

*Research Article*

# Culture Shock Experienced by the Main Character in the Picture Book *The Way We Do It in Japan*

Loviana Ressayanti<sup>1\*</sup>, Yosep Bambang Margono Slamet<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Semarang, Indonesia, email: [lovianaressyanti@gmail.com](mailto:lovianaressyanti@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Semarang, Indonesia, email: [yosep-bambangms@untagsmg.ac.id](mailto:yosep-bambangms@untagsmg.ac.id)Author Correspondence: [lovianaressyanti@gmail.com](mailto:lovianaressyanti@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Culture shock is a phenomenon commonly experienced by individuals who encounter unfamiliar cultural environments, including children. This phenomenon is represented in the picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan* through the experiences of Gregory, an Asian-American child who moves from America to Japan and faces cultural differences in daily life. This study aims to analyze the representation of cultural differences between Japan and America and to examine the stages of culture shock experienced by Gregory throughout the story. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using textual and visual analysis of the picture book. The analysis applies Oberg's (1960) concept of culture shock and Pedersen's (1995) stages of culture shock, including the honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence stages. The findings reveal that differences in language, social norms, daily habits, and school practices become the main triggers of Gregory's culture shock. His experiences develop dynamically from curiosity and confusion to gradual adaptation and cultural acceptance. These experiences also contribute to Gregory's emotional growth, adaptability, and ability to understand cultural differences more objectively. Therefore, this study highlights the important role of children's literature in promoting intercultural understanding, empathy, and awareness of cultural diversity among young readers.

**Keywords:** Character Development; Cultural Differences; Culture Shock; Multicultural Literature; Picture Book

## 1. Introduction

Multicultural literature is a form of literary work that represents cultural diversity and individual experiences in dealing with social and cultural differences. According to Cai (2002), multicultural literature can be defined based on both its intrinsic literary characteristics and its pedagogical purposes in education. From a literary perspective, multicultural works refer to texts that explicitly depict multicultural societies or implicitly introduce readers from different cultural backgrounds to specific cultural dynamics. Therefore, multicultural literature functions not only as a representation of culture but also as a medium for understanding intercultural interactions and promoting awareness of cultural diversity. In the context of globalization, cross-cultural mobility has significantly increased, making intercultural encounters and cultural adaptation common experiences not only for adults but also for children. Consequently, individuals are often required to adjust to unfamiliar cultural values, habits, and social norms when interacting with different cultural environments.

Culture shock is a psychological condition experienced by individuals when encountering unfamiliar cultural environments. Oberg (1960) defines culture shock as anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar social signs and symbols in everyday interaction. Furthermore, Pedersen (1995) explains that culture shock consists of five stages: honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence. These stages demonstrate that cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process involving emotional and cognitive changes. Differences

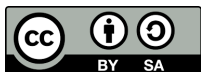
Received: November 15, 2025

Revised: January 18, 2026

Accepted: March 19, 2026

Published: May 22, 2026

Curr. Ver.: May 22, 2026



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in language, values, habits, and social systems often trigger feelings of confusion, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional discomfort during the adaptation process. In children's experiences, culture shock may appear through difficulties in understanding unfamiliar customs, language barriers, social interaction problems, and feelings of isolation within new environments. These emotional experiences are important to examine because they reflect how children perceive and negotiate cultural differences from their own perspectives. Such experiences may also influence children's sense of identity, emotional security, self-confidence, and social belonging during the process of intercultural adaptation.

The representation of culture shock in children's literature is particularly significant because literary works can help young readers understand cultural diversity and emotional experiences in accessible ways. One literary form that effectively introduces multicultural values to children is the picture book. According to Slamet (2013), a picture book combines written text and illustrations that complement each other in constructing meaning. Through the interaction between verbal and visual elements, picture books allow children to understand characters' emotions, conflicts, and cultural experiences more concretely. In addition, picture books play an important role in introducing multicultural values because visual and verbal narratives encourage children to develop empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding from an early age. Therefore, analyzing picture books requires attention not only to textual narration but also to illustrations as visual representations of cultural experiences and emotional conditions.

These multicultural and intercultural experiences are represented in the picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan* by Geneva Cobb Iijima and Paige Billin-Frye through the experiences of Gregory, an Asian-American child who moves from the United States to Japan. This relocation places him in a significantly different cultural environment in terms of language, daily habits, school systems, and social values. Gregory is raised in American culture but comes from a mixed Japanese–American family, making his position unique when facing Japanese culture, which he has not directly experienced before. Throughout the story, Gregory encounters various unfamiliar cultural practices that gradually shape his emotional responses and adaptation process.

