# Contextual Differences in Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles in Japan

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**Abstract**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the influence of interpersonal category differences based on intimacy and social status (e.g., parents, close friends, acquaintances, and intimate seniors) on five conflict management styles (dominating, integrating, compromising, avoiding, and obliging). Questionnaires were administered to 195 female university students in Japan. A one-way between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the influence of interpersonal categories.  Generally, it was found that both intimacy levels and social status variations significantly influenced interpersonal conflict management styles. The higher the social status and the lower the intimacy level, the more obliging, and avoiding styles were used.  To examine combined patterns of five styles on each category, discriminant analysis was conducted. The first function distinguished between intimate-equal status and acquaintance-higher status groups. Integrating and compromising were positively correlated with intimate-equal status, while obliging and avoiding styles are negatively correlated.  The second function distinguished between kinship and non-kinship groups. The latter were negatively correlated with dominating, while avoiding and integrating styles were positively related. These findings revealed that subjects changed their conflict handing styles depending on intimacy, social status, and kinship.

Although extant studies posited that Japanese social interactions were more collectivistic or based on the interdependent self than American social interactions, the recent research findings have often contradicted this hypothesis (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996; Matsumoto, Weissman, Preston, Brown, & Kupperbusch, 1997).  An extensive review of cross-cultural research claimed that there was an inconsistency in these findings (Matsumoto, 1999; Takano & Osaka, 1999).  Even meta-analysis research revealed that the Japanese no longer maintain collectivistic tendencies (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002).  Reasons for this anomaly were claimed to be changes in the values of the Japanese (Matsumoto et al., 1997), university student samples (Gudykunst et al., 1996), the lack of cross-cultural equivalence in the instruments (Iwawaki, 1994), and the reference group effect (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002).

This inconsistency could be due to methodological problems rather than the recent trend of the individualistic society in Japan.  Many intercultural researchers have claimed that communication patterns in Asian cultures are highly contextualized according to the interpersonal relations and situations (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1994, 1995).  However, this very feature was not well reflected in the research methods.  In the examination

of Asian communication patterns in general and Japanese ones in particular, researchers have often ignored this "context-dependence."  In order to overcome this methodological paucity, controlling situations by creating a vignette is desirable.

Although a considerable amount of research has utilized vignettes to investigate communication behaviors, manipulating situations has not been an effective method to study context dependence.  In other words, situations were varied in each condition, and the differences in research findings were sometimes caused by situational differences themselves rather than by those in interpersonal relations.  For example, Kim and Wilson (1994) used vignettes to delineate the cross-cultural differences in requesting strategies; however, the scores in different situations (intimacy and social status) were averaged, ensuring that there were no clear situational differences in strategy.  Similarly, Matsumoto et al. (1997) developed a scale to evaluate the value differences toward four social groups (family, close friends, colleagues, and strangers), and then added up and averaged the values in each group.

Researchers should exercise extreme caution when utilizing this method.  When utilizing vignettes in a questionnaire survey, researchers should not change the situation for each condition because differences in responses may occur as a result of the differences in the situation rather than those in the conditions that the researchers are interested in.  It is preferable that researchers control the situations and employ the same scenario, observing only differences in conditions such as interpersonal relations. Based on this assumption, Moriizumi and Takai (2006) created vignettes where participants and their conversation partners should handle interpersonal conflict because of disagreeing with each other about the destination of their trip. They found out that Japanese participants used different conflict management styles in different social situations based on social status and intimacy.

Research in interpersonal conflict management has a rich tradition from both western and Asian perspectives (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1997; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006).  Many interpersonal conflict studies are based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) dual concern model. This model was theorized on the basis of the degree of the influence of self-other orientation in interpersonal conflict management, and posited five styles of integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating, and avoiding based on self-other orientations. To illustrate, integrating is a strategy involving a high self and other orientation, while avoiding is a strategy involving a low self and other orientation.  Compromising is a strategy involving a medium degree of self and other orientation. Dominating is a strategy involving a high self-orientation whereas obliging is with high other-orientation. After Blake and Mouton (1964) first theorized this model, Rahim (1983) developed the scale of interpersonal conflict management in organizational settings, and later this model was confirmed as stable constructs (Rahim & Magner, 1995). Japanese versions of the interpersonal conflict management scale were developed by Asahara (1999) and Kato (2003) on the basis of self-other orientations.

