

Acculturation through a Leisure Activity: The Argentine Tango in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural experience has long been discussed in the context of indigenous people and colonization, refugees, and migrants and sojourners. This study investigated the cross-cultural experience of forty Japanese who were engaged in a cultural leisure activity, the Argentine tango. Three research questions were tested using an online survey and follow-up interviews. Is the tango (as a cross-cultural experience) an exotic experience of the Other for Japanese dancers? Does the experience of the tango make Japanese dancers reflect on the Self? Does acculturation occur through the tango experience? The results of the online survey indicated that the Japanese tango dancers experience the tango as a new and different social practice, despite the long history of that dance in Japan. The interview data provided support for the view that for the Japanese dancers the Argentine tango is an exotic experience of the Other, and that the experience makes them examine the Self. The desire to be closer to the Other helps the Japanese dancers absorb the Latin culture, and in some cases it facilitates an identity change. In other words, through this leisure activity the Japanese dancers are able to experience acculturation. The individual differences in the responses seem to be created by two influential factors: how much the respondents reach out to the culture of the Other, and how ready they are to accept it.

Key Words: acculturation, Japanese, Latino, tango, cross-cultural

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INTRODUCTION

Today, as part of a surge in interest in things Latin American, many Japanese in metropolitan areas enjoy Argentine tango classes and *milongas*, or dance parties, where tango dancers from Argentina and their compatriots congregate. In these venues, Japanese have opportunities to observe and interact with South Americans of Latin descent, or, as they call themselves, “Latinos” (for the sake of conciseness, “Latino” or “Latinos” is used in this paper). In other words, Japanese people, intentionally or unintentionally, have a cross-cultural experience through engaging in this leisure activity. This experience, to a greater or lesser extent, brings some psychological changes to the people involved, and, in some cases, it acts as a driving force for visiting Buenos Aires, the heartland of the tango. This, in turn, encourages further and deeper psychological changes.

In this paper, I describe how Japanese tango dancers perceive the Argentine tango, how they value both the Latin American culture (hereafter, the Latin culture) and the Japanese culture, and what changes they experience as a result of the cross-cultural contact. A person is surrounded by his or her culture (e.g., knowledge, behavior, beliefs, attitudes, values) from birth, and learns and acquires that culture through interaction with parents, other adults and peers. Later, the person may experience cultural and psychological changes as a result of contact with people from different cultures (Berry et al. 2002). This is called “acculturation”. Acculturation is defined as “a process that individuals undergo (usually later in life) in response to a changing cultural context” (Berry et al. 2002, 349). It has been claimed that acculturation occurs via a number of processes, including colonization, military invasion, migration, and sojourning (Berry 2005). Recently, acculturation research has been extended to tourists. Ward (2008) states that studying acculturation by tourists is an opportunity to test and extend acculturation theory, since tourism is the most common setting for first-hand intercultural contact. This study argues that people who are engaged in a leisure activity that is embedded in another culture may also experience acculturation to a certain extent, and that, in some cases, the leisure activity may facilitate further acculturation. When discussing acculturation, it is important to distinguish between group and individual acculturation (Berry et al. 2002). The focus of this paper is individual acculturation, or “psychological acculturation”, which is defined as “the changes that an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures” (Berry et al. 2002, 350). The particular interest of the present article is psychological changes in the Japanese people who

dance the Argentine tango.

While history and tradition are still respected in Japanese society, Japan today shares many aspects of its culture with other developed nations due to globalization. After the Meiji restoration in 1868 and particularly after World War II, Japan was eager to embrace Western culture. Over time, aspects of the West have been absorbed and adapted to suit Japanese society (Tobin 1992). Nowadays, the West has lost its exotic nature and has been blended into Japanese life. On the other hand, Latin America, still exotic because it is out of the ordinary to Japanese people, is attracting the attention of those Japanese who want to be different.

One clear component of Latin American culture is the Argentine tango, known as “a dance of passion that expresses *sentimiento* (feelings) between a man and a woman” (Takahashi 1997, 22). In Argentina and Uruguay, it is a deeply rooted tradition, closely related to the history of the region, and maintained for decades by aficionados. In October 2009, the tango was recognized by the United Nations as part of the world’s intangible cultural heritage. The Argentine tango is now danced in most parts of the world. Based on tango-related web sites, it appears that, in Asia at least, Japan is at the top in terms of the number of tango schools, dance halls and tango dancers. The Japanese tango schools and tango parties often provide Latino tango dancers to attract customers. Knowing that it is a lucrative business, some Latino dancers themselves hold classes and dance parties, or *milongas*, to which they often invite their Latino friends. In these contact environments, Japanese people have opportunities to observe and interact with people from a different culture. For them, learning the tango is not merely learning a dance; it is a cross-cultural experience. By observing and interacting with Latinos, they experience a different culture, one with which they are not familiar. In this paper, I call the culture with which the Japanese people are familiar “the Self”, and the Latin culture, with which they are not familiar, “the Other”. Whether the Japanese tango dancers perceive the tango itself as being of another culture will be discussed later.

Three research questions are tested in the present study. Is the tango (as a cross-cultural experience) an exotic experience of the Other for Japanese dancers? Does the experience of the tango make Japanese dancers reflect on the Self? Does acculturation occur through the tango experience? Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, namely an online survey and interviews.

HISTORY OF THE TANGO IN JAPAN

The current popularity of the tango can be seen as a product of the devotion and commitment of tango dancers in earlier times. A small cadre of elites in Japan encountered the tango as early as the 1920s. French-style Argentine tango (as part of French-style ballroom dance) was introduced to the Japanese aristocracy by Baron Tsunayoshi Megata (Manus 2000), who had learned the tango at high society dance parties in Paris (Megata 1999). However, because Megata taught directly by dancing with people without using any written instructions, his style of dancing was overshadowed by English-style tango, which was standardized and documented (Megata 1999).