The uniqueness of this picture book lies not only in its multicultural theme but also in the interaction between textual and visual narratives in representing culture shock. Gregory's emotional experiences are conveyed through both dialogue and illustrations that visually depict social situations, emotional alienation, and cultural contrasts between America and Japan. The setting also plays an important role in representing cultural differences. Gregory's move from America to Japan highlights contrasts between American culture, which tends to be individualistic, informal, and freedom-oriented, and Japanese culture, which emphasizes harmony, politeness, and social hierarchy (Benedict, 1946; Kelley, 2008; Khusnah et al., 2024; Kohls, 1985). These differences are represented not only through narrative descriptions but also through visual symbolism and character interactions within the illustrations. As Damono (2019) states, setting in literature functions not only as a physical background but also as a representation of characters' emotional and psychological changes when facing unfamiliar realities.

Previous studies have examined culture shock and intercultural adaptation in children's literature. Wulandari (2024), for example, analyzed the stages of culture shock in the *Yoon* series and found that immigrant children often experience confusion, emotional pressure, and identity negotiation when adapting to new cultural environments. However, studies discussing culture shock representation in children's picture books remain limited, particularly those focusing on intercultural adaptation from America to Japan and the interaction between textual and visual elements in representing children's emotional experiences. In addition, previous studies mainly focus on migration from Asian cultures to Western societies, whereas this study examines the reverse cultural movement from America to Japan. Therefore, this study offers a different perspective on children's intercultural adaptation experiences within an Asian cultural context.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the representation of cultural differences between Japan and America in the picture book, to identify the stages of culture shock experienced by Gregory, and to examine how these experiences influence his emotional and character development. The research questions focus on three main aspects: how cultural differences between Japan and America are represented in the picture book; what stages of culture shock are experienced by Gregory; and how culture shock impacts Gregory's charac-

ter development. Theoretically, this study contributes to children's literature studies, particularly in understanding multicultural representation and intercultural adaptation through textual and visual narratives. Practically, this study provides insights into culture shock as a real-life phenomenon and highlights the role of multicultural picture books in promoting empathy, intercultural understanding, and awareness of cultural diversity among young readers.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Koentjaraningrat (1985), culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human creations in social life that are learned and shared (p. 180). Culture functions as a guideline for individuals in shaping behavior according to the values and norms of a particular society. In situations of cultural relocation, individuals are required to understand and adapt to unfamiliar cultural values and social systems. This process often becomes more complex when individuals encounter significant differences between their original culture and the host culture. In the picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan*, Gregory experiences this cultural transition when moving from America to Japan. Gregory carries American cultural values that emphasize individualism, equality, freedom, and informality (Khusnah et al., 2024), while Japanese culture emphasizes harmony, collectivism, politeness, and social hierarchy (Benedict, 1946; Kelley, 2014). These contrasting cultural values become the foundation of Gregory's intercultural experiences throughout the story.

Such cultural differences often trigger culture shock, a psychological condition experienced when individuals encounter unfamiliar cultural environments. Oberg (1960) defines culture shock as anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar social signs and symbols in everyday interactions. This condition is commonly marked by confusion, anxiety, discomfort, and emotional instability when individuals attempt to adapt to unfamiliar values, habits, and social expectations. Culture shock is not limited to adults but may also be experienced by children, particularly when they are exposed to significant cultural transitions. In children's experiences, culture shock may appear through language difficulties, confusion toward unfamiliar customs, problems in social interaction, and feelings of isolation within new environments. Therefore, culture shock can influence not only emotional conditions but also identity formation and social adaptation processes.

To understand the process of culture shock more comprehensively, Pedersen (1995) proposes five stages: honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence. These stages indicate that culture shock is a dynamic process that develops gradually from positive curiosity to emotional challenges and eventual adaptation. The honeymoon stage is characterized by enthusiasm and curiosity toward the new culture, while the disintegration stage reflects confusion, loneliness, anxiety, and declining self-confidence caused by difficulties in cultural adjustment. During the reintegration stage, individuals begin responding more actively to cultural differences, although frustration and negative judgments toward the host culture may still occur. The autonomy stage demonstrates greater emotional stability and the ability to understand cultural differences more objectively, whereas the interdependence stage reflects the successful integration of both original and host cultures into a balanced cultural identity (Pedersen, 1995).