Applying similar constructs of interpersonal conflict management to intercultural research, Ting-Toomey (1988) advanced a theory called the "face-negotiation theory" to explain the cultural differences in response to conflict.  Her line of research revealed that individuals from individualistic cultures preferred dominating styles, whereas individuals from collectivistic cultures were more likely to avoid or oblige (Ting-Toomey, Gao, G., Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Her research also found that use of avoiding strategy in Asian collectivistic cultures is due to high other concerns, not low other concerns posited by Rahim's model.

Not only cultural but relational differences influence interpersonal conflict management styles. In fact, Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory (Assumption 6) incorporated this relational difference (i.e., intimacy, social status, and ingroup/outgroup) into a factor influencing interpersonal behaviors especially conflict management styles. Several empirical studies supported this view and found both social status and intimacy had effects on interpersonal conflict management styles (Drory & Ritov, 1997; Moriizumi & Takai, 2006; Ohbuchi, Fukushima, & Tedeschi, 1999). For example, Moriizumi and Takai (2006) found that integrating, compromising and dominating styles were used more with a person having low social status and/or high intimacy, while avoiding and obliging styles were used with a person having high social status and/or low intimacy.

Great attention has been put on ingroup/outgroup differences in communication behaviors, especially in cross-cultural research because cultural differences exist between individualism and collectivism. In collectivistic cultures, outgroup members are treated in a less collectivistic manner than ingroup members. In individualistic cultures, however, this ingroup-outgroup distinction causes less variability in social behaviors (Gudykunst, Yoon, & Nishida, 1987; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). For example, Nagao's (1996) cross-cultural research on Japanese and North Americans indicated that the Japanese were less self-assertive than the North Americans. She also found out that when comparing the differences in self-assertiveness used with close friends (ingroup) and strangers (outgroup), the Japanese distinguished between ingroup and outgroup members to a greater extent than the U.S. Americans.

Although it is important to distinguish between ingroups and outgroups, the simple ingroup-outgroup dichotomy is insufficient to explain Japanese interpersonal social behavior. For example, Ting-Toomey and Takai (2006) explained the differences in social behavior toward people in various relational categories by applying Midooka's (1990) detailed four ingroup-outgroup categorizations. The ingroup comprises *kino-okenai-kankei* and *nakama*, and the outgroup comprises *najimi-no-tanin* and *muen-no-kankei*. *Kino-okenai-kankei* ("intimate ingroups") includes people with whom the individual shares a very intimate or equal-status relationship, for example, best friends and family members. According to Takai and Ting-Toomey (2006), in this category, age differences are superseded by intimacy and communication is direct and honest. In contrast, *nakama* ("familiar interactive ingroups")— maintains still ingroup characteristics—is indicative of ingroup relations that are intimate but not to the extent of overriding status differences; these include classmates, members of the same club at school, and colleagues at the same workplace. In these relationships, care must be taken to perform appropriate ingroup role-based communication rituals in order to preserve relational harmony and trust.

With regard to the outgroup categories, *najimi-no-tanin* ("acquaintance interactive outgroups") includes less intimate acquaintances such as those at school or at the workplace. Although this group is categorized as an outgroup, it is rather distinct from the fourth group of *muen-no-kankei* ("stranger outgroups") or pure outgroup, which includes strangers with whom no relationship ties exist. With regard to the persons in the third category, preserving each other's dignity and maintaining harmony and good relationships are important. Since people do not have much knowledge about or styles for interacting with such persons, they often choose to adopt social normative or ritualistic behaviors. The Japanese interact with those who are in *muen-no-kankei* (stranger outgroups) in an indifferent or impolite manner

because pure strangers fall beyond the boundaries of established social or personal ties (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006).

Another distinction was made by Yoneyama (1976).  He divided ingroups into two categories, i.e., with and without kinship.  He suggested that people behave differently with *miuchi* ("ingroup members who are kins or relatives") and with intimate group members with whom they do not share kinship relations.  He further claimed that people behave in a more direct manner toward *miuchi* due to the existence of closed relationships wherein social rituals and the dignity of the other person need not be considered.

From the above discussion, it appears that the Japanese generally alter their social behavior, particularly their use of interpersonal conflict handling styles, according to the person they are interacting with.  Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of interpersonal categorical differences on interpersonal conflict management styles.  Interpersonal categories are based on social status and intimacy.  This investigation is conducted by controlling communication situations by means of vignettes developed by Moriizumi and Takai (2006).