A number of dance halls were built during the competition between English-style and French-style tango, but few survived, due to the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, police crackdowns on disguised prostitution, and austerity measures imposed by the government leading up to World War Two (Nagai 1999). Nonetheless, the tango remained a dance of the elite until the complete closure of dance halls in 1940 due to the war (Megata 1999; Nagai 1999); it did not become accessible to ordinary people for many years after that (Gambarotta 2006). Although some dance halls re-opened after the war, it was mostly for English-style ballroom dancing, where the sporting or fitness side was intentionally emphasized (Megata 1999) in order to cleanse the negative image of dance created by the police and journalists (Nagai 1999).

According to Takahashi (1997), the first recording of tango music in Japan was released as long ago as the late 1920s. The music of the tango continued to be listened to by many Japanese people, even during the war, primarily because it was still available when almost all other non-Japanese music was banned (Savigliano 1992), but probably also because the melancholy tango music appealed to their mood (Takahashi 2002). Since then the music has not lost its popularity (Ishikawa 2001). Once tango music programs commenced on the radio after the war (Fujisawa 1981), the music was embraced readily by the general public (Miura 2009).

In 1955, a circle of tango lovers formed a club called Tango Suiyokai and organized regular gatherings to listen to and, to a lesser extent, dance to tango music (Miura 2009). A small group of Japanese tango fans had an opportunity to see an authentic tango show for the first time in 1961 when a pair of Argentine dancers, Gloria and Eduardo Arquimbau, accompanied by the Francisco Canaro Orchestra, danced on stage (Gambarotta 2006). In 1972, tango fans fell into raptures over the tango

dance lessons taught by Gloria and Eduardo (Miura 2009). It was not until 1987, however, when the musical *Tango Argentino* was performed at a theatre and later broadcast on television (Manus 2000), that the dance itself became popular among the general public in Japan. A decade later, in 1997, a major Argentine tango dance show, *Tango Buenos Aires*, was staged in Tokyo for six weeks (Takahashi 2002).

Some Japanese ballroom dance instructors who were aware of the trends of the times sought a new career in the Argentine tango. Taihei Kobayashi and his partner Yuko Eguchi were the first Japanese dancers to go to Argentina to study the dance. On their return in 1998, they opened a tango school in Tokyo, and established the Argentine Tango Dance Association, which organized performances and workshops (Kobayashi and Eguchi 2000). In the same year, the Argentine Tango Dance Club was formed, and the members provided a *practica* where tango lovers could go and practise (Miura 2009). A number of tango schools, circles and cafes have followed. The year 1998 was memorable as it marked one hundred years since Japan and Argentina had established diplomatic relations. As part of the commemorative ceremonies, Japan welcomed the Argentine National Orchestra, together with tango singers and dancers sent by the Argentine government (Takahashi 2002).

Since Gloria and Eduardo Arquimbau, a large number of tango dancers from various shows have offered group and private classes to local fans (Gambarotta 2006). Among them, Maria and Carlos Rivarola's dedication to the Japanese tango community is worth noting. Since 1987, the Rivarolas have visited Japan regularly to give demonstrations and lessons to Japanese dancers (Miura 2009). According to their autobiography (Rivarola), they have also directed tango dance shows with and for Japanese tango fans, and lectured on the Argentine tango at Japanese universities. They have made a considerable contribution towards the popularization of the tango throughout Japan (Miura 2009).

From the mid 1990s, Japan started to see Argentine-born tango dancers and teachers settling in Japan in order to engage in tango-related businesses. One of them, Juan Guida, who came to Japan to teach tango for Kobayashi, opened the first *milonga* in 2000 and helped promote the Argentine tango in Tokyo (Mong-Lan 2006). Many *milongas* have been opened since then. In addition, the influence of mass media has been significant. In 2002, Japanese National TV aired a nine-week series of tango lessons, taught by Kobayashi and Eguchi, and in 2003 and 2004 the performance by the Argentine Tango Dance Company, which was formed by the same people, was televised. All of this has fuelled the tango boom in Japan

(Kobayashi and Eguchi 2000).

The Argentine government's promotion of the tango has also assisted the growth of the popularity of the tango in Japan. Every August, in Buenos Aires, the Argentine Tango Dance World Championship, funded by the Argentine government, is held. Since 2004, the Tango Dance World Championship in Asia, officially authorized by the Tango Dance World Championship Organization in Buenos Aires, has been held in Japan. At a six-month-long universal exposition in Japan in 2005 (the Aichi EXPO), eleven tango shows, organized by the Argentine government, were performed every day. On Argentina's National Day there was an official ceremony and a variety of events, including special tango shows. The Aichi Expo was visited by more than fifteen million people (Gambarotta 2006). In 2008, Japan saw a unique mix of Japanese and Argentine arts. An Argentine tango with the theme of the *Tale of Genji*, a Japanese novel written 1,000 years ago, was performed in Tokyo and Nagoya as one of the events celebrating 110 years of friendly relations between Japan and Argentina. In this tango performance, entitled *Jyoen* (Passion of Fire), Argentine dancers were supported by Japanese traditional dancers and performers, and a mix of Argentine and Japanese traditional music accompanied the dances (Arita 2008).

At an individual level, in 2009 a Japanese couple, Hiroshi and Keiko Yamao, won first place in the traditional salon category at the seventh Argentine Tango Dance World Championship organized by the Department of Culture of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. They were the first non-Argentine pair to win in this category. In the same year, Yuriko Kobayashi won the Japan Arts Fund, which is part of the international cultural exchange program promoted by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, and became the first tango dancer to go to Buenos Aires to study the tango on a government grant. Currently, she teaches and performs both in Buenos Aires and Tokyo with her Argentine dance partner.

Today Japan imports a number of Latino tango dancers for both performances and teaching. There are numerous *milongas* and tango classes all over Japan. Most of these tango venues hold frequent performances by Latino tango dancers, some of whom are teachers or teachers' assistants residing in Japan. Japan also exports many tango enthusiasts to Buenos Aires.

