Third Culture Kids from a New Perspective:

A cross-cultural comparison of the Western, Japanese and Indonesian context

A Literature Review

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Introduction:

We live in an era of mass human migration. In the 20th century and now in the beginning of the 21st century, vast amounts of people are moving in search of better economic or social prospects from one country to another. It is difficult to make an accurate estimate as to how many children are now growing up in, and how many adults have grown up in a cross-cultural environment, but in a time characterized by economic development, urbanization, mass migration and cheap travel the number is not only big and growing but may at some point become the norm. For some children, migration comes with the employer or job requirements of one of both parents. Children often accompany their sojourning parents into several different cultural environments.

In the English speaking world the term “Third Culture Kids” has become popularized to describe children or young adults that follow or have followed their parents to other countries with the prospect of returning to the “home” culture at some point in the future. The term “third culture” was first coined and introduced into the scientific literature by John Useem and Ruth Hill, husband and wife sociologists who were interested in “people who cross societal borders under the aegis of an organized endeavor and whose work or occupational roles are involved in relating two or more societies, or sections thereof, to each other” (Useem, 1993, p. 1). Third culture is a broad term used “to cover styles of life created, shared, and learned by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other” (Ibid, p.2) and that “Third Culture Kids” describes children who accompany their parents to another society. Note that third culture does not refer to the ‘third world’, but in this case it refers to the first culture as the country of origin (sometimes origin of the parents), the second culture would be that of the host culture and third culture the one that develops among them. But in the non-English speaking world this concept has also been recognized. In Japan, for example, there are two words that describe two parts of this process: “kaigaishijo” refers to children who accompany their parents when they work overseas, and the Japanese also use the word “kikokushijo” to refer to the children who return to Japan at the end of such an assignment (Fry, 2007). Kaigai-Shijo is practically the Japanese equivalent for what English scientific literature may call sojourn children. On the whole, words like TCK and Kaigai-Shijo allow people to discuss cross-cultural experiences of adulthood significance.

As countries around the world develop, the variety of cultures on the move is increasing. What happens when the literature on “third culture kids” is coming predominantly from these American or Japanese “home” contexts is that the literature can become ethnocentric. A norm seems to be emerging in the
literature which typifies the experience of children that grow up in several cultures. Keeping other cultures in mind, to what extent is the term TCK loaded? This thesis aims to understand the TCK profile through the eyes of Pollock & van Reken, but also attempts to discover and counteract implicit ethnocentrism by bringing in examples from Japan and Indonesia. Japan and Indonesia were selected because these countries are non-western yet each share a characteristic with the US. Japan is equally developed and Indonesia is multicultural. This thesis therefore divides the broad TCK group into three distinct groups based on the respective “home” culture: the Western TCK, Japanese TCK (Kaigai-Shijo) and the Indonesian TCK. Indonesia is interesting because it is neither explicitly multicultural like the US nor implicitly homogeneous like Japan, but throws elements of both with nationalism, separatism, religious fundamentalism, and internal migration and so forth into the cultural mix. This is followed by a discussion about how these groups are similar, how they are different, and what conclusions can and cannot be made.

For Western TCKs, work by Pollock & van Reken will be examined because they have made the most thorough book on the matter so far. Pollock & van Reken’s book describes the widely used profile of the TCK, and the implications of the third culture kid experience and for cross-cultural kids in general. But if the TCK profile is only studied from their perspective then this study may fall victim to the implicit ethnocentrism in a Western conception of what a TCK is. Therefore, other cultural realms must be studied. Hence, the Japanese context will be discussed and Pollock & van Reken’s work will be compared and contrasted with work by Rieko Fry and Momo Kano Podolsky amongst other notable scholars of the Japanese context. Then an Indonesia perspective will be introduced and literature found on the subject introduced. This is because Indonesia is a populous island archipelago in South East Asia that has a rich culture and language diversity. Indonesia has one official language which serves as the lingua franca in the nation. These two factors combined make Indonesia a microcosm for what may be happening at large in the world with cultural mixing. The English scientific literature on the subject is scarce and imprecise so a direction for future research will be discussed. The Indonesian context will be compared and contrasted to the previous sources, which will shed light on how the TCK experience is different based on the “home” country or culture that the TCK is oriented towards. The Japanese and Indonesian contexts help uncover implicit ethnocentrism in the literature on TCKs coming from western authors.

At the same time, there are new variables in acculturation that are developing due to the emergence of multiculturalism and the spread of the world wide web that are particularly interesting for the future of this research and the acculturation processes of modern days youths. These variables are essential for
understanding TCKs. Gail Ferguson’s tridimensional acculturation framework will be discussed alongside a new form of acculturation that can occur from a distance called “remote acculturation”. The implications this may have for TCKs and cross-cultural kids are discussed as a conclusion and orientation for future research on TCKs.

Key term: Who are Cross cultural kids? (CCKs)

Pollock and van Reken try to broaden their scope by arguing that there are many kids who could be classified as belonging to the expatriate group, and that there should exist a wider and more inclusive term. For that, they bring in the term cross-culture kid (CCK), a term which has to be discussed before moving on to other literature. This model includes various groups like traditional TCKs, children of immigrants, children of refugees, educational CCKs or international adoptees.