The impact of culture shock can be both positive and negative. In the early stages, individuals often show curiosity and openness toward new experiences, which encourage intercultural learning and adaptation. As individuals gradually adjust to the new environment, they may develop stronger adaptive abilities, social skills, and broader cultural perspectives. Pedersen (1995) emphasizes that successful cultural adaptation may lead individuals to appreciate cultural differences more objectively and develop intercultural communication skills. However, culture shock may also generate anxiety, alienation, frustration, homesickness, and decreased self-confidence, particularly during the disintegration stage when individuals struggle to meet unfamiliar cultural expectations (Oberg, 1960; Pedersen, 1995). Thus, culture shock functions not only as a challenge but also as a process of emotional growth, identity negotiation, and intercultural learning.

In literary studies, culture shock is frequently represented in children's literature, particularly in picture books. Slamet (2013) defines a picture book as a literary work that combines written text and illustrations to construct meaning and narrative coherence. Through the interaction between verbal and visual elements, readers are able to understand characters' emotions, conflicts, and cultural experiences more concretely. Picture books function not only as entertainment but also as educational tools that help children understand social and cultural values more easily, especially with the guidance of adults during the reading process (Slamet,

2013). Because children rely heavily on visual interpretation, picture books become effective media for introducing cultural diversity and emotional understanding in accessible ways. As a result, picture books play an important role in introducing multicultural values, as visual and verbal narratives encourage empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding among young readers.

Picture books can also be categorized as multicultural literature, which represents cultural diversity and individual experiences in dealing with social and cultural differences (Cai, 2002). Multicultural literature functions not only as cultural representation but also as a medium for promoting understanding and appreciation of diversity. Through multicultural narratives, children are introduced to different cultural perspectives, social practices, and identity experiences. In this context, works such as *The Way We Do It in Japan* portray characters who interact with unfamiliar cultures and experience adaptation processes within multicultural environments.

Previous studies have examined the representation of intercultural adaptation and cultural diversity in children's literature. Wee et al. (2018), for example, analyzed Japanese culture in children's picture books and found that multicultural picture books often represent authentic Japanese cultural values through children's daily experiences and social interactions. One of the picture books discussed in their study is *The Way We Do It in Japan*, which represents Japanese culture through the perspective of a child character in a cross-cultural context. Similarly, Jagusch et al. (2021) explain that contemporary American children's literature increasingly portrays more personal and realistic multicultural experiences through Japanese-American child characters. Their study suggests that books such as *The Way We Do It in Japan* reflect changing representations of multicultural identity and intercultural experiences in modern children's literature.

In addition, Wulandari (2024) analyzed the stages of culture shock in the Yoon series and found that immigrant children frequently experience confusion, emotional pressure, and identity negotiation when adapting to unfamiliar cultural environments. The study also demonstrates that children's literature often represents cultural adaptation as both an emotional and developmental process. While previous studies mainly focus on immigrant children adapting to Western societies or on multicultural representation in general, this study examines the reverse cultural movement from America to Japan. Furthermore, previous research tends to emphasize textual representation, whereas this study also focuses on the interaction between textual and visual elements in representing Gregory's culture shock experiences and emotional development. Therefore, this study offers a different perspective on intercultural adaptation in children's literature by analyzing both narrative and visual representations of culture shock within a Japanese-American cultural context.

Based on this theoretical framework and previous studies, this study analyzes how culture shock is represented in *The Way We Do It in Japan* through Gregory's experiences in encountering cultural differences between Japan and America. The analysis focuses on the stages of culture shock, the impact of cultural adaptation on Gregory's emotional and character development, and the interaction between textual and visual elements in representing intercultural experiences within children's literature.

### 3. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a literary analysis approach to examine the representation of culture shock in the picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan*. A qualitative approach is applied because this study focuses on interpreting meanings, emotional experiences, and cultural representations presented through both textual and visual elements within the literary work. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative research is appropriate for understanding social and cultural phenomena through detailed interpretation and contextual analysis. Therefore, this study emphasizes interpretative analysis of narrative text, dialogues, scenes, and illustrations related to intercultural experiences and cultural adaptation.

The picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan* was selected because it explicitly portrays intercultural encounters between American and Japanese cultures through the perspective of a child character. In addition, the book combines textual and visual narratives that effectively represent emotional responses, cultural differences, and adaptation processes experienced by children in multicultural environments. The story also provides significant representations of

culture shock through everyday social practices, language use, school environments, and interpersonal interactions, making it relevant to studies of multicultural children's literature and intercultural adaptation.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data are obtained from the picture book itself, including narrative texts, dialogues, scenes, character interactions, and illustrations that depict cultural differences and culture shock experiences. Meanwhile, the secondary data consist of books, journals, articles, and previous studies related to culture shock, multicultural literature, intercultural communication, and children's literature. These secondary sources are used to support the interpretation and theoretical analysis of the study.