THE OTHER AND THE SELF

In order to discuss cross-cultural experience and acculturation, it is necessary to establish if Japanese tango dancers perceive the tango as being of another culture or it has become part of the fabric of their lives. To this end, I created a web survey in which participants, who were tango dancers, were asked which of a range of words they related to the tango. I compared the responses of Japanese tango dancers (the target group) and Latino tango dancers (the control group). In the survey, one hundred words were randomly presented, one at a time, on the screen. Respondents rated the importance of each word with respect to the tango. The cultural background of the participants was either Latin American or Japanese. The survey was carried out in Spanish or Japanese. The results were analyzed using independent t-tests. P-value was set at 0.05. The results indicated that, in addition to the words rated highly by both the target group and the control group, a number of words suggested significant differences between the two cultural groups. In Japan, the tango has a history of nearly one hundred years. Despite this long history, it seems that the Japanese and Latino dancers' perceptions of the tango differ significantly (for details, see Toyoda 2012).

The Japanese dancers rated the words *Comfortable*, *Enchanting*, *Euphoric*, *Spiritual*, *Sophisticated* and *Individualistic* significantly more highly than did the Latino dancers. These concepts are likely to represent a wish to escape aspects of everyday life that they find boring, stressful or too restricted. In general, Japanese people travel in packed trains, work long hours and sometimes go out for a drink with their work colleagues for bonding purposes. The Japanese national statistics show that more than six million people worked sixty or more hours per week during the period 2000–2004 (Iwasaki et al. 2006). Many workers face health problems, due to their long working hours, which are often complicated by stressful and constrained interpersonal relations (Iwasaki et al. 2006). The following words were also regarded by the Japanese dancers as significantly more important than by the Latino dancers: *Alert*, *Integrated*, *Loving*, *Relationship* and *Trusting*. These concepts may indicate that the Japanese value good relationships with the members of the group to which they belong. Confucian ethics, which emphasizes hierarchy and loyalty, is still deeply embedded in the Japanese culture (Christopher 1984; Chu et al. 1995; Kumagai 1995). It is traditional that one should not stand out but be integrated within the group to which one belongs (Takahashi 2002). It is considered desirable to take care not to harm relationships, and to love and trust the members

in order to stay in the group.

In contrast, the Latino group rated the word *Confidence* significantly more highly than did the Japanese group. This fits the image of assertive tango dancers, both male and female, described by Levant (2003). The Latinos are also, without doubt, proud of the tango, which originated in their land and now has world heritage status. Argentina, once one of the ten richest countries, collapsed in the recent financial meltdown and faced the humiliation of poverty (Lewis 2002). The tango may be one of the remaining aspects of their culture of which they can be proud.

The Japanese rated many more words as important than did the Latinos. These results suggest that, for the Japanese dancers, the social practices in the tango are new and different. Therefore, they see a value in those things that they have not previously experienced, and also in those things with which they are familiar and which are emphasized in the tango. In contrast, the Latinos are not likely to see anything that is particularly novel in the familiar tango world. In summary, the survey responses suggest that Japanese tango dancers perceive the tango as the dance of the Other.

THE INTERVIEWS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

With the precondition that Japanese tango dancers see the tango culture as different from their own having been met, the three research questions are now investigated. First, is the tango (as a cross-cultural experience) an exotic experience of the Other for Japanese dancers? Second, does the experience of the tango make Japanese dancers reflect on the Self? Third, can acculturation occur through the tango experience?

Japanese tango dancers who go to *milongas* participated in the study. I observed their behavior at various tango venues. The aspects that I observed included dress, greetings, invitations to dance, the embrace or dance hold, and conversations with other dancers. I also conducted semi-structured interviews in Japan with forty Japanese tango dancers: twenty males and twenty females. Some background information on the participants such as age and a brief dance history were also collected during the interviews. The participants' ages ranged from the teens to the eighties, and their tango experience varied from one year to more than ten years. In the interviews, I asked individuals or couples to comment on how they view the tango, why they continue dancing, what they think about Japanese dancers and Latin dancers, and what changes the tango

has brought to them. For analysis purposes, I recorded and later transcribed their comments. I analysed the data using the grounded theory approach (Lincoln and Guba 1985), marking key points with a series of codes, grouping the coded points into similar concepts, forming categories from these concepts and creating a hypothesis from these processes. At the interpretation stage, besides the transcriptions, I reviewed my notes taken during the observations and the interviews, and I asked the interviewees to clarify any ambiguous comments. In order to improve reliability, in addition to using the data obtained, I referred to several other sources such as blogs and interviews published on the web and the findings from previous studies published in articles and books. The interviewees' comments have been translated into English for this paper. In identifying the interviewees, I use code names such as F.30.34, which indicates the person is female, in her thirties, and has been involved in the tango for three to four years. In the cases where more than one person is of the same age and has similar tango experience, an alphabetic character has been added to distinguish them. Where a question mark replaces a number, it indicates that that information is missing.

In the following sections, interpretations of the interview data may appear to be binary and stereotypical when the differences between the two cultures are being discussed, i.e., Japanese and Latino. This is not to suggest that the Japanese and the Latin cultures are monolithic. In the case of the Japanese culture, it is evident that the once-supported view that Japan is a monocultural society is too narrow (Sugimoto 2009). In the mid-twentieth century, the popular view was that each society possesses a unique culture, and Japan was described and analyzed within the discourse of Japaneseness (Befu 2009), which ignored diversity within the society. With globalization, Japan has become a society of greater cultural diversity. However, it is also true, as Sugimoto emphasizes, that the two models (monocultural and multicultural) coexist in rivalry, rather than with one overwhelming the other (Sugimoto 2009, 3). The comments made by the Japanese participants tend to highlight the uniqueness of the Japanese society and culture. The Latin culture is historically hybrid, and cannot be defined in a simplistic manner. However, as can be seen in the quotes from the interviews, the majority of the Japanese dancers depicted the Latin culture as possessing positive features that the traditional Japanese culture lacks.