TCK vs. CCK:

Traditionally it was easy to distinguish TCKs from CCKs due to the fact that immigrants usually move to a new culture and stay there, but with the current state of travel and tourism, CCKs have become just as mobile. The distinguishing factor now becomes that TCKs travel due to their parent’s career choices; neither CCK nor TCK includes young adults who decide on their own to study abroad. This exposes the fact that the TCK experience is at least partially about having parents that have a very demanding and stressful career. It would be interesting to investigate how close the similarities are between TCKs and ‘first culture kids’ that grew up with parents that were emotionally or physically absent due to career circumstances.
The Western context:

Pollock & van Reken - Growing Up Among Worlds

Arguably the most thorough source to date for understanding the western view of a TCK is the work done by David Pollock and Ruth van Reken, coming together most clearly in their 2009 edition of Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds. Traditionally TCKs are understood to be children of expatriates and missionaries who grow up outside of the culture of their parents during their developmental years, often in several different countries; the term is used to describe adults as well as children. With third culture they mean not the first culture as in the culture of the parent(s), not the second culture which is the culture of the host country but a third culture which is a blend or union of the other two which is reinforced by the expatriate community of the host country. The best place to find Third Culture Kids in the making is in expatriate communities around the world.

TCKs have existed as long as people have been travelling with their children, but the realization that there is an invisible class of people with a multicultural upbringing is more recent. In David Pollock’s own words “‘Third culture kids (TCKs) [children who spend a significant period of their developmental years in a culture outside their parents’ passport culture] are not new, and they are not few. They have been a part of the earth’s population from the earliest migrations. They are normal people with the usual struggles and pleasures of life. But because they have grown up with different experiences from those who have lived primarily in one culture, TCKs are sometimes seen as slightly strange by the people around them.’” (p. xi)

The world is globalizing rapidly; airplane travel allows us to reach most major cities around the world in twenty-four hours or less and communication across vast distances has become instantaneous. This is the curve that modern technology has thrown the Third Culture Kid in the past fifty years. A single lifetime now is long enough to become familiar with up to dozen cultures or more. An expatriate occupation can take a family to a new continent every two years, with travel between the host country and the home country during holidays. The number of families living in this way is increasing. Hence, the cultural complexity within families is changing faster than most people can fully adapt to. What brings TCKs together is that no matter where they live, they face the same challenges, especially once they reach adulthood, and in Western tradition gradually break away from the nuclear family. This travel takes its toll on the family through separation and makes maintaining or being part of a community
unsustainable. The toll this lifestyle takes on families and individuals is well known in the international expatriate community; TCKs always have a particular set of challenges that they face, which is the main contributing factor in the term becoming more popular. TCKs and their parents want to understand themselves and want to define the group that they feel they belong to. TCKs may have implication for the future of the human condition, which is deeply affected by globalization.

The demand for TCK recognition became increasingly more evident in the western world during the 44th American presidential elections in 2008 when Barack Obama was running for president. The domestic media had a very tough time figuring out Obama’s ethnicity because of his complexion, and the public was doubtful about the legitimacy of his American nationality. It is not hard to argue that Obama is a Third Culture Kid. Obama has Kenyan roots and spent a portion of his childhood in Indonesia. And out of the prominent international personalities, Obama is not alone in his administration. When he became president he appointed many so called TCKs into his team (Reken, 2008). While the Nobel peace prize may have come too soon, and Obama was not able to make true all of the things he promised, he at least pays lip-service to a kind of a political correctness, world community and cultural sensitivity that was more sincere and realistic than most preceding U.S presidents like George W. Bush or Richard Nixon. But is he then representative of the people? Many people working for the international organizations like the United Nations, the International Labour Organization or many of the world’s major banks and oil companies, contract TCKs directly and by nature of the work that their employees perform they hatch yet more TCKs. It seems appropriate that TCK literature often focuses on the potential for TCKs to grow into adults that thrive in international organizations. But the TCK profile is anything, it is unstable, the jury will remain out to evaluate whether or not unstable individuals can bring stability into the world. Either way, their number is growing, in the U.S there are estimated to be over three million people abroad, and in Japan and Germany the number already exceeded one million in 2009 (Pollock & Reken, 2009).

On another level, this way of life is challenging traditional assumptions about belonging. Once we were conclusive in believing that people belonged to a certain ethnicity or nationality. But now it is harder to be dogmatic in such matters, these traditional assumptions are being eroded by TCKs and other cross-cultural kids. If we take the numbers of nationals living abroad for this world’s major economies we see that this equals about one percent of the population of each country. For rough calculation, if all of these people are in contact with twenty nationals (friends and family) then this would mean that twenty percent of the population of first culture citizens is in some way affected by the mere presence of TCKs.
When we include anyone with a cross-cultural experience like immigrants for example in countries like Mexico or the Philippines which have a huge number of immigrants abroad working and sending money back to their families, then the numbers become bigger yet, even if their voices are not as loud, and they are not as mobile, people are emotionally affected by the cross-cultural experience.

So besides their numbers growing their significance increasing, the voice of TCKs is also becoming louder as more TCKs become well educated Adult TCKs (abbreviated ATCKs). Self defined ATCKs publish books, maintain websites, start support groups, create networks on social media or become prominent politicians, actors, sports figures, journalists, etc. TCKs are a special and often elite group of global citizens characterized by access to wealth and high mobility especially when compared with domestic cross-cultural kids. But the impact of TCKs and their various works on the world might change the relationship to culture for cross-cultural kids and kids who grow up primarily in one culture alike.
Up until this point, the TCK has been defined. But as mentioned earlier there are certain benefits, challenges, personal characteristics, practical skills, rootlessness, restlessness, relational patterns, developmental issues and unresolved grief that TCKs face in particular, that make up their profile. What will follow is a group profile which not every individual embodies fully. This may be useful later for understanding cross-cultural kids in general. It is in this context that the profile will be examined, and mostly those elements applicable to this research will be summarized.