With regard to relations with and without kinships, Japanese social behaviors are distinct between *miuchi* (relations with ingroup members who are kinships or relatives) and non-kinship relations (Yoneyama, 1976).  A study of the Western perspective also revealed that more open and direct strategies are used in the case of closed relationships or kinship relations that involve close ties than in the case of open relationships or non-kinship relations that are fragile (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992).  Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: Different interpersonal conflict management styles are used with people with whom a kinship relation exists and those with whom a kinship relation does not.  Individuals prefer to use the dominating style with persons with whom they share kinship relations.

With regard to the distinction between ingroups and outgroups, this categorization was based on intimacy but not social status.  Thus far, little empirical research has dealt with interpersonal categories based on both social status and intimacy.  Generally, the Japanese use ritualistic linguistic forms of honorific expression toward their superiors.  It is questionable whether they consider persons they are intimate with but those having a high status as *nakama* ("interactive ingroups") or *najimi-no-tanin* ("interactive outgroups"). However, Ting-Toomey and Takai (2006) claimed that both of these two ingroups, i.e. intimate ingroups and interactive ingroups, include intimate individuals. For this reason, the following hypothesis is posited:

H2: Dominating, integrating, and compromising styles are used more with intimate-high status members than acquaintance-high status members.

Since both intimacy and social status influence interpersonal conflict management styles (Moriizumi & Takai, 2006), intimacy levels may influence the styles used with the interpersonal categories.  For instance, direct styles are used mainly with seniors at school with whom one is intimate than with those who are merely acquaintances. So, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Styles differ according to different intimacy levels.  Dominating, integrating, and compromising styles are used more with intimate group members than with acquaintance group members of the same interpersonal category.

Though many studies have compared conflict management styles one by one as if they were independent, some scholars claimed that people generally utilized a combination of conflict styles (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Van de Vliert, 1997), and thus research designed to

empirically identify combinations of conflict handling styles is acutely needed (Nicotera, 1994). As far as I know, only one research (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro, & Euwema, 1999) attempted to untangle this issue. They identified different patterns of conflict management styles by using cluster analyses and found that multiple conflict handling styles, combined styles of integrating, compromising, and dominating in particular, were more effective than patterns based on a single style.  Though Munduate et al. (1999) gave us insightful findings; they investigate managers' conflict management styles in private companies.  Since how people combine and form patterns of five conflict handling styles have not been known according to interpersonal categorical differences, the following research question is advanced.
RQ 1: What patterns of conflict management are used according to interpersonal categories?

Gender differences in conflict management styles are an interesting topic for research. However, the present study does not focus on them for the following reasons.  First, the role played by gender has been unclear in the line of conflict management research in western perspectives. For example, two different meta-analytic studies (Gayle, Preiss, & Allen, 1994; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998) concluded that substantial differences did not exist among studies in terms of gender differences. From Japanese perspectives, however, gender differences in social and language behaviors has been reported. Particularly, females were found to have more interpersonal and language sensitivity than males, and in Japanese language, females and males use different sentence-final forms (Abe, 1998).  Second, the present study was conducted as part of larger study which aimed at investigating the relationships among conflict handling behaviors, cultural (i.e., self-construals), as well as individual variables (public self, trait-like self-assertion), and language strategies, whose results were reported elsewhere (Moriizumi & Takai, 2006). The present research excludes gender as a variable, and the subjects were all female students.

## Methods
### Participants
In the present study, 212 participants responded to the questionnaire.  Some participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not follow the directions of the questionnaire or submitted incomplete questionnaires. Thus, the data of 195 participants were analyzed.  The respondents were female students recruited from a small-sized liberal arts college and a mid-sized university in Central Japan.  The average age of the participants was 19.50 years.

### Instrument
The objective of the study was to determine the differences in the use of conflict handling styles with people belonging to different interpersonal relational categories (i.e., friends, parents, and siblings).  A questionnaire format was utilized to investigate this objective.  The independent variables were the interpersonal categories based on relational closeness (intimacy) and social status.  Relational closeness and status were manipulated by the vignettes.  In other words, four different conditions were created according to differences in status (equal vs. high) and intimacy (low vs. high). This manipulation was tested and it was found to be successful (Moriizumi & Takai, 2006). Before reading the vignettes, the participants were asked to recall a specific same-sex person that they interacted with in a certain condition and to write down that person's initials  and her relations with them (i.e., friends, and seniors).  The respondents were then asked to read the vignettes, which depicted a

difference in opinion between the respondents and their conversation partner with regard to the destination of their trip (see Appendix).  In each condition of interpersonal relations, the same scenario was used, the only difference being the changes in the interpersonal relational categories; this was done because, as discussed in the previous section, controlling the situation is of paramount importance in the present research.  The validity of vignettes was checked by asking participants the degree of reality, significance, and conflict of the vignettes, and it was found to be adequate (Moriizumi & Takai, 2006). The order of presentation of the four conditions was counterbalanced, and participants answered conflict management styles for each four situations.