The data collection method is conducted through literature review and close reading of the picture book. The writer thoroughly reads and examines the narrative text, dialogues, scenes, and illustrations to identify representations of cultural differences and intercultural interactions. Since picture books construct meaning through the interaction between words and illustrations, both verbal and visual elements are analyzed simultaneously to understand the character's emotional experiences and cultural adaptation process (Slamet, 2013). During the data collection process, the writer identifies and records scenes, dialogues, and illustrations that represent confusion, anxiety, unfamiliarity, emotional discomfort, adaptation, and responses toward Japanese cultural practices, values, language, and social interactions. These criteria are used to determine scenes related to culture shock experienced by the main character.

The data analysis method employs close reading, which involves detailed and in-depth interpretation of textual and visual elements within the literary work (Braun, 2022). Close reading is applied to interpret representations of cultural differences, emotional responses, character expressions, social interactions, and intercultural experiences presented through both narrative and illustrations. The analysis focuses on how culture shock is represented verbally and visually through Gregory's experiences after moving from America to Japan.

The analytical process is conducted systematically in several stages. First, the writer identifies cultural differences between American and Japanese cultures as the main context of Gregory's intercultural experiences. Second, scenes, narrative passages, dialogues, and illustrations related to culture shock are identified and classified. Third, Oberg's (1960) concept of culture shock is used to identify psychological and emotional responses toward unfamiliar cultural environments. Fourth, the classified data are analyzed based on Pedersen's (1995) stages of culture shock, including honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence to examine Gregory's adaptation process throughout the story. Finally, the analysis interprets the impacts of culture shock on Gregory's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development, as well as his ways of coping with cultural differences.

To maintain the credibility and academic rigor of the study, the interpretation is grounded in theory-based analysis rather than personal assumptions. The findings are consistently supported by textual evidence from narrative texts, dialogues, scenes, and illustrations in the picture book. Through this systematic analytical procedure, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how culture shock and intercultural adaptation are represented in children's picture books through both textual and visual narratives.

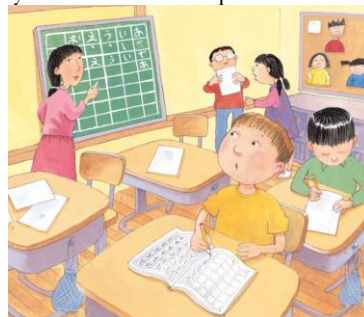
## 4. Results and Discussion

### Representation of Cultural Differences Between Japan and America

The representation of culture shock in the picture book *The Way We Do It* in Japan cannot be separated from the cultural differences between Japan and America, which form the primary background of Gregory's experiences. These differences are represented through language, social norms, habits, and school rules that gradually trigger Gregory's emotional responses and adaptation process. In this context, the picture book not only presents cultural contrasts but also illustrates how intercultural encounters influence children psychologically and emotionally.

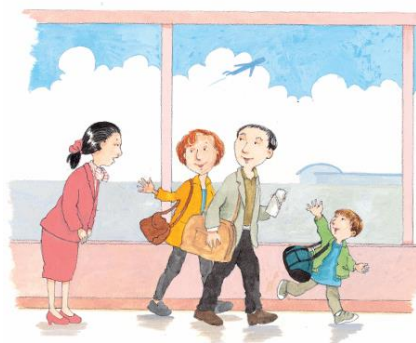
One of the earliest differences experienced by Gregory is language. When the stewardess says, "Ohayoo gozaimasu," Gregory immediately asks, "What did she say?" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 4). This dialogue reflects Gregory's unfamiliarity with Japanese language and shows how language becomes an initial barrier in intercultural communication. His confusion indicates that he still interprets the new environment through the perspective of his original culture. Furthermore, the use of terms *sensei* in the school context, as seen in the dialogue, "Your teacher, Inoue-sensei, speaks English. You will do fine" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 18),

represents Japanese politeness and social hierarchy, which differ from the more informal communication style commonly associated with American culture. According to Benedict (1946), Japanese social interaction is strongly influenced by hierarchical awareness and politeness values, which shape everyday communication practices.