**TCK Profile - Benefits & Challenges**

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of being a TCK is the expanded world-view. Living in different geographies, climates, time-zones inhabited by peoples with various cultures, philosophies and ways of looking at life, brings the TCK firsthand experience of what the world is like. TCKs learn firsthand what people of the same age are learning from textbooks, stories, documentaries, etc. This enhances history lessons and allows them to know and feel the weight of news stories. An expanded world view is empowering for those individuals in most cases, and if one feels confident about their own experiences the individual is unlikely to be manipulated or fall victim to bias about the Other\(^1\). Studies show that western TCKs have an advantage in world view compared to the mono-cultural peers from their “home” culture (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009). They often have an advantage in seeing the world as it is. TCKs have a particular advantage to children of immigrants for example in the sense that having lived in three or more places, rather than just one or two, the world is more rooted in perception and observation. They don’t only see that there are differences but they may begin to figure out what culture is and how it can change. They know the smells, sights, sounds, tastes, emotions and feels of other places, which gives them a more complete view of the world outside of the abstractions that most people use to understand different places. Pollock and van Reken refer to this as the three-dimensional world view, which is somewhat misleading because it is assumed that most people see the world in three dimensions and they do not elaborate themselves on why they call it as such. An argument that can be made however is that Western civilization is very print and reading based and that many Westerners attempt to read about the world, whereas TCK live in different place and rather than construct the world through reading, observe the world with various senses. Still, the extent to which TCKs read the

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\(^1\) The Other in the way that Edward Said meant it when Civilizations define themselves by contrasting themselves with the other.
world is entirely an open question. As enriching as this experience may be, the cross-cultural experience also causes frustration about the ignorance of ‘home’ culture.

This close interaction with the world and the expanded view of it may have a downside. Pollock and van Reken call it confused loyalties, and what is meant by this is confusion about the complexities of the world. Values, politics and patriotism or nationalism are especially confusing for Third Culture Kids. Which values should they be loyal to and which country should they support in which situation? The example given in the book is of a young man who had lived in Argentina, was raised in a British school and had to pledge allegiance to the American flag. It is not hard to imagine that deciding how to feel about the Falkland wars, or how to swear allegiance to three different countries by the time he was eleven years old, would lead to some confusion, not to mention frustration. This confusion may cause TCKs to seem mean, arrogant or unpatriotic to their peers. Especially during and before the cold war, prior to the internet, the UN and globalization really took off people in many countries were more suspicious of foreigners. Another challenge connected to this is that their knowledge of reality is more painful. No matter where in the world suffering takes place, the TCK knows it is real, because experience in several countries teaches them that people are actually quite similar all around the world.

**TCK Profile - Personal Characteristics**

“In an era when global vision is an imperative, when skills in intercultural communication, linguistic ability, mediation, diplomacy, and the management of diversity are critical, global nomads are better equipped in these areas by the age of eighteen than are many adults.” As argued in the quote by Norma M. McCaig (2008) adaptability definitely has its virtues. On a day-to-day basis fitting in with people and imitating their ways is something the stereotype TCK can do very well. But this also presents a challenge, which is that they have a hard time achieving cultural balance within themselves, and most at some point in their lives are metaphorically torn inside between different value systems and beliefs.

Personal characteristics play another role in how they are perceived by others. A fair skinned blonde girl who moves to a Chinese school is easily recognized as a potential foreigner and is off the hook when it comes to behaving differently than the other students. But if she spends her developmental years there and then has to move to an American school or university, suddenly she becomes a hidden immigrant. She looks like a local to everyone else but inside she may feel like she cannot relate to her peers. The opposite happens as well, that someone who has an East Asian appearance, who has lived a lifetime in one place, will continue to be perceived and treated initially as a foreigner who might not speak the
language or does not know the ways things are done. A young Kenyan man in the United States will be viewed as African American, or an American girl in Germany will be treated as a local. This can be a continuing challenge with everyone that they meet.

TCKs can be both less and more prejudiced. Their cross-cultural experience may help them meet people and make friends from different nationalities, complexions and religious backgrounds which may make them less likely to be prejudiced. But on the other hand their lifestyle may make them feel elitist and superior if they have grown up in gated communities with maids and housekeepers in the home. People are not always aware of their prejudices and the same is true for TCKs.

The decision making process of TCKs may gravitate towards choosing to live in the now because for them a lot of opportunities present themselves. On the other hand, they may not choose to dedicate themselves to things that take time, for the same reason. The idea of maybe having to move at some point in the near future causes them to take the opportunity to climb a certain mountain, but not dedicates themselves to a sports team or art project for example.

Also their relationship to authority can be affected; the safety and isolation of the compounds they live in may lead them to appreciate authority and structure, while on the other hand the top down way that the company decides to move their family may have made them distrustful and legitimately angry for the complexity it brings to their social lives.

Often times, TCK’s social skills, observational skills and linguistic skills are tested frequently. And in meeting the tasks and overcoming the challenges, many TCKs excel in these areas compared to people of the same age who have lived their entirely life in one place.

_TCK Profile - Rootlessness, Restlessness, Relational Patterns, Developmental Issues and Unresolved Grief_

This section covers many topics in Pollock & van Reken (2009) so it will be paraphrased and summarized for this thesis because it is essential in understanding the Western TCK profile. Rootlessness, restlessness and grief seem to be very objective while developmental issues and relational patterns appear to be more relative to the culture which is judging them.

For the TCK the two most difficult questions to answer, which usually come back to back, are: ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘What would you call your home?’ From the amount of thought that has to go into
answering that and from the answer it soon becomes clear that there is no simple answer, and this is perhaps the hallmark of the TCK. TCKs are able to give a simple and a complicated answer depending on who they are talking to and to how interested the person is who is asking. On the whole, having a narrative of oneself is often required in new social contexts.