Exotic Experience of the Other

In relation to the first research question (Is the tango an exotic experience of the Other for Japanese dancers?), the interview responses suggest that the Japanese tango dancers look on the tango with a mix of wonder and envy. Quite a few participants commented on the *abrazo*, the tango dance embrace. Japanese people are not used to showing affection toward the opposite sex in public, due to the influence of Confucian ethics (not Confucian religious belief) (Takahashi 2002). When Kobayashi, a pioneer tango teacher and performer, started to teach the tango, as he writes in his blog (Kobayashi and Eguchi 2000), people were reluctant to embrace their partners at the start, as showing affection in public was considered to be embarrassing. In an interview with Mong-Lan (2006), Jorge Tores, a tango dancer and teacher, in speaking about his experience when he started to teach the tango in Japan, said that the first thing he noticed was the difference in the embrace. He emphasized that he had to teach the embrace properly because “the Argentine tango is an *abrazo*, a dance of the close embrace”. Even though most people who attend tango lessons nowadays have some knowledge about how to dance, Tores remarked that quite a few people are disconcerted by the *abrazo* at the beginning. F.30.56a recalls that she could not breathe when she was embraced by a male dancer for the first time. Many Japanese dancers feel uncomfortable about a man and a woman embracing and expressing their feelings, yet they look longingly at dancers who are not embarrassed by physical contact and the display of emotion.

Most Japanese dancers overcome this awkwardness within a few months, and start to emulate not only the *abrazo*, but also other behavior of Latino dancers and experienced Japanese dancers, such as frequent body contact and unreserved conversation. This is clear from comments made by the interviewees. For example, M.50.56b exclaims, “In the tango environment, I can hug, kiss and talk freely!” F.40.34a also enjoys the tango environment because she can express her feelings openly. M 30.56a remarks, “Argentines say what they have in mind without mincing their words. After I started to talk freely, conversations with people have become much more fun than before”. In Japan, public morality is regarded highly, and privately felt ideas and feelings, *bonne*, are often contained behind public mores (*tatema*) (Shimuzu 2001). Hiroshi and Kyoko Yamao, the winners in the traditional salon category at the seventh Argentine Tango Dance World Championship, describe an episode that highlights the difference between Latino and Japanese communicative styles:

What is impressive is that Argentines don't hide anything. So straightforward. For example, before a big competition, our Argentine friends said, "We've been practising hard towards this competition". Japanese dancers would say "We haven't been able to practise much" even if they have. When someone is practising a nice move, they say, "Hey, how do you do that move? Show me how". In Japan, people would say, "It's difficult, isn't it?" and wait until an offer comes. We've heard Argentine friends saying "Don't I look good?" or "Look, I can do this well". They enjoy being looked at, and they don't hide it. And if they don't like something, they say so. In Japan, people try to hide it even if they, in fact, want to get attention.

A number of people show their delight by describing their feelings as "liberation", "escape" and "surreal". In Japan, considerable stresses exist in the competitive schools and workplaces (Christopher 1984). From childhood, Japanese students listen to the teacher and study hard as instructed, and try to get better results than others (Christopher 1984). As adults, employees work hard to out-achieve others (Takahashi 2002). On the other hand, those who are not in the forefront may suffer feelings of defeat and inferiority. Whatever the case, it is evident that people are under great stress, which often causes a somewhat depressed mood. As a supporting argument, the film *Shall we dance?* (directed by Masayuki Suo), which was about a successful, but weary, middle-aged *salaryman* (corporate employee) who takes up ballroom dance lessons to escape from the doldrums, won thirteen Japanese Academy Awards in 1996, which suggests that the movie struck a chord with a considerable number of people.

Constrained human relationships are an exacerbating factor. One aspect of the constraint is revealed in the exchanging of name cards. When people meet for the first time, they often exchange name cards that define clearly their group membership and status, so that both parties can obtain information on how they should treat each other (Matsumoto 1998). The reason is simple. Until a Japanese finds out someone's group affiliation and specific position within that group, he or she is unable to decide how much deference that person should be paid (Christopher 1984). In other words, people do not meet an individual; they meet a member of a certain group. In contrast, at *milongas*, I have seen people handing out name cards with no information about their company name or position in the company. This is very unusual in Japanese society, as people are accustomed to paying more attention to the names of organizations and positions than to people's actual names (Itasaka 1986). Thus, it is plausible

that Japanese people seek an environment where they can be free of the binding stresses of social norms and expectations. Indeed, M.50.78 remarks, “Now I sometimes go out with other dancers for a drink. It’s good because I can relate to them as if they are my classmates regardless of their age or status”. M.30.56a comments that it is escape both from work and from home: “The tango gives me an experience that is entirely different from everyday life [...] It’s escape from work and from home. I think that’s why there aren’t many people coming here with their spouse”. In regard to this, M.50.78 reveals, “I can’t imagine coming to dance with my wife. It would be like a continuation of the family life”. All these comments demonstrate that people seek an environment where they can be themselves without facing any expectations that they must play a social role.

Several people describe the tango experience as “surreal”. As M.30.78a explains, “In the tango, you experience feelings that cannot be experienced in everyday life. It’s a form of meditation. You can feel a partner’s character, nature and love. And everything else just disappears. It’s like being another world”. In a similar fashion, F.50.78b remarks, “In normal life, there are no other occasions where you embrace strangers. In the tango, you can feel the warmth of people”. According to F.50.78a, it is the music that brings one into a different world. She says, with a dreamy look, “When I’m immersed in music, I forget all the bad things. I feel togetherness with the music, and togetherness with the partner”. F.20.12 affirms this: “It is like a meditation. I can forget about everyday life”. This view is shared by a number of dancers, both female and male.