The dependent variables were the five conflict management styles.  This style was categorized into five dimensions in terms of other-orientation vs. self-orientation, involving dominating, obliging, integrating, compromising, and avoiding. We used a 20-item scale of interpersonal conflict handling styles by modifying the original version of the scale (Kato, 2003).  By conducting confirmatory factor analysis, the same construct was obtained with the original version ($\chi^2$ (140) = 857.4, $p < .001$, GFI = .89, RMSEA = .079), even though one item was excluded from the scale due to inappropriate wording.  Cronbach alpha internal consistency was satisfactory (Dominating: alpha= .86, Obliging: alpha= .92, Avoiding: alpha= .80, Compromising: alpha= .72, Integrating: alpha= .80). All the items were answered in a 7-point Likert-type format.

## Results
### Interpersonal Categories of the Recalled Person
In light of the four interpersonal conditions of intimacy and social status, the recalled persons were classified into interpersonal categories.  The details of the categories and their frequencies are shown in Table 1.  In the intimate-equal status condition, almost all the participants recalled close friends, while in the other conditions, they recalled people belonging to various interpersonal categories.  In the acquaintance-equal status condition, acquainted classmates and friends belonging to the same club or from the same part-time workplace were recalled.  In both the conditions of intimate-high status and acquaintance-high status, seniors, seniors at the part-time workplace, and the boss at the part-time workplace were recalled.  In this case, the word senior translates as *senpai* in Japanese and refers to a person who is studying in a higher year than the participants at their university.  Since the participants recalled the same categories in both the conditions, it is possible to analyze the differences in the styles based on the difference in intimacy levels.  In the intimate-high status condition, mothers were recalled, while teachers were recalled in the acquaintance-high status condition.  In the analysis, the frequencies of the acquaintance-high status condition were fewer than those of the other conditions.  This was because the participants recalled various persons such as "a friend of mother," "a friend of a senior," and "acquaintance of a friend," all of whom were categorized as "others."

In total, 11 interpersonal categories were analyzed in this study, although it is possible to merge similar categories into larger ones.  However, if more than 20 participants recalled the same person, this category was included in the analysis. This is because, as Field (1996) claimed, it would be statistically robust if each condition had more than 20 data. Although each participant recalled people with respect to four conditions, the persons who were recalled were different.  Thus, the analysis was a between-subjects rather than a within-subjects design.

Table 1

*Breakup of the Recalled Interpersonal Categories*

|  | Intimate-equal status | Acquaintance-equal status | Intimate-high status | Acquaintance-high status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Close friend | **194** | 2 | 8 | 1 |
| Acquaintance from class | 0 | **118** | 2 | 4 |
| Acquainted club member | 0 | **47** | 8 | 1 |
| Senior at school | 0 | 2 | **34** | **30** |
| Senior at the part-time workplace | 1 | 2 | **23** | **22** |
| Boss at the part-time workplace | 0 | 0 | **26** | **46** |
| Teacher | 0 | 0 | 16 | **40** |
| Mother | 0 | 0 | **45** | 0 |
| Sibling | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Relative | 0 | 1 | 9 | 3 |
| Acquaintance of friends | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 |
| Neighbor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Others | 0 | 7 | 16 | 41 |
| Total | 195 | 195 | 195 | 195 |

**Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles in Interpersonal Categories**

In order to confirm Hypotheses 1 to 3, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the 11 interpersonal categories as the independent variables and the five conflict handling styles as the dependent variables. Prior to the analysis, normality, multicollinearity, and the homogeneity of variance were checked. Due to the violation of Box's test of equality of covariance of matrices (Box's M = 243.38, $F(150, 79621)$ = 1.53, $p < .001$), Pillai's trace, which is more robust than Wilks' Lambda in the heterogeneity of variance, was used. The MANOVA results indicated multivariate effects of interpersonal categories on conflict handling styles (Pillai's trace = .60, $F(50, 3075)$ = 6.14, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ ⩵ .09), which revealed the differences in strategy use according to the interpersonal categories. In order to analyze the effects of interpersonal categories on each dependent variable, analyses of variance were conducted by adopting a $p$-value of 1% using the Bonferroni adjustment. The results revealed that the differences in interpersonal categories influenced each self-assertive strategy (Dominating: $F(10, 615)$ = 5.18, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ = .08; obliging: $F(10, 615)$ = 13.52, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ = .18; avoiding: $F(10, 615)$ = 12.57, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ = .17; compromising: $F(10, 615)$ = 8.73, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ = .12; integrating: $F(10, 615)$ = 10.22, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2$ = .16). The means of the handling styles in each category are shown in Figure 1. Since the figure in each cell was unbalanced, the Games-Howell procedure was utilized for the analysis of multiple comparisons. Table 2 shows the means, the standard deviations of the interpersonal conflict management styles in each interpersonal category, and the results of the multiple comparisons.

The results in Figure 1 indicate that there are contrasting tendencies ragarding the use of the integrating and compromising styles and that of the obliging and avoiding styles. In other words, the integrating and compromising styles show a negative linear pattern, and the obliging and avoiding styles show a positive pattern from intimate to non-intimate others.

To examine research question 1—combined patterns of styles on each interpersonal category—a discriminant analysis was performed using the five styles as predictors of the styles used with regard to the 11 interpersonal categories.  The advantage of using a discriminant analysis to answer this research question is that it yielded information on the degree of the effects of each strategy on each interpersonal category (i.e., discriminant functions). Three discriminant functions were calculated with a combined $\chi^2$ (50) = 312.92, $p$ < .001.  Even after the removal of the first function, there remained a strong association between the interpersonal categories and styles, $\chi^2$ (36) = 117.84, $p$ < .001.  The third function, $\chi^2$ (24) = 57.62, $p$ < .001, was also obtained after the removal of the second function.  The three functions accounted for 65%, 17.9%, and 15.9% of the between-group variability.
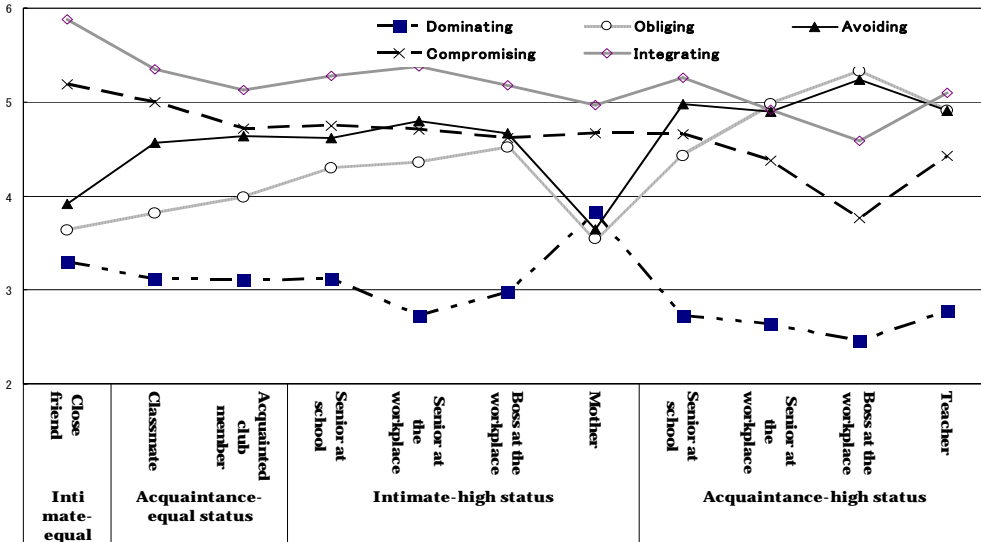


*Figure 1.*！ Conflict handling styles used with people in interpersonal categories