Restlessness is evident when you see how often they travel and how often they have the feeling that they have to move. This affects their careers, the university choices, their love lives, etc. This in turn affects the way the typical TCK makes friends. TCKs often have no patience for small talk, and the more often they have been made to move, the more easily they spill deep personal secrets that kids who grew up in the primary culture might only ever share with one or two people, and in some cases with no one at all. They can make friends fast, or avoid making friends and respectively can fall behind in keeping up with people they feel they are close or grow increasingly more isolated until they are ready to take the responsibility in their adult lives. Their relational patterns are often inconsistent and confusing to themselves and the people around them.

Sadly, and perhaps obviously, the forms of separation and cultural variation are not always handled perfectly, just like any ordinary human life does not go as planned; let alone the fact that most people do not have a plan. This can lead to developmental issues or unresolved grief that TCKs carry with them well into adulthood.

When it comes to developmental issues, some of the most apparent features are that are commonly ascribed to TCKs are that they convey an uneven maturity. What is meant by this is that they may be ahead in maturity in terms of global awareness, communication with adults and have certain autonomy skills such as travelling alone long distances. But then, and this is most evident in the home culture context, their attitudes towards local systems of behavior and their experimentation comes across as adolescent behavior. TCKs may seem to drag their adolescence out when it comes to building relationships, decision making and becoming independent or it may appear in their 40s when it would be called delayed adolescence. How TCKs form identity in a system is a study of its own but basically entails that a child either intuitively conforms, strives to conform, resists or chooses between conforming and resisting. This childhood identity in relation to the system defines the way in which they will try to fit or not fit in with the system in adulthood.

The last topic that Pollock and van Reken cover is the topic of unresolved grief. Grief is present in the human experience, and is also very much present in TCK experience because they have had to part with
and sacrifice many things on their path. This may be being separated from parents when going to boarding school or leaving close friends as a teenager. This can manifest in several different ways and stages: denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, withdrawal, rebellion, vicarious grief or delayed grief. They do not elaborate much on how similar or different this is for people who grow up primarily in one culture.

**Ethnocentrism in the Western context:**

At this point the TCK profile seems to be one big paradoxical benefits and challenges. Pollock and van Reken go on to describe how to maximize the benefits of a third culture lifestyle like how to build a strong foundation, how to deal with transition, how to meet educational needs, how to enjoy the journey, re-enter into the “home” country, how organizations can help and how it’s never too late to seek help. And in all sincerity, perhaps the final rite to TCK-hood is to start identifying oneself as a TCK and to seek support from other TCKs, in the same way as an alcoholic may seek support from other alcoholics. And perhaps there may be readers thinking: “I grew up primarily in one culture and I can learn a lot from this”, besides their high mobility, how are TCKs so different from everyone else? These are legitimate questions, and over time the TCK experience might become more commonplace and more people will begin to relate.

“TCK” carries with it a certain ethnocentrism in its current form, at least it seems to be a Western term, with most authors being at least part ‘American’ TCKs. Being an expatriate is an American concept and has to do with their type of economic system or “empire building” if one may be so bold to call it as such. Globalization is seen by Greg Madison, an author on what he calls Existential Migration, as a late stage of capitalism (Madison, 2006). The U.S. economy is still by far the largest in the world and the consumer society is set up in such a way that it requires vast amounts of cheap resources from various places around the world, which will be secured through business, diplomacy, military or missionary activity. This work is being carried out by people with direct or very close connection to the United States and its culture. After Europeans and the Japanese lost or abandoned their colonies in the second half of the 20th century, Americans carried on doing business, policing and making war in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia. So due to the way recent history has played out, and the fact that we are here investigating an American term; it seems to be that about half of the international expatriate community is American. This does not mean that there is not something to be learned from

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2 Existential migration is conceived as a chosen attempt to express something fundamental about existence by leaving one’s homeland and becoming a foreigner.
the TCK experience for cross-cultural kids everywhere, but it means that, as some sociologists have remarked (Hylmo, 2002), perhaps the commonality between TCKs is not the result of true commonality but rather the effect of bias and projection of expectations upon different subcultures.

The theory of the independent and interdependent self-construal by Markus and Kitayama (1991) basically argues that in American culture the independent aspects of the self are highlighted whereas in Japan, China, Korea, Southeast Asia, South America, and Africa the view of the self as interdependent is underlined. David Matsumoto (2002) summarized the basic logic in Markus and Kitayama’s work on the self-construal as follows:

“Culture influences individual self-construals; these, in turn, influence all aspects of behavior. In Western cultures, therefore, the imperative to become independent, unique, autonomous, separate, and individual encourages the formation of independent self-construals. Presumably, Western culture’s emphasis on individualism provides the platform to foster these cultural goals. Independent self-construals, in turn, affect the way these individuals think, perceive themselves, feel emotions, and act.” (Ibid p. 3)

They describe non-western cultures to perpetuate interdependence among individuals which presumably leads to harmony, cohesion and cooperation and the development of the interdependent self-construal which dictates how individuals in that society think, act and feel. In the same paper that Matsumoto (2002) describes the basic logic behind the Markus and Kitayama (1991) theory of self-construals, he critiques this basic logic on the grounds that although it has little evidence. However, the independent and the interdependent self may play a role in the different in the cross-cultural experience. TCKs whose home culture stresses the interdependence between people may continue to translate their emotions and new relationships to something family and friends back home would understand throughout their sojourn. TCKs whose home culture is independent may drift further emotionally, educationally and with new relationships.

