right? We are all cooking with our own ingredients - who we are as an individual, the cultural context that has shaped us, the foreign adventures we are having, the meaning we make for our lives. And maybe what we can pass on to others as cultural bridge people. |
| 00:32:33 | Joseph | And I think that's a good place to bring this episode to a close. But of course, we are just getting started on season five. |

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| 00:32:42 | Ishita | We are working on a new episode on empathy and on bias. And we want to look more deeply at under explored areas in intercultural education, like gender and religion. |
| 00:32:57 | Joseph | Plenty to look forward to. The Deep Culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I'm the director of JII. There have been changes to the podcast team. We want to give a special thanks to Yvonne van der Pol, the co-founder of the Deep Culture podcast, and also to Zeina Matar and Daniel Glinz for their contributions over the past three seasons. And we wish a special welcome to the newest member of the podcast team, Sanne Bosma. We're so happy to be collaborating with you. And thanks also to Emre Seven, Liu Liu, our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, and Ikumi Fritz. And thanks to you, Ishita, as a producer of this podcast, it's been great working on this episode with you. |
| 00:33:45 | Ishita | Thank you, Joseph. It was great fun, and I'm really excited, excited to kick off season five. |