Table 2

*Means and standard deviations of conflict handling styles in interpersonal categories*

| | Intimate-equal status | Acquaintance-equal status | | Intimate-high status | | | | Acquaintance-high status | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Close friend! | Classmate! | Acquainted club member | Senior at school | Senior at the workplace | Boss at the workplace | Mother | Senior at school | Senior at the workplace | Boss at the workplace | Teacher |
| Dominating | 3.29$^{bc}$ | 3.11$^{bc}$ | 3.10$^{abc}$ | 3.11$^{abc}$ | 2.72$^{ab}$ | 2.97$^{abc}$ | 3.82$^{c}$ | 2.72$^{ab}$ | 2.63$^{ab}$ | 2.45$^{a}$ | 2.77$^{ab}$ |
| | (1.14) | (1.20) | (1.07) | (1.03) | (1.02) | (1.24) | (1.44) | (0.92) | (1.17) | (0.94) | (1.05) |
| Obliging | 3.63$^{a}$ | 3.81$^{ab}$ | 3.98$^{ab}$ | 4.29$^{abc}$ | 4.36$^{abc}$ | 4.52$^{abcd}$ | 3.54$^{a}$ | 4.43$^{bc}$ | 4.98$^{cd}$ | 5.33$^{d}$ | 4.91$^{cd}$ |
| | (1.14) | (1.27) | (1.10) | (1.18) | (1.08) | (1.45) | (1.23) | (1.14) | (1.11) | (1.16) | (1.22) |
| Avoiding | 3.91$^{a}$ | 4.57$^{b}$ | 4.64$^{bc}$ | 4.62$^{bc}$ | 4.80$^{bc}$ | 4.67$^{bc}$ | 3.64$^{a}$ | 4.98$^{bc}$ | 4.90$^{bc}$ | 5.24$^{c}$ | 4.91$^{bc}$ |
| | (1.21) | (1.08) | (.97) | (.90) | (.78) | (.96) | (1.24) | (.99) | (.92) | (.86) | (.89) |
| Compromising | 5.19$^{b}$ | 5.00$^{b}$ | 4.72$^{b}$ | 4.75$^{b}$ | 4.71$^{b}$ | 4.62$^{ab}$ | 4.67$^{b}$ | 4.66$^{b}$ | 4.38$^{ab}$ | 3.76$^{a}$ | 4.43a$^{b}$ |
| | (1.00) | (1.08) | (.97) | (.85) | (.98) | (.96) | (.99) | (1.10) | (1.45) | (1.18) | (1.13) |
| Integrating | 5.90$^{c}$ | 5.35$^{b}$ | 5.13$^{ab}$ | 5.28$^{ab}$ | 5.38$^{abc}$ | 5.18$^{abc}$ | 4.97$^{ab}$ | 5.26$^{abc}$ | 4.92$^{ab}$ | 4.59a | 5.10$^{ab}$ |
| | (.72) | (.93) | (.86) | (.81) | (.97) | (1.06) | (.95) | (1.10) | (1.11) | (1.26) | (1.04) |

Multiple comparisons using the Games-Howell procedure.   The standard deviations are shown within parentheses.

Different alphabets for the groups indicate significant difference at a *p*-value of 5%.

Table 3

*Canonical scores of group means in interpersonal categories*

| | Discriminant Functions | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal Category | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Close friend | .68 | .10 | .24 |
| Classmate (acquaintance) | .03 | .17 | -.45 |
| Club member   (acquaintance) | -.21 | -.03 | -.41 |
| Senior at school (intimate) | -.19 | -.02 | -.03 |
| Senior at the workplace (intimate) | -.32 | .35 | .01 |
| Boss at the workplace (intimate) | -.37 | -.05 | .12 |
| Mother | .38 | -1.05 | -.16 |
| Senior at school (acquaintance) | -.47 | .36 | -.13 |
| Senior at the workplace (acquaintance) | -.81 | -.05 | .26 |
| Boss at the workplace (acquaintance) | -1.34 | -.17 | .33 |
| Teacher (acquaintance) | -.67 | .03 | .31 |
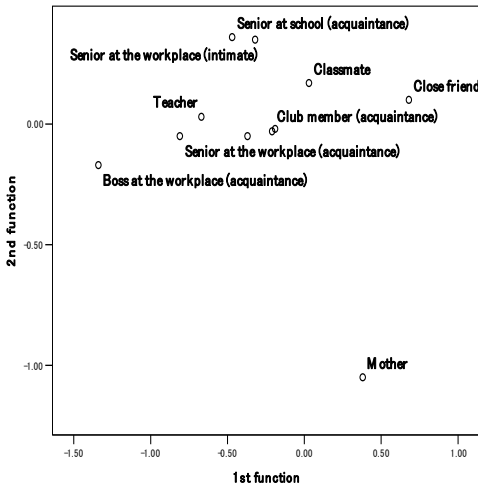
*Figure 2.* Plots of groups centroids on the 1st and 2nd functions
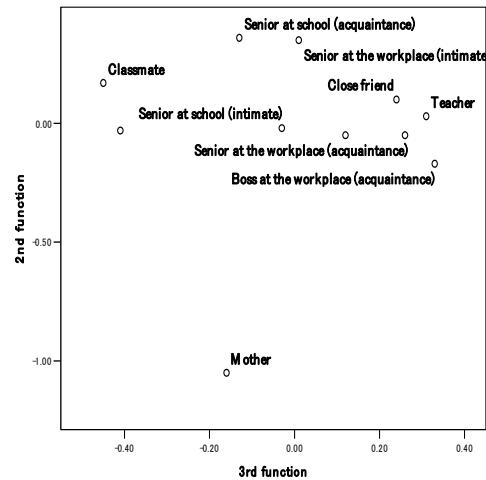