Some comparisons between possible subcultures have already been made. Pollock and van Reken have looked for traits that TCKs share with Cross-cultural kids of all sorts and dedicate part B of their appendix in ‘Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among World’ to comparing Third Culture Kids to Kagai-Shijo’s. Kagai-Shijos is practically the Japanese word for sojourn children, so one can make the claim that it is the term Third Culture Kid in Japanese context. Momo Kano Podolsky in her article ‘Cross cultural upbringing: A comparison of “Third Culture Kids” framework and “Kaigai/Kikoku-shijo” studies’ points out common theoretical issues as well as differences in perspective.
The Japanese context - Kaigai-Shijos:

Japan is an interesting place to study third culture kids, because it is a developed island nation that is remarkably homogeneous. Japan has just one national language which is spoken by 98.5 percent of the 126 million people that live there. Because around 73 percent of Japan’s surface is forested, mountainous or otherwise unsuitable for habitation, the population has settled in extremely densely populated urban centers in the coastal areas. After the Second World War, Japan’s economy was booming and a nation that had previously always been very isolated suddenly saw an increasing number of its citizens go overseas for business. Since then an increasing number of Japanese families started bringing their children with them for the sojourn.

In Japan the government recognized the problem of “educational orphans” very quickly due to the centralized structure of the educational system. The initiative to do something about it was taken before the business community started sponsoring studies and offering programs, before it became a topic of research and before returnees themselves manages to really organize themselves. Although not everyone is satisfied with the results, the Japanese government created a system of re-integration for returnee children and extended the distribution of educational resources beyond national borders. With a long history of immigration and dealing with diversity perhaps this was not necessary in the American context.

There is a difference in public perception of TCKs between the U.S. and Japan. The “Kaigai-Shijo problem” was a matter of national concern in Japan for several decades. On the one hand it makes it easier to re-integrate and to be recognized, but on the other hand it seemed to take on connotation. As other authors have shown about Kaigai-Shijos in the English academic literature, the perspective shift of Kaigai-Shijos has changed: the perception about Kaigai-Shijos has gone from “educationally disadvantaged to internationally minded children with bilingual and bicultural abilities who can thrive in the era of globalization” (Fry, 2007). The term TCK now has a new element: it varies over time. In the U.S. getting to know about the term TCK is still considered to be liberating, which is supported by the types of comments in the comment sections of TCK related articles³, which may be due to the fact that is has not yet become loaded with connotation. One more aspect of the Kaigai-Shijo that she mentions is that too much emphasis is put on the return, which is a short term issue which may not remain relevant.

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³ This is what the highest rated comments on [http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art3.html](http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art3.html) show: accessed on August 23rd, 2014
What the Western conception of Third Culture Kid and the Japanese notion of a Kaigai-Shijo both imply is that a cross-cultural upbringing is somehow unusual, which may be the case at least for now, and in their respective home culture contexts. But keeping the criticism in mind it is well possible that the Japanese experience of being a TCK is very different, and that there is merely mirroring of superficial traits with the ‘American’ TCK for those who choose to look for it. The problem with this is that this argument is a paralyzing form of relativism for this investigation, which has more material to explore.
The Indonesian Context:

From the outset it was not expected that a term like Third Culture Kid or Kaigai-Shijo will be found already existing which specifically suited the Indonesian context. There are two reasons for this: one is that due to the fact that a cross-cultural upbringing in Indonesia, especially on the most populous island Java, is the norm rather than the exception. At the same time the cross-cultural experience is marginalized for political reasons. Perhaps Indonesia is a good place to study and predict what the world will be like if globalization continues to flatten the cultural landscape, perhaps not, but what will happen when we bring Indonesia into the picture?

The Indonesian question is fundamentally different in the sense that we are not investigating the emotional lives of Indonesian sojourners’ children, their international presence or their domestic societal impact on the home nation states. Indonesia is cross-cultural within itself; and celebrates its diversity in its motto “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” which is Old Javanese for “Unity in diversity” (the same motto as the European Union and South Africa). Indonesia has around three-hundred distinct native ethnic groups with 742 different languages and dialects (Merdekawaty, 2006).

To get an idea of how this diversity is actually distributed, fifty-eight percent of Indonesians live on Java, the world’s most populous island at around 140 million inhabitants. And the largest ethnic group is therefore also Javanese which compromise around forty-two percent of the total population. Other major ethnic groups include the Sundanese, ethnic Malays, Madurese and Balinese which also inhabit Java. Most of the language and cultural diversity in numbers exists in the east of Indonesia; this includes provinces in Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, the Malukus, West Papua and Papua where tribes and cultures exist on small islands or in the isolated rainforest of mountain valleys. Sumatra in the West of Indonesia is the biggest island and has around 20 percent of the population with several more ethnic groups. Kalimantan provinces are on the island of Borneo with around 15 million people. A smaller but influential minority group is the Chinese Indonesian ethnic group that constitutes around 4 percent of the total population. The Chinese-Indonesians own much of the wealth and companies that are vital to the modern economy of Indonesia, and due to the sojourning associated with the bamboo network and are resented within Indonesia, might be an interesting group to study. Considering the geography and

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4 Later on, in Gail Ferguson’s work we will see how this multiculturalism which is emerging in more places is relevant to acculturation, TCKs and CCKs in general

5 Bamboo network, network of overseas Chinese companies and families that play an important role in the economy of South East Asian (Weidenbaum & Hughes, 1996).
ethnic diversity in Indonesia, the nation is surprisingly uniform in religious belief with close to 90 percent of the population being Sunni Muslims. The Indonesian government has been called Java-centric and is considered to be quite authoritarian despite the fact that the nation is officially a unitary presidential constitutional republic.

It must be noted that all in all Indonesia is dynamic, and depending on perspective it has paradoxically hosted religious and ethnic discrimination on the hand, and on the other made democratic and electoral steps that highlight the desire ethic and religious tolerance and general inclusiveness (Barker, 2008).