**Figure 1.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 20)

The representation of language differences is further strengthened through visual elements. The illustration in Fig. 1, which shows Japanese writing on the classroom board visually emphasizes Gregory's confusion when encountering unfamiliar symbols. His facial expression and body posture reflect uncertainty and difficulty in understanding the new environment. The narrative, "How would he ever learn to read those funny marks?" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 20), reinforces his emotional reaction toward the unfamiliar writing system. Through the interaction between text and illustration, the picture book effectively conveys Gregory's sense of alienation and anxiety. This demonstrates how visual elements in children's literature function not only as decoration but also as narrative tools that communicate emotional meaning and cultural experience. In addition, the difference between Japanese and English writing systems further intensifies Gregory's unfamiliarity, since Japanese uses three writing systems, 'Hiragana,' 'Katakana,' and 'Kanji,' whereas English uses the Latin alphabet (Angelina et al., 2018; Wallace, 2011).



**Figure 2.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 4)

Cultural differences are also represented through social etiquette and daily habits. One example appears in the greeting scene in Fig. 2, where the Japanese stewardess bows while Gregory and his mother wave in response. This contrast visually represents different concepts of politeness between the two cultures. In Japanese culture, bowing symbolizes respect and awareness of hierarchy, whereas American culture tends to emphasize equality and informality in social interaction (Kohls, 1985). The visual contrast between the characters' gestures helps young readers recognize cultural differences more concretely through illustrations rather than explanation alone.

Another cultural difference appears in the custom of removing shoes before entering a house, as shown in the narrative: "The Japanese like to keep their floors very clean," he said. "So you wear your slippers inside the house" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 9). Gregory initially perceives this practice as unusual because it differs from his previous habits in America. However, after receiving explanations from his father, Gregory gradually begins to understand the value of cleanliness and order emphasized in Japanese culture. His response illustrates that culture shock does not only involve confusion but also the gradual process of understanding unfamiliar social practices.



**Figure 3.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 5)

Differences in eating habits also become important representations of cultural variation. In Fig. 3, supported by the narrative, “He was glad he knew how to use the chopsticks on his tray. ‘This is the way they eat in Japan,’ he told the girl across the aisle. She was eating with a fork” (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 5), Gregory realizes that Japanese people commonly use chopsticks, while some American passengers continue using forks. This contrast highlights how everyday practices function as markers of cultural identity.



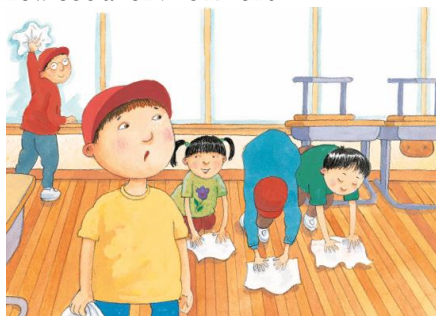
**Figure 4.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 21)

The conflict becomes more significant when Gregory brings a different lunch from his classmates and becomes the center of attention at school. The illustration in Fig. 4, emphasizes Gregory’s discomfort by visually separating him from the other students, who appear relaxed and socially connected. This visual contrast reinforces his emotional isolation and sense of alienation within the unfamiliar environment. In Japanese collectivist culture, visible differences may disrupt social harmony, whereas American culture tends to value personal choice and expressive individualism (Bellah et al., 1996). Thus, Gregory’s lunch experience reflects not only differences in eating habits but also broader cultural values regarding conformity and individuality.

The representation of cultural differences is further reflected in school rules and educational practices. This is illustrated in the dialogue:

“The girls all wear red ones, and the boys wear black ones. That’s the custom,” the clerk told them. “But at your school the students wear blue gym uniforms on days they have gym. And you’ll need a red cap, too” (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 16).

Japanese school culture emphasizes discipline, harmony, and group responsibility, as shown through standardized uniforms and collective classroom cleaning activities (Kelley, 2008). The dialogue showing Gregory wearing the same uniform as his classmates symbolize his gradual adaptation to the new social environment.



**Figure 5.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 23)

Furthermore, the classroom cleaning scenes in Fig. 5 visually depict cooperation and togetherness through the close interaction among students. Gregory's participation in these activities indicates that he is beginning to accept Japanese cultural values through direct social involvement. This practice reflects values of responsibility, discipline, and cooperation instilled from an early age (Widiuseno, 2018). Unlike in American schools, where students are typically not directly involved in such tasks, this experience initially feels unfamiliar to Gregory, but he gradually begins to understand and even enjoy it.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on multicultural children's literature that emphasize the role of everyday cultural practices in representing cultural identity and intercultural experiences. Similar to Wee et al. (2018), this study shows that Japanese culture in picture books is represented through ordinary daily activities rather than through explicit historical explanation. However, the present study extends previous discussions by demonstrating that these everyday cultural representations also function as psychological triggers of culture shock and emotional adaptation.