*Figure 3.* Plots of groups centroids on the 2nd and 3rd functions

Table 3 provides canonical scores of the interpersonal categories.  Figure 2 and 3 present plots of 11 groups centroids on three discriminate functions derived from five self-assertive strategy variables.  The first function maximally separated member of the *kino-okenai-kankei* category such as mother and close friends from the *najimi-no-tanin* category members such as senior acquaintances at school and the part-time workplace.  The second function distinguished mothers from the other categories.  The third function separated the *najimi-no-tanin* category members from *nakama* category members although no clear distinctions were observed apart from the first two functions.

The loading matrix of correlations between the predictors and discriminant functions, as seen in Table 4, suggested that the best predictors for distinguishing between *kino-okenai-kankei* and *najimi-no-tanin* (the first function) are obliging, avoiding, compromising, and integrating.  Obliging and avoiding are negatively correlated to *kino-okenai-kankei*; however, compromising and integrating are positively correlated to this category.  In other words, more compromising and integrating styles and obliging and avoiding styles were used less in the case of the categories having a positive discriminant coefficient in the first function.  In contrast, the obliging and avoiding styles were used with the *najimi-no-tanin* category.

Table 4
*Results of Discriminant Analysis of Conflict Management Styles*

| Predictor Variable | Correlations of Predictor Variables with Discriminant Functions | | | Pooled Within-Group Correlations among Predictors | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Obliging | Avoiding | Compromising | Integrating |
| Dominating | .38 | *-.45* | -.20 | -.21 | -.05 | .15 | .20 |
| Obliging | *-.73* | .10 | *.50* | | .59 | -.21 | -.18 |
| Avoiding | *-.69* | *.47* | -.19 | | | -.17 | -.03 |
| Compromising | *.57* | .36 | -.22 | | | | .49 |
| Integrating | *.64* | *.61* | .31 | | | | |
| Canonical *R* | .52 | .31 | .29 | | | | |
| Eigenvalue | .37 | .10 | .09 | | | | |
| Between-group variability (%) | 65.00 | 17.90 | 15.90 | | | | |

The three styles—dominating, avoiding, and integrating—have a loading value that exceeds .45 on the second discriminant function; this separated mothers from the other interpersonal categories. As indicated in the results of the MANOVA, the dominant strategy was used more and the avoiding and integrating styles were used less with mothers. With regard to the correlation between the styles and the third discriminant function, only obliging was correlated with the third function; this separated *nakama* from *najimi-no-tanin*. This result indicates that the obliging strategy was used more with the acquaintance categories.

Pooled within-group correlations among the five styles are also shown in Table 4. The self-oriented strategy of dominating was positively correlated with the mutual-oriented styles of integrating and compromising. Both the low-self-oriented styles of obliging and avoiding are positively correlated, and both the mutual-oriented styles of integrating and compromising are positively correlated.

**Discussion**

To examine the three hypotheses, multivariate analysis of variances was conducted to examine the differences in the five interpersonal conflict handling styles used with the 11 interpersonal categories. Hypothesis 1 regarding the differences in the strategy use in the case of kinship and non-kinship relations was supported. The results revealed that the styles used with mothers were significantly different from those used with the other categories of people recalled in the intimate-high status condition, including seniors at school, seniors at the part-time workplace, and the boss at the part-time workplace. In particular, although it did not reach the statistically significant level, avoiding and obliging styles were used less, while dominating was used more with mothers than with persons in the other categories.