Another aspect of liberation mentioned by some participants is the expression of femininity. While male dominance is still an overwhelming reality outside the home (Christopher 1984; Shirahase 2001), the image of a dominant man and a submissive woman is no doubt weakening in Japan. Taylor (1987, 281) describes the tango as “an encounter between the active, powerful, and completely dominant male and the passive, docile, and completely submissive female”. This image of strong males looking after weak females in the dance is parallel to the Japanese traditional image of a *yamato-onoko* (masculine man) and *yamato-nadeshiko* (feminine woman) (Takahashi 2002). In relation to this, F.50.78a believes that Japanese women still have, to a certain degree, a *yamato-nadeshiko* in them and claims, “Somewhere in our heart, we yearn for a strong man’s lead, cherishing the traditional image of demure Japanese women”. It may be that, for male dancers, the tango evokes nostalgia for feminine charm and submissiveness. M.60.78 voices his opinion that women look elegant in

dresses. Similarly, female dancers express a feeling of liberation for being able to express femininity “without concerning others’ eyes” (F.30.34b). F.40.12 says that she enjoys being feminine and elegant. F.40.34a believes that it is good to dress more femininely because there are few opportunities for people to dress-up in everyday life. At *milongas*, it is not unusual to see women wearing a low-cut dress or a dress with a thigh slit, neither of which is considered appropriate in other parts of Japanese society. It may be that there is some hidden pressure for women to be “strong” in the changing society, and for some it is a relief that they can freely express their femininity in the tango environment. Pegorer (2008) hypothesizes that the tango may have become widespread because it symbolizes the image of the male-dominant (strong males looking after weak females) heterosexual relationship to which many people relate.

While most of the interviewees make positive comments about the Other, there are two negative remarks about Latinos and about Japanese who act like Latinos. One is that “Latino behavior is over the top” (M.60.78). Latinos, particularly males, are well known for being outgoing and effusive (Valdés 1986). On the other hand, Japanese people place value on modesty (Brown 2008) and silence (Nakai 2002). With regard to this, research suggests that Japanese people have low self-esteem due to their modesty and self-criticism. However, Brown (2008, 654) claims that such modesty and self-criticism stem from the fact that “Japanese people are concerned with the impression they make on others and that strongly stating one’s virtues or positive self-feelings elicits negative reactions”. Evidently, in the eyes of Japanese people, the lack of modesty and self-criticism displayed by Japanese who act like Latinos seems excessive. M.40.78b expresses his disgust by saying, “Beginner dancers tend to be too shy. But more experienced ones sometimes go too far. They act as if they are Latin people”. The other negative comment is that “Some men have ulterior motives” (F.30.34a). As mentioned above, physical contact in public, particularly showing affection toward the opposite sex openly is not ethical in Japan. People who violate social etiquette in this way are often regarded as lascivious. The behavior of the male dancers who dance like Latinos may appear excessive to some conservative Japanese.

Reflecting on the Self

In relation to the second research question (Does the experience of the tango make the Japanese dancers reflect on the Self?), some Japanese dancers identify positive aspects of the Japanese culture through engaging

in the tango. M.30.56a comments, “In the tango, you have to respect and care for the partner. Japanese people usually have capacity for that sort of compassion by nature”. M.30.56b reveals that the tango has made him realize some good aspects of the Japanese culture, such as *omoiyari*. Lebra (1976, 38) defines this as “the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure and pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisfy their wishes”. According to Shimizu (2002, 4), it is a “prevalent and idealized cultural common sense” in Japan. Comments such as “whether in the tango situation or not, it’s important to maintain a good relationship with other people” (M.20.34) and “being considerate is good in any situation” (M.60.78) may also be the results of participants’ reflection on this aspect of the Japanese culture, in which the underlying influence of Confucian ethics cannot be denied. While the ethics may sometimes be a constraint, the majority of people seem to value genial relationships with others.

M.30.34 thinks that Japanese people can relate to the tango easily because people appreciate melancholy in Japan. M.40.78c, who is an ex-ballet dancer, claims that he can dance more naturally to tango music than to Tchaikovsky’s ballet music because he gets a nostalgic feeling when he listens to tango music. M.50.78 sees some similarities between tango music and a genre of Japanese popular music called *enka*, which stylistically resembles traditional Japanese music. *Enka* is “a form of sentimental ballad that projects a world of longing and suffering on a personal level that extends to the cultural and national levels” (Yano 2000, 148). The lyrics of *enka* often tell of painful, blighted love or pining for one’s hometown, or both, which are indeed the main themes of tango lyrics. The difference is that *enka* tends to depict the suffering of a helpless woman who has been rejected by her man, whereas the tango focuses on the destroyed heart of a man whose woman has left him for another man.

On the other hand, there is considerable criticism of the behavior of Japanese tango dancers. Some interviewees are critical of Japanese dancers as shy and too reserved. A common comment that several women make is that men are too shy to approach women with whom they have not danced before (e.g., F.40.56a). In contrast, a male dancer claims that women are too shy to make eye contact (M.20.34), which poses a problem. In Argentina, traditionally, men discreetly invite women to dance, from a distance, by making eye contact with a small gesture of invitation. However, in Japan, this is not easy because men cannot attract a woman’s gaze, and therefore they need to walk over to the woman under the public gaze, knowing that a refusal is also publicly viewable. Thus, the shyness

in question is better described in terms of “loss of face” and embarrassment. Face, or *mentsu* in Japanese, is “an image individuals want to claim, maintain, or enhance in the presence of others” (Lin and Yamaguchi 2011, 120). Male dancers, therefore, avoid risky situations where they may invite someone and be refused. F.20.12 claims, “Men never again invite the women who have turned down their invitations”. Perhaps this is due to a strategy to avoid yet another loss of face. Female dancers, in the normal course of events, follow the traditional tango rule that women wait until an invitation is extended, and therefore they do not need to risk loss of face by being turned down. However, they may still feel that *mentsu* is lost if they try to get a male dancer’s attention but do not receive an invitation. While many women complain that men are too shy, it seems that it is also true that some women do not have the courage to make eye contact with a target male. In relation to this, F.30.34d remarks that she likes to go and dance at a *milonga* where nobody knows her because she feels “there is no need to be reserved about looking around to catch someone’s eye”. Apparently, people are concerned about how they are perceived by others.