Overall, these cultural differences serve as the primary triggers of Gregory's culture shock, as the values he previously considered normal no longer apply in the new environment. This aligns with Oberg's (1960) concept of culture shock as a condition of confusion and anxiety when individuals encounter unfamiliar cultural systems. Thus, the representation of cultural differences in *The Way We Do It in Japan* not only highlights contrasts between Japanese and American cultures but also illustrates how children experience, interpret, and gradually adapt to unfamiliar environments.

Through the interaction between text and illustrations, the story encourages readers to understand that cultural differences are not strange or wrong, but simply different ways of living. In this sense, the picture book promotes intercultural understanding, empathy, and openness toward cultural diversity among young readers. For educators and parents, the picture book can also function as an educational medium to introduce children to cultural diversity and emotional adaptation in multicultural environments. By presenting intercultural experiences through relatable child characters and visual narratives, the story helps young readers develop empathy, tolerance, and awareness of different cultural practices from an early age.

### **Stages of Culture Shock Experienced by Gregory**

The culture shock experienced by Gregory in the picture book *The Way We Do It in Japan* represents the emotional and psychological journey of an individual interacting with a new culture. This process does not occur instantly; rather, it develops gradually through several stages as proposed by Pedersen (1995), namely honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence. These stages demonstrate that cultural adaptation is dynamic and involves changes in emotions, responses, and behavior as individuals engage with a new cultural environment. Through the sequential progression of Gregory's experiences, the picture book allows readers to follow his emotional transition gradually, making the process of cultural adaptation more accessible and understandable for young readers.

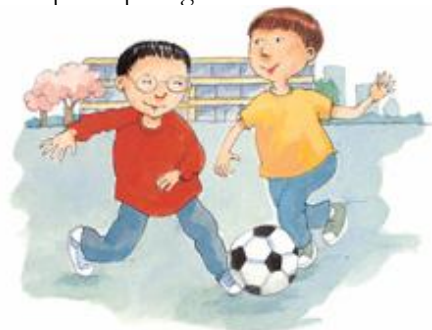
In the initial stage, Gregory exhibits an enthusiastic response to his move to Japan. This is reflected in his statement, "I want to go, too!" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 2), as well as his curiosity when encountering the Japanese expression "Ohayoo gozaimasu," which he responds to by asking, "What did she say?" (p. 4). These responses indicate that Gregory perceives Japan as an exciting new experience that has not yet generated psychological pressure. His interest in the language and unfamiliar situations reflects a phase of exploration without significant conflict. This condition corresponds to the honeymoon stage, in which individuals tend to perceive the new culture positively because they have not yet encountered substantial adaptation challenges (Pedersen, 1995).

As Gregory's interactions become more frequent and complex, he begins to recognize deeper cultural differences. This is evident when he states, "Everyone is driving on the wrong side of the street!" (p. 7). The phrase "wrong side" suggests that Gregory is still using his original cultural framework as a standard for evaluating the new environment. His confusion continues when he questions the absence of familiar household items, as seen in the dialogues: "But aren't there any chairs in the living room?" (p. 11) and "There are no beds in this apartment" (p. 12). However, after receiving explanations from his father, Gregory maintains a positive response, stating, "That'll be just like camping!" (p. 13) and "I like the way we do it in Japan" (p. 15). These reactions indicate that although Gregory begins to recognize cultural differences, he does not reject them; instead, he continues to interpret them as interesting new experiences. Therefore, this condition still reflects the honeymoon stage, in which curiosity and positive attitudes remain more dominant than cultural stress (Pedersen, 1995).

Upon entering the school environment, Gregory's experience begins to reflect more complex cultural pressure. This is evident when he questions his social acceptance by asking, "Will the kids like me?" (p. 17). This question signals a shift from curiosity to self-doubt. In addition, his difficulty in reading Japanese writing and his experience with unfamiliar lunch practices contribute to feelings of alienation, as reflected in the narrative describing him as feeling "very alone" (Iijima & Frye, 2002). This situation is further reinforced by the illustration in Fig. 4, which highlights the contrast between Gregory's discomfort and the relaxed attitudes of his classmates. The visual separation between Gregory and the other students strengthens the representation of his emotional isolation and anxiety within the unfamiliar environment.