Hypothesis 2 on the locus of "intimate-high status others" in ingroup-outgroup categorization, the results revealed that intimate-high status others were categorized as *nakama*. This implies that status differences were underestimated and intimacy was "carried over" to social status. In other words, intimacy had a larger effect than social status. Further research is needed to investigate the *nakama* category because it involves both acquaintance-equal status and intimate-high status others. It is still unclear whether the two groups share the same qualities.

As for ingroup-outgroup distinctions, the present study suggested that two groups could be further subdivided in the following manner.  Close friends were categorized into *kino-okenai-kankei* or intimate ingroups; persons of acquaintance-equal status, including members of the same club and classmates, were categorized into *nakama* or familiar interactive ingroups; while those belonging to the acquaintance-high status category, including seniors at school and teachers, were categorized under *najimi-no-tanin* or acquaintance interactive outgroups.  Although it did not reach statistically significant levels in some comparisons, in general, the styles were used differently across each group category.

More precisely, dominating, integrating and compromising styles were more likely to be used with the *kino-okena-kankei* or intimate ingroups and *nakama* or familiar interactive ingroups than with the *najimi-no-tanin* or acquaintance interactive outgroups and intimate-high status group members.  However, significant differences were found only among the close friend, classmate, and senior acquaintance categories with regard to the dominating strategy and between close friends and the remaining categories with regard to the integrating strategy.  The compromising strategy was used less with senior acquaintances seniors at the workplace than with ingroup members (*kino-okenai-kankei* and *nakama*).

Obliging and avoiding were used more with the outgroup members of *najimi-no-tanin* or acquaintance interactive outgroups than with the other ingroups.  In particular, significant differences were found in strategy use in the case of the boss at the workplace and the other categories, and the obliging strategy was chosen more in interactions with them.  Similarly, avoiding styles were used less with the mother and close friend categories and more with outgroup members. A comparison of the two ingroup categories of *kino-okenai-kankei* (intimate ingroups) and *nakama* (familiar interactive ingroups) revealed that the avoiding strategy was used less while the integrating strategy was used more with persons in the *kino-okenai-kankei* categories (i.e., close friends).  In other words, direct styles were used more when people perceived disagreement with close friends.

The support of hypotheses yields two important aspects regarding the direction of future research.  First, previous researchers used vignettes regardless of the contextual differences, and calculated the mean scores of the dependent variables by balancing several of the concerned situations.  However, the results of this study indicate that we chose appropriate conflict management styles based on social status, intimacy, and kinship relations.  Future research should focus more attention on categorical differences of conversation partners.

Second, the use of dominating styles with mothers showed the peculiar characteristics of Japanese collectivism.  Matsumoto et al. (1999) misunderstood this high self-assertive attitude with family members as a result of the individualism in Japanese society and concluded that the Japanese are as individualistic as the U.S. Americans.  However, the results of this study indicated that we should distinguish ingroup-outgroup categories more precisely, as suggested by Midooka (1990) and Ting-Toomey and Takai (2006).  Since collectivistic people behave more favorably with ingroup members and distinguish between ingroup and outgroup members, a high self-assertiveness with family members and lower assertiveness with other intimate persons reveals that the Japanese may possess collectivistic attitudes in interpersonal communication.

With regard to more elaborate ingroup-outgroup categories, this study suggested that different styles were used with people in the four categories of *miuchi*, *kino-okenai-kankei*, *nakama*, *najimi-no-tanin*. Here note that the category of *muen-no-kankei* (mere strangers) was excluded in the present study because it is impossible to think of a situation where we might

experience disagreement with mere strangers. The dominating strategy was used with *miuchi*, which predominantly constituted family members. This supported Yoneyama's (1976) contention that the Japanese change their communication behaviors according to whether or not they share kinship relations with the people they interact with. Similarly, as Midooka (1990) contended, the Japanese change their styles in relation to others (intimacy and social status), particularly ingroup members. It is valid that the Japanese distinguish between the *kino-okenai-kankei* and *nakama* categories. With the former, the Japanese use mutual-oriented styles to a greater extent because they feel secure about directly disagreeing with members belonging to this category. However, even with ingroup members, the low-self-oriented styles of obliging and avoiding were used more with ingroup acquaintances.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that intimacy levels had a significant effect on interpersonal conflict management styles even in the case of the same interpersonal categories (i.e., seniors at school, seniors at the part-time workplace, and the boss at the part-time workplace). This hypothesis was not supported because the results of the MANOVA revealed no significant effects