A number of interviewees state that people dance too far apart in Japan. In Argentina, people usually dance close, chest to chest, cheek to cheek. This proximity is not unusual for them because interpersonal distance is very small in their culture (Marcus and Slansky 1994). In Japan, on the other hand, interpersonal distance is quite large (Marcus and Slansky 1994). Comments with regard to interpersonal distance are, for instance, “The space between the male dancer and the female dancer is very wide” (M.10.78); “People feel awkward when they come very close to each other” (F.30.34d); “Some people, even with many dancing years, simply don’t want to dance in close hold” (F.50.78b); “Japanese men don’t know how to do *abrazo* properly, so they hold women either too close or too loose” (F.40.34b). In terms of *abrazo*, M.40.78a, who has been to Buenos Aires states:

Over there, people express their emotions in actions. If a man likes someone, he shows his affection to her by holding her, kissing her or whatever [...] in action. In Japan, the Japanese people express their feelings in fixed ways [...] only in certain actions or certain words that have been socially coded. Expressing affection is not something they do in public [...] When they are told to show their affection, they go over the top.

Even if people dance pleurably in a close hold, F.30.34a says, as soon as they finish dancing, they return to their normal tense selves.

F.40.78 remarks disparagingly, it is often the case in Japan, after a *tanda* (one round consisting of three or four dances) is over, a male dancer simply departs leaving the dance partner on the floor. According to F.40.34b, “Japanese men do not know how to escort ladies back to their seats”. Referring to this aspect, F.30.34a describes her feeling as, “I feel I’m used for dancing and dumped after”. These awkward behaviors may all be attributed to bewilderment at being caught between what one is supposed to do in the tango and what one is expected to do in the society outside of the tango. Naturally, the norm of the outside world wins in most cases.

Some participants believe that Japanese people tend to dance without feeling, for the same reason. As pointed out previously, a man and a woman are supposed to express *sentimiento* in the tango (Takahashi 2002). However, it seems that Japanese ethics restrict this. M.80.10+a explains:

My tango teacher, Carlos, used to tell me that I had to have a genuine interest in the partner that I would dance with. I shouldn’t dance with anyone in whom I would have no interest. But, in Japan, if I dance with someone with an interest or even just pretend that I have an interest in the person, other people will gossip about our relationship. Well, it’s ok if the two are in a real relationship, but if not, it’s troublesome. So when I dance in Japan, I try not to show any feelings because I don’t want anybody to feel awkward.

Supposedly, in order to dance in a detached manner, some dancers focus on form, as M.70.10+ remarks: “I know that tango is a dance of *sentimientos*. But it appears, in Japan, not many people put emotions in their dancing. Instead, they tend to place an emphasis on rules, the rules of the steps to take”. However, not all think that the focus on technique is to camouflage awkwardness. M.80.10+b and M.50.56b both believe that the focus on steps is because many tango dancers in Japan are ex-ballroom dancers for whom having good form is crucial. F.40.78 thinks that it may be because Japanese people do not appreciate tango music as deeply as do Latinos, in whom the music is ingrained. M.70.10+ adds that it could also be because tango teachers usually emphasize steps rather than feelings. M.30.78a claims that he cannot feel energy coming out of the dancing couples because the Japanese men concentrate on executing steps instead of injecting energy into their dancing. In relation to this, two tango teachers, M.40.78c and F.30.78, make an interesting comment:

Because Japanese *milongas* finish early, people feel that they just have three hours or so to dance. Some people have even less hours if they have to catch the latest train that leaves before midnight. Because time is limited, they want to dance a lot and work up a good sweat. They are not there to enjoy dancing with others. It's more for themselves. At a Japanese *milonga*, they worry about the time and they dance with one after another, and they dance straight away without having any preparatory time. When they dance, they execute step after step displaying all the new steps that they have recently learned. They are not enjoying each movement of the dance.

M.70.10+ mentions that some people chat throughout a *tanda* of dances. He adds, "I think it's not a bad thing since dancing is socializing". M.30.56b, on the other hand, says, "People never forget to say 'please' and 'thank you', but some people find it difficult to carry on natural conversation during a *cortina* (a break between sets of music)". In addition, F.30.34a remarks, "People don't know what to do between tracks of music. Some don't say anything, and just look away so that they don't have to meet the partner's eyes. Japanese people don't know how to communicate". All of these may also be a form of camouflage to hide embarrassment.

A few people mention cliques that Japanese people tend to form. F.30.34c says, "People usually only dance with those they know, within the group". M.50.56a adds, "If it's a *milonga* organized by my teacher, I feel I'm obliged to dance with his students before anyone else". M.80.10+b confirms this. Dancing with members of one's own group is not of itself unusual. However, apparently in Japan, people tend to feel that they "must" dance with in-group members before they can dance with outsiders. The word *giri* represents this sentiment well. In a traditional sense, *giri* refers to correct paths that people have to follow; to mores or to moral duty. In the present day, it implies an obligation to feel grateful for being "looked after" by people such as relatives, colleagues, teachers, and doctors. In some cases, people feel that they "must" return favors, even if it is against their will, in order to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships (Davies and Ikeno 2002). In the tango context, it appears that some people feel that they must dance with certain people out of *giri* even if there are other people with whom they would like to dance.

Acculturation: Psychological Changes

Regarding the third research question (Does acculturation occur through the tango experience?), some respondents reported changes in physical distance (M.50.56b) and in greeting behavior outside of the tango community

(M.30.78a; M70.10+). As indicated above, interpersonal distance in Japan is quite wide (Marcus and Slansky 1994). Hugging, kissing or any form of touching is not part of the traditional Japanese way of greeting. However, some tango dancers seem to have adopted by osmosis the Latin style of communication, and unconsciously behave in a Latino-like way even outside of the tango scene.