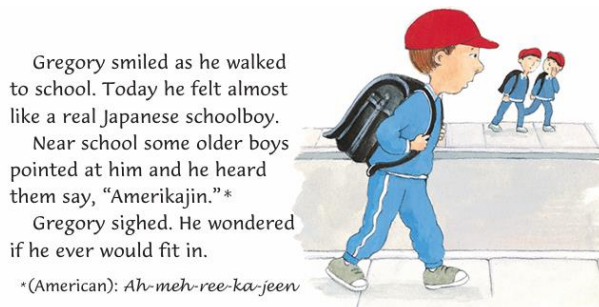
This condition indicates the emergence of emotional pressure in the form of anxiety, confusion, and isolation resulting from cultural differences. Such experiences correspond to the disintegration stage, a phase in which individuals begin to experience internal conflict and psychological stress when facing a new cultural environment (Pedersen, 1995). By presenting Gregory's emotional struggles from a child's perspective, the story encourages readers to empathize with individuals who experience cultural displacement and adaptation.

After experiencing this pressure, Gregory begins to demonstrate changes in his interaction with his surroundings. This is evident as he becomes involved in social activities, such as playing with his friend Yuuki and participating in classroom activities.



**Figure 6.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 22)

The illustration in Fig. 6 shows increased physical proximity and more open interaction among the characters, indicating greater social engagement. This visual representation suggests that Gregory is no longer entirely isolated but is beginning to build relationships within his new environment. His participation in classroom activities and friendships demonstrates a gradual willingness to engage with Japanese culture rather than withdraw from it. This condition reflects the reintegration stage, in which individuals begin to adjust through direct experience and social interaction, although the adaptation process is not yet fully stable (Pedersen, 1995).



Gregory smiled as he walked to school. Today he felt almost like a real Japanese schoolboy.

Near school some older boys pointed at him and he heard them say, "Amerikajin."\*

Gregory sighed. He wondered if he ever would fit in.

\* (American): Ah-meh-ree-ka-jeen

**Figure 7.** (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 25)

In the subsequent stage, Gregory demonstrates a more stable acceptance of the new culture. This is evident when he begins to understand the school system and continues his daily activities despite being referred to as "Amerikajin," as shown in Fig. 7. The illustration depicts Gregory walking to school while other children point at him and identify him as a foreigner. His response, merely sighing, indicates that he is still aware of the differences but no longer reacts with strong emotional distress as he did previously. The visual portrayal of Gregory calmly continuing his activities suggests increased emotional control and adaptation.

Furthermore, his growing awareness of cultural differences is reflected in the dialogue, "But that's the way we do it in Japan," to which his teacher responds, "And this is the way you do it in America" (p. 28). This exchange demonstrates that Gregory begins to understand

that cultural differences do not necessarily lead to conflict but can coexist as distinct systems. The dialogue also functions as an important narrative technique that emphasizes mutual understanding and respect between cultures. This condition corresponds to the autonomy stage, in which individuals achieve emotional stability and are able to function effectively within a new cultural environment (Pedersen, 1995).

However, Gregory does not fully reach the interdependence stage. This is evident in the continued dominance of his identity as an American throughout the story, without a balanced integration of both cultures. Although he is able to adapt, he does not fully develop a bicultural identity. Thus, Gregory's experience illustrates that the process of culture shock does not always culminate in full integration but may conclude at a particular stage depending on the individual's experience (Pedersen, 1995).

These findings are consistent with previous studies on children's intercultural adaptation, which suggest that children often experience culture shock gradually through emotional responses such as curiosity, anxiety, and eventual acceptance. Similar to Wulandari (2024), Gregory's adaptation process demonstrates that cultural adjustment in children is closely connected to social interaction and emotional support. However, unlike previous studies that focus primarily on verbal narratives, the present study also highlights how illustrations visually represent Gregory's psychological transition throughout the stages of culture shock.

In a broader context, the representation of culture shock in *The Way We Do It in Japan* highlights the importance of openness, flexibility, and preparedness in encountering cultural differences from an early age. Gregory's experience demonstrates that engaging with a new culture is not always a smooth process but involves gradual stages of curiosity, confusion, and eventual acceptance. As noted by Kim (2001), individuals who develop cultural flexibility are more likely to achieve effective adaptation in new environments. In this case, Gregory begins to exhibit such flexibility as he not only confronts cultural differences but also attempts to understand and accept Japanese cultural practices as part of his lived experience.

Through Gregory's emotional journey, the picture book encourages young readers to understand that feelings of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty are natural parts of intercultural adaptation. At the same time, the story promotes empathy and intercultural understanding by showing that cultural differences should not be viewed as barriers, but as opportunities for learning and personal growth. For educators and parents, the picture book can also function as an educational medium to introduce children to cultural diversity, emotional adaptation, and respectful intercultural interaction through relatable child characters and visual narratives.