Generalizations about Indonesia never do justice to the wealth of human and natural diversity and yet universality and orientalization⁶ are easy to fall victim to. This must not stop us however from trying to look beyond the national banner, look into the demographics, and try to focus on several areas to see how multicultural nationalism in Indonesia plays out. Daphne M. Keats writes in her article “Cross-Cultural Studies in Child Development in Asian Contexts” (Keats, 2000) that “the contributions of Asian researchers [working in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and China] to the role of cultural factors in development are not as well known as they should be”. All the countries mentioned she points out are primarily multicultural and this has a particular impact on child development in these countries because they have to grow up with respect or tolerance and go to school with people that have a unique culture, are from a different ethnicity and speak a different mother tongue. This is at least if they are to manage this multiculturalism successfully, because she herself and author Eugene Tan are quick to point out that the Chinese-Indonesians or children of Chinese sojourners are discriminated and resented. In his article “From sojourners to citizens: managing the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia and Malaysia” Eugene shows that politics, economics and ideology at some level intertwines multiculturalism with cross-cultural in Indonesia (Tan, 2010), and this makes studying child development in the cross-cultural context tricky for the anthropologists. It would be interesting if future research could focus on interviewing various, since the literature at the moment is scarce, and consists only of a couple of personal accounts.

There are more articles that promise to address the cross-cultural experience as a whole, but fails on addressing the cross-cultural experience of the individuals. In this area there seems to be a large potential for Indonesian researchers to interview common Indonesian experiences of managing cultural diversity in daily life, and to find out if there exists an Indonesian equivalent for CCK, TCK or Kaigai-Shijo.

⁶ Meaning to treat as exotic – While there are isolated villages and rainforests, the action happens in crowded cities.
Personal stories do exist though, and were found using ‘Third culture kid’ as a search term. It is perhaps possible to learn more by analyzing a personal story, if we may empower the individual experience in ‘Confessions of a Third Culture Kid’7 and look for commonalities from the TCK profile described by Pollock & van Reken.

Susetyo writes about the difficulties of answering the ‘where are you from’ question and how cultural identity is a complex issue. It is unique in her context because in Indonesia the question is followed by: ‘where in Indonesia?’ All her ancestors are from different places in the world. She is an expat when she’s abroad and a domestic migrant at “home”. And yet she claims that it does not make her less Indonesian, although being Indonesian is almost impossible to define in itself. She writes:

“As a 1990s child, I felt that the education system of Suharto’s era was constantly brainwashing schoolchildren with the “Ind-ONE-sian identity” and that my unique experiences and interpretations were often discredited. Yet the same schools were preparing me for the emerging “global era” where Indonesians are supposed to internationally compete in the free market of the new borderless world.” (Susetyo, 2013)

which shows the uniqueness of the cross-cultural experience for Indonesians because the “home” culture’s public educational system has a different way of relating to the world. It was not until her travels abroad as an adolescent that she makes the case of first understanding the value of her Indonesian background and the beauty of her “home” nation. Studying at a local university in Jakarta that made claims to having an “international atmosphere” she realized how this meant dealing with increasing amounts of “copycatting trends from American British pop culture rather than cultivating genuine artistry”. This is highly subjective but it does echo in a familiar way with what ‘non-Western TCKs’ describe. It raises the suspicions of ethnocentrism in the international community which is dominated by American and British cultures, two countries that actively interfere in the international community to spread their form of governance and civil ideology. Susetyo personally wrote a thesis on the cultural identity of Indonesian teenagers educated in a Western setting8, interviewing 3 teenagers. After her 180 page thesis she concludes that no two “Indonesian identities” are identical.

“Rather, identifying as “Indonesian” is the choice to call this country home and do one’s best to do good things for this nation, whatever that may mean. But surely that goes for other nationalities as well. And if you’ve been

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7 If she came up with the title then she labels herself as third culture kid
8 Grace’s BA Honsthesis Persepsi Xenosentrisme dan Identitas Budaya Pada Siswa Musik Remaja Indonesia Berpendidikan Barat (English: Perceptions of Xenocentrism and Cultural Identity in Western-Educated Teenage Indonesian Music Students) was originally published in Indonesian by STIKOM. The full Indonesian PDF version of the thesis, and a chapter-only English translation, are accessible on Academia.edu
immersed in a culture other than your own, whether as an expat abroad or in an international setting at home, the experience often makes you re-evaluate your values and how you view your national identity.”

She quotes Marcus Garvey: “A people without knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture, is like a tree without roots”, perhaps it may be considered unusual quote for a Third Culture Kid to quote a Jamaican politician on rootlessness because that is exactly what TCKs usually lack. But it does express the need of every person to be rooted in some kind of social context; even if they have been very mobile in their lives, people should have a story about where they came from, even if the story is complex. In general she re-affirms her national identity as well as her own experience (Susetyo, 2013). At the same time she pleads against xenocentrism, defined as the preference for cultural styles, products or ideas other than those of one’s own culture. She observes how young music students have a preference for British and American cultural institutions.

Other promising sources were found, like “Media exposure and internal migration - Evidence from Indonesia” by Farre and Fasani (2014), but this proved to be about the relationship between these two elements. Sources on rural migration and regional development did not focus on the way people dealt with or were affected by this migration, and had strong emphasis on understanding the economic effects. And then there was Zane Goebel’s book “is a carefully crafted examination of how talk mediates social relations in the context of ethnic diversity. The study is set in two urban neighborhood wards in the industrial city of Semarang, which is situated on the north coast of Central Java, Indonesia, an archipelagic nation renowned for its ethnic and linguistic diversity.”
Indonesian context in comparison to Japanese and Western TCKs:

At this point what can we say about the Indonesian cross-cultural experience? It seems that the “home” culture, whatever that may be, does change the cross-cultural experience, and plays a role in the extent to which and the way in which the cross-cultural experience is integrated. From the Japanese context we have seen that the home culture can also be affected, more specifically, in Japan the educational system adapted to the special needs of the returning sojourn children and the Kaigai-Shijo issue was a hot topic in government for some years. In the U.S. the question remains open: how have TCKs impacted American society, if at all? And similarly for Indonesia, does the implicitly multicultural society have something to learn from their TCKs. The TCKs from a multicultural society seem to be particularly difficult to understand. But what we do see is that audience also plays a role. In American TCK writing, the emotional stakes and paradoxes are highlighted. In traditional Japanese context the problem of coming home, reintegrating, continuing in Japanese education are highlighted. In Indonesia, the implications for identity formation seem to be highlighted. The term TCK seems to have capacity for adaptability. And yet, it feels like there is a common denominator, that edges ever closer to the individual human experience. That is why the American TCKs are lonely in a dominant culture, why Japanese Kaigai-shijos long to be recognized as individuals and what this Indonesian example celebrates. However, every individual is expected to define their roots in social context and this defines how people make a first impression in an unfamiliar group. The irony of the TCK is that because of their high mobility, they may meet many new people, and therefore need to define their roots more often. When a cross-cultural experience is sufficiently diverse, the story of coming from a certain country, city, culture, ethnicity and it would be too complicated of a story so en masse people are opting to describe themselves by the term that the first people to study the phenomenon proposed: “we belong to a third culture and we have something in common”.

To some extent it is a question of acculturation. The traditional definition of acculturation was something along the lines of “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups [emphasis added]” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1936, p. 149). It was an excellent definition for the time, but we must ask for our own times: how much continuous first-hand contact is still going on? The modern traveler brings not only cultural artifact with him/her wherever they go, but also devices that can hook up to the web as a whole. The TCK isn’t just affected by travel, but has a choice about what material to access, where to go and what group to join.
Certainly mobility plays a role, but it seems the issue is even more complicated than either being in one place or acculturating to another, because TCKs seem to be able to stick to a reference culture no matter where they go. Culture transcends the material world in language, and in technology⁹ (books, magazines, TV, computer, internet, etc.) it transcends the body and to some extent time¹⁰. Acculturation science is still in the process of catching up to some 21st century actualities that have come about due to technology.

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⁹ Technology as defined by Marshall McLuhan: Extensions of man
¹⁰ Ancient Greek culture survives to some extent until this day although no-one actively practices it.
Gail Ferguson

Introduction:

Ferguson’s work with Jamaican islanders has reconciled acculturation sciences with two 21st century realities: multiculturalism and technology. The first reality is multicultural destination societies for immigrants and their families. The other reality is intercultural contact among non-immigrants via modern mechanisms of globalization like tourism, consumer goods and the internet. In other words, acculturation is redefined by globalization. (Ferguson, The Big Difference a Small Island Can Make: How Jamaican Adolescents Are Advancing Acculturation Science, 2013)

In order to deal with these two realities Ferguson and her colleagues have come up with two concepts: tridimensional acculturation and remote acculturation. Together these mechanisms may be the way in which current and future adolescents influence their own acculturation.

Gail Ferguson - Multicultural destinations:

Firstly multicultural destinations for immigrants and their families add a dimension to the bi-dimensional model of acculturation. Ferguson works from the perspective of the Black immigrant youth and families in the United States. The problem with the bidimensional framework has been that it cannot fully describe the acculturation process for Black immigrants because the destination society is not implicitly homogeneous, but actually explicitly multicultural.

“We propose an expansion of the bidimensional acculturation framework to a tridimensional paradigm for Black immigrants. That is, Black U.S. immigrants may orient toward at least three cultures during acculturation rather than two: their culture of origin, European American culture, and African American culture.” (Ferguson, Bornstein, & Pottinger, Tridimensional Acculturation and Adaptation Among Jamaican Adolescent–Mother Dyads in the United States, 2012)

Ferguson and colleges go on to test the theory, which gets good results, and the paper makes an excellent case for supporting a tridimensional acculturation framework. What is interesting for this thesis is that multiculturalism changes the acculturation process, and that destination society plays a big role. And this may be part of the reason why finding out about Indonesian TCKs has been so tricky. Indonesia is neither explicitly multicultural like the US nor implicitly homogeneous like Japan, but throws elements of both with with nationalism, separatism, religious fundamentalism, and internal migration
Gail Ferguson - Intercultural contact among non-immigrants via modern mechanisms of globalization:

Ferguson and Bornstein’s theory of remote acculturation is particularly relevant to understanding cross-cultural socialization altogether. In 1991, Appadurai mentioned that there was a pressing need to focus on the cultural dynamics of *deterritorialization* (Appadurai, 1991). Although several people predicted the rise of this new medium by as early as the 1960s (most notably Marshall McLuhan), Appadurai mentioned this just before the rise of the World Wide Web, and since then the need to understand these new cultural dynamic has only grown. In Ferguson and Bornstein (2012), remote acculturation is tested as a modern type of acculturation. This is tested by juxtaposing Jamaican islanders’ acculturation to European American culture with the traditional acculturation of Jamaican immigrants to the US European American culture (as we have already seen they could also choose to acculturate to African American culture in the US). Results show that indeed there are indicators of remote acculturation in behavior, identity, family values, intergenerational discrepancies, and parent-adolescent conflict in families from the Jamaican Island culture to European American culture that resemble the acculturation that would take place in Jamaican immigrants that settle in the same US culture. Due to this medium as a whole, the ‘social neighborhood’ (Appadurai, 1991) has become totally decoupled from geographical space.