A number of people stated, in different ways, that the tango had sown the seed of an identity change within them: “I became cheerful after starting the tango” (F.20.34); “I became more sociable” (M.50.78); “I can make friends much more easily” (F.30.34d); “I’ve become able to open up my heart even with a person whom I’ve never met before” (F.40.56b); “I’ve learned how to express my feelings honestly” (F.?.56); and “I can now talk to people of the opposite sex more naturally” (M.50.56b). F.30.34c claims, “I was more reserved before, I think. I was often worried about how people think of what I say and what I do. Now I feel it’s ok if it’s fun”. F.40.34a explains how she has changed:

I learn tango and flamenco at the Latin Culture Center. Through the contacts with Latin people, I think I’ve changed. A Latino once told me to write “*distruto mi vida*” (I enjoy my life). I’ve become more open. I don’t care about people as much as I did. I don’t feign innocence any more. I’m no longer afraid of expressing my feelings. I’m no longer as inhibited by social expectations.

It is often said that, in the Japanese way of communication, it is difficult to understand what the message really means. A factor is the aforementioned *honne* and *tatemae*. Privately felt ideas and feelings, *honne*, are often concealed behind public mores, *tatemae* (Shimuzu 2001); nor is the way people deliver messages straightforward. Nakai (2002) claims that the use of ambiguous expressions, silence and/or lack of explanation, and the frequent use of hesitation and pauses, all result in perceived difficulty. By drawing on Barnlund’s (1975) analysis of the perceptions of Japanese people regarding their own communicative practices, Nakai argues that Japanese people use ambiguous and indirect communication because factors within Japanese culture oblige them to do so, rather than that they prefer the ambiguous communicative style. The comments made by some Japanese tango dancers suggest that the cross-cultural experience has made them observe the Self from the Other’s perspective, which has resulted in a change to the characteristics that determine who or what the person is; i.e., an identity change.

Acculturation: Individual Differences

The ready acculturation of Japanese tango dancers may seem puzzling given that their contact with South Americans is limited to the time they spend on a leisure activity (the tango) and, in some cases, to short visits to Argentina. I believe that change has been facilitated not only by their contact with South Americans (the Other) directly, but also through interaction with Japanese who have become more acculturated to the Latin culture in Japan or in Argentina itself. The tango community, consisting of familiar, acculturated, Japanese tango dancers, may be providing a desirable environment for smooth acculturation. As Berry (2002, 364) claims, “When acculturation experiences are judged to pose no problem for the individual, changes are likely to be rather easy and behavioral changes will follow smoothly”.

Almost as significant is that the Japanese tango dancers have a choice as to the degree to which they accept the culture of the Other. According to Berry et al. (1987), volition of contact is one of the fundamental and pivotal factors for smooth acculturation. In the case of the Japanese tango dancers, they have freedom to choose which mask to wear and can move between the Japanese culture and the Latin culture. This is clear in the frequent comment that they separate their Japanese selves from their “tango” selves. F.30.56a remarks that, when she is with her non-tango friends, she restrains herself from hugging them. M.50.56a says that he switches his two identities back and forth between the tango self and the non-tango self. M.40.12 expresses his opinion that people learn about the Latin culture, but it does not necessarily mean that they take on Latin styles. M.80.10+a claims that it is not easy to move out of one’s culture, and adds, “People always think about what would be appropriate behaviors” in Japan. It cannot be denied that, for some people, changes remain at a superficial level. M.50.56a is also interested in the Spanish language and other Latin dances such as the salsa and the flamenco. M.40.78b likes to move his body to Latin music, but he says that he is not particularly interested in the Latin countries.

Of course, the degree of acculturation of individuals who already share a common cultural heritage varies greatly (Berry 2009). On the other hand, there is good evidence in the data of this study for thinking that this heavily cultural leisure activity, the tango, can have a life-changing impact on people. Some Japanese have been enthralled by the tango. As a case in point, Hiroshi and Kyoko Yamao had been enjoying dancing the tango as a leisure activity until they decided to go to Buenos Aires.

Hiroshi had a secure job in Japan but gave it up in order to go and study the tango more deeply. The couple stayed in Buenos Aires for one and a half years. In Buenos Aires, after an initial period of confusion due to conflicting suggestions made by different teachers, they met their maestro, who eventually became like their father in Buenos Aires. Through him, the couple learned the heart and soul of the tango. Below is a snippet of what they have learned about a real *abrazo*, and a reflection of what they observe in Japan:

Hiroshi: For us, the tango had been just a dance [...] but after hearing what Carlito said, we started to understand, though vaguely, what the tango is about. When Carlito told us to do an *abrazo*, I didn't know how to embrace properly. I asked him how we should do the *abrazo*, and to this, he said, "*Abrazo es abrazo*. Just embrace naturally".

Kyoko: Carlito's *abrazo* is amazing. No one can give me an *abrazo* as good as his. It's amazing that there is someone who can embrace people so warmly. He envelops you, as a whole, in the warmest hug.

Hiroshi: In the past [in Buenos Aires], it was not easy to dance with a woman. Young ladies were always accompanied by their mothers. In order to dance with the target, a man had to dance with her mother and impress her first. If he didn't get a yes from the mother, that was the end of his competition. Not just him, but all the members of his group were out. For them giving a good *abrazo* was a matter of life or death. They were desperate to get the heart of the target girl.

Kyoko: When we came back to Japan, I thought what the Japanese people were doing was a Japanese tango.

Hiroshi: I didn't realize how distant two people keep while dancing, until I experienced dancing in Buenos Aires. They dance so far apart [in Japan] from each other.