### **The Impact of Culture Shock on Gregory**

The impact of culture shock in *The Way We Do It in Japan* is reflected not only in Gregory's emotional changes but also in his character development as the main character. His emotional responses illustrate how his identity undergoes gradual transformation through interaction with a new culture. In other words, Gregory's emotions do not merely represent what he feels, but also demonstrate how he learns to understand and adapt to his new environment. According to Pedersen (1995), each stage of culture shock produces different impacts, both positive and negative, depending on how individuals respond to their experiences.

During the honeymoon stage, Gregory's emotional responses are dominated by enthusiasm and curiosity. This is evident in his desire to move to Japan, as expressed in "I want to go, too!" (Iijima & Frye, 2002, p. 2), as well as his attempts to imitate Japanese expressions. This attitude reflects openness to new experiences. The impact at this stage tends to be positive, as Gregory's enthusiasm facilitates his entry into the adaptation process without resistance. Although confusion arises—such as when he encounters differences in traffic systems and living conditions—these do not yet develop into significant emotional stress. This condition aligns with the characteristics of the honeymoon stage, in which cultural differences are still perceived positively (Pedersen, 1995).

As Gregory enters the disintegration stage, he begins to experience more complex and predominantly negative impacts. He develops anxiety related to social acceptance, encounters difficulties in the academic context, and feels different from his peers, particularly during lunchtime situations. These experiences lead to decreased self-confidence, feelings of embarrassment, and a sense of isolation. Cultural differences that were initially perceived as interesting begin to transform into sources of pressure. This condition corresponds to the disintegration stage, which is characterized by cultural stress and negative emotional responses (Pedersen, 1995).

In the reintegration stage, Gregory begins to show more positive responses. His involvement in social interactions, such as playing with Yuuki and participating in classroom activities, indicates improved social skills and a reduced sense of alienation. The impact at this stage is transitional, as negative emotions gradually diminish and are replaced by active efforts to adapt (Pedersen, 1995).

Furthermore, in the autonomy stage, Gregory achieves greater emotional stability and demonstrates stronger adaptive abilities. He no longer responds negatively to cultural differences; instead, he is able to understand them more objectively. This stage reflects increased self-confidence, the ability to function effectively in a new environment, and acceptance of cultural differences (Pedersen, 1995).

However, Gregory does not fully reach the interdependence stage, as his identity as an American remains dominant and is not yet fully integrated with the new cultural context. Consequently, the impact of culture shock in his experience concludes at the stage of adaptive stabilization rather than full cultural integration. Overall, Gregory's emotional and behavioral changes not only illustrate the impact of culture shock but also reflect his character development. His experience progresses from positive responses, to emotional pressure, and ultimately to acceptance, demonstrating that culture shock is not merely a challenge but also an essential part of the process of identity formation. Through Gregory's gradual adaptation process, the picture book also promotes intercultural understanding and empathy by encouraging readers to recognize that feelings of confusion, anxiety, and discomfort are natural when encountering unfamiliar cultures. By presenting Gregory's experiences through both dialogue and illustrations, the story helps young readers understand cultural differences from an emotional perspective and encourages respect toward different cultural practices and ways of life.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that *The Way We Do It in Japan* represents culture shock through the integration of narrative text, dialogue, scenes, and illustrations that depict Gregory's intercultural experiences after moving from America to Japan. Cultural differences related to language, social norms, daily habits, and school systems become the primary triggers of Gregory's culture shock and shape both his emotional responses and character development. The study also shows that Gregory experiences several stages of culture shock proposed by Pedersen (1995), namely honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, and autonomy, which reflect a gradual process of adaptation from curiosity and confusion to acceptance of cultural differences.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that culture shock influences Gregory's emotional condition, social interaction, and perspective toward cultural diversity. Through the interaction between verbal and visual elements, the picture book portrays how children negotiate unfamiliar cultural environments and gradually develop openness, empathy, and intercultural understanding. The analysis also reveals that illustrations, dialogue, and narrative techniques play significant roles in representing Gregory's emotional experiences and psychological transition throughout the adaptation process.

This study highlights the importance of multicultural picture books as educational media for introducing cultural diversity and intercultural adaptation to children. For educators and parents, picture books such as *The Way We Do It in Japan* can be used to encourage discussions about empathy, tolerance, emotional adaptation, and respect for cultural differences in everyday life. For literary scholars, this study also demonstrates the importance of analyzing both textual and visual elements in children's literature to understand how emotional and intercultural experiences are represented.

Finally, future studies are encouraged to examine representations of culture shock in other multicultural children's literature from different cultural contexts and perspectives. Further research may also explore children's responses to multicultural picture books to better understand how such literary works contribute to intercultural awareness, empathy, and understanding among young readers.

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