This is particularly relevant for the understanding the TCK. It seems obvious that young people growing up now have choices of how and to what culture to acculturate to. This is changing TCKs, CCKs and youths in general. Even adults can engage in remote acculturation either through direct internet exposure or through contact with people they know that travel to other cultures. Ferguson and Bernstein (2012) mention also that tourism and the influx of consumer goods is reinforcing this process. This is the face of globalization today. But we must remain careful about generalizing this too far, or taking it at face value because globalization may actually be Americanization or Westernization. Western culture has a long history of marginalizing, destroying and manipulating other cultures, and this extends to the media which somehow seems to be disproportionally popular, let alone dominant. This is a thesis in itself which will not be discussed, but is important to keep in mind as we talk about globalization; there are other cultures which spread in various realms.
The limitations of Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) include that “the study of remote acculturation may reinvigorate non-immigrant youth acculturation research in its own right (including among understudied majority-world adolescents and among European Americans), and as a potential precursor to immigrant acculturation.” Research should not ignore the complexities of parents’ experiences of their adolescents’ remote acculturation given the hypothesis that they may admire youths’ preparedness for today’s world despite concerns about the acculturation gap (Jensen et al., 2011). This however is most likely not a limitation but another factor: a potential link could be made for TCKs because they are to some extent defined through their parents.
Conclusion and Re-orientation:

TCK is emerging as a collective term for these many individuals with diverse backgrounds, and allows us to see what this diverse group made up of children and young adults has in common. The term is useful for understanding part of the human experience, but silently it also creates a new divide between the people who grew up in one culture, and the people who grow up in different cultures. Meanwhile TCKs are becoming more similar to CCKs. On top of that children that have one culture in their material environment can acculturation undercover in a process called remote acculturation.

If we take remote acculturation to a hypothetical extreme we could ask: Through access to the internet: can you grow up in a small village and without ever travelling become a kind of TCK by remote exposure? The answer is yes; this has indeed become a possibility, and recognizing this may help understand the otherwise strange and ‘out of place’ behavior of the younger generation and those that dare explore other cultures with the help of this new technology, regardless of their national background. Advertisers have caught up with this 21st century reality and put in place tracking mechanisms on websites that gather precise information about the content and behaviors of the people surfing on the web. If this information was used by globally minded anthropologists to understand culture rather than only by covert capitalists, then the collective output would be more than the saturation of our social milieu with sensitive advertisement. These anthropologists may find for example that a global culture has developed which is in turn diversifying into various subcultures not bound by age, class, geography or any of the borders of the pre-internet world and may put studiers of culture looking for regional culture in the internet age on a dead end path. At the same time, there are isolated tribes in the Amazon basin in Brazil that have not yet been contacted11, not by scientists, not even by illegal loggers. The whole range of acculturation theories remain equal contenders in the struggle to understand and explain how people acquire culture, yet the variables are changing at such a rate that it may well be impossible for one person to understand something as broad and diverse as culture. Especially the TCK will likely be impossible to understand as a stereotype or as a group since no two TCK profiles are the same.

Initially it seemed like TCKs are a well defined group of sojourn children, this explains why their profiles are similar, but their adulthood does not have a consistent pattern or outcome, and neither is there an

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intercultural consensus on using the term TCK. Still, TCK culture is making advances to become more inclusive a wider range of CCKs. Acculturation science is catching up with a tridimensional acculturation model that pays respect to the fact that individuals can acculturate from a distance.

What are the implications for studying TCKs in the future? Already, today’s TCKs do not have to face continuous first hand contact because of their high mobility. And neither do CCKs that traditionally could afford less mobility, have to be more restricted to continuous first hand contact. But this also means that the term TCK, as young as it is, is actually losing its meaning for describing expatriate children. This is not to say that work by Pollock and van Reken was futile, in fact the opposite may be the case: the work by Pollock and van Reken, as they predicted will become more and more relevant as more people exhibit TCK traits while making a transition and before stabilizing into a niche of virtual culture, if that were the shape of things to come. In this case social media may help make the individual more transparent to the anthropologists of the future.

In conclusion, TCKs are different depending on which culture they hold as a reference point, and the academic literature about TCKs should be sensitive to this. Literature about TCKs can be ethnocentric, especially because the literature on TCKs often focuses on either the benefits or challenges, and these benefits and challenges may be relative to the culture of the person who is writing it. The distinction between country and culture should always be made in the face of increasing multiculturalism, especially in implicitly multicultural nations like Indonesia, the researcher must practice caution. Remote acculturation is a factor which has been proven to be relevant to understanding acculturation at a distance and the implications for this should be discussed.
Contributions to cultural studies:

Everyone resists culture to some extent, and it is not absolutely necessary to fit in. Ethnocentrism may take the form of a dominant culture which tries to impose itself upon all people who have experiences that don’t fit the cultural paradigm. People have a lot of experiences which cannot be translated easily into language and which they keep to themselves, this is very true for the TCKs with their diverse experiences. Every culture steers its’ members towards certain traditions12; in Western society this might dictate what should be focused on in school, how to be competitive in sports or it might foster time and task oriented behavior in an occupation. And yet, the individual experience is always more broad, and perhaps more interdependent than scientific literature really takes into account. Also, those individuals in Western society that are fully acculturated are not necessarily healthy or without problems. There are few stable modern societies for human beings to orient themselves from, and this should not be forgotten. These societies however, export and transmit their culture across borders through people or virtually through the fiber-optics of the internet. Culture may become increasingly difficult to get a grasp on.

A part of culture is that it is a set of common experiences. These common experiences allow for a certain amount of understanding between individuals, and are usually rooted in features of the shared geography, climate and biodiversity. The question is that with TCKs crossing all kinds of cultural borders, and culture spreading across borders towards remote people, will there emerge a global culture, and if so what will the common set of experiences agreed upon be? There is an apparent need for philosophy about the social sciences in the face of these new developments in culture.

12 With traditions I mean certain patterns that are known to work when done in a certain way. Its nature is conservative.
Bibliography