Kyoko: It's been three, four years since we came back to Japan. We now see some good salon dancers around. The dancers' techniques have improved greatly. But I don't think they dance with their heart. I believe one has to experience a shock. One can only change their dance by being exposed to and deeply moved by an emotional dance. The Japanese people are diligent, so they learn techniques very well, but learning how to dance with heart is a different story.

As mentioned above, the Yamaos were the first non-Argentinean couples to win the world championship in the salon division. Miura (2009) wrote in the Shonan Argentine Tango Dance Association newsletter, "I believe their victory is the outcome of, not only their polished techniques, but also their understanding of the emotional expressions born out of Argentine

local culture”. This couple, who started the tango as a leisure activity, came to understand the underlying meanings of the tango, and now put emotion into their dancing.

M.30.78b offers an account of a similar emotionally moving experience. He took up the tango merely because he wanted to do some exercise that he could enjoy. One and a half years later, he also quit his full-time job in Japan and flew to Buenos Aires. He extended his stay there from one year to two:

In my first year, I couldn't open up my heart to people. I wanted to, but I couldn't. And then I gradually learned to open my heart. By doing so, my dance changed. I was liberated. One trigger for opening my heart was when a girl with whom I danced told me that she hadn't been able to dance tango with her heart. It gave me a big blow. It made me realize how much I was focusing on technique. For about a week, I couldn't dance because of the shock. I had been always very conscious about how I looked. It's not the technique, but heart to heart. And that is wonderful. Clearly it is an encounter of a man and a woman. I guess it is difficult in Japan. You can't really be a man or a woman. Over there, it is something very natural. A man is a man and a woman is a woman. Once I opened up my heart, I could see, smell and feel my partner's sorrow. Well it could have been because I was in sorrow, but I thought I did. And I embraced the sorrow. I felt I embraced her heart and comforted her. And I was saved by her. It is a fulfilled feeling. I found the meaning of life there. In Japan, I haven't really felt that way. I believe everyone, regardless of nationality, has something deep inside. Their desire is the same. But in Japan, most people don't openly show it. I feel their feelings are sugarcoated [...], both men and women. By dancing tango, I have realized that I'm not complete. Individuals are not complete by themselves. People complement each other. And I have become more honest after all these experiences. I can't say that I'm now communicating better, but at least I became more honest about myself.

The tango is often described as “four legs, two heads and one heart”. Although the man and woman have different responsibilities, they dance as one, actively collaborating in the creation of an ephemeral dance experience (Olszewski 2008). Takahashi (2002, 63) claims that the tango is “a dance of the ephemeral exchange of joy and sorrow between a man and a woman”. When both sides dance with emotion, “four legs, two heads and one heart” is realized. Both the couple and the man reported above have acquired some of the knowledge, behavior, beliefs, attitudes and values of the Latin culture, and they have gone through considerable psychological changes.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the cross-cultural experience of forty Japanese people who were engaged in a heavily cultural leisure activity, the Argentine tango. Using an online survey and interviews, three research questions were tested: Is the tango (as a cross-cultural experience) an exotic experience of the Other for Japanese dancers?; Does the experience of the tango make Japanese dancers reflect on the Self? Does acculturation occur through the tango experience?

This article presented a snapshot of one stage of the acculturation process. Acculturation is a “continuous process” (Berry 2005, 699), not simply a single output from cultural contact. If assessed at a different time, the patterns of individual differences may be different. Nevertheless, at the present, we can conclude that, in general, the tango, as part of a different culture, has affected the way Japanese tango dancers see themselves and their own culture. As a result, acculturation has occurred, although the extent varies from person to person.

Overall, the following tendencies in the Japanese tango dancers were observed during the present study: appreciation of the culture of the Other; criticism of the Self’s culture; and integration of the Other into the Self. In response to the three research questions, the survey and interview data provide support for the view that, for the Japanese dancers, the tango is an exotic experience of the Other, and the experience makes them examine the Self. The desire to be closer to the Other helps the Japanese absorb the Latin culture; for some, it facilitates an identity change. In other words, through a leisure activity, the Argentine tango, the Japanese dancers can experience acculturation. The tango, which is an embodiment of the Other culture, gives Japanese people, an opportunity to be liberated from the invisible boundary of the Japanese culture, and thus freedom to choose what they want to be. As we have seen in the Japanese tango dancers described in this paper, many of them, consciously or unconsciously, have exercised this freedom. This may be in part because, even though it is a mere leisure activity, dancing the tango is a very intense, personal, and multisensory experience, and can therefore be deeply affecting.

The individual differences seem to be created by two influential factors: how much the Japanese reach out to the culture of the Other and how much they are ready to accept it. Their reach may be affected, in part, by their goal in the tango and the quantity and quality of their exposure to the Other. Their readiness may be determined by various conditions such as their age, personality, past cross-cultural experience, emotional

attachment to the Japanese culture, and the invisible restrictions that the Japanese culture imposes on them. This last factor is elaborated below.

The interview data of this study revealed that most people admire the tango and, by extension, the Latin culture. However, at the same time, they experience some lingering psychological conflicts in their appreciation of the tango and the Latin culture. In my opinion, this can be ascribed to *sekentei*. *Sekentei* is conformance with *seken*, which is the general world-view of Japanese people. According to Nakada (2005, 105), *seken* includes “criteria of value judgments leading to high evaluations of such things as morals, social ethics, common sense, as well as shared myths, illusions, beliefs in and expectations about life and the world deriving from past experiences of natural disasters, people’s relation with nature, the tradition of Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism”. Japanese live in the framework of *seken*, and constantly monitor themselves and others as to how closely *sekentei* is maintained. This appears to be one of the determining factors of the individual differences among the target group. Some people are unable to escape from this framework of *seken*. Others, eventually, break through this invisible wall, and experience major psychological changes. Further research is necessary as to how robust is my identification of the determining factors for individual differences.

This study suggests that, through a heavily cultural leisure activity, the tango, Japanese dancers may experience acculturation. The study sheds light on acculturation theory in terms of the possibility of acculturation through a leisure activity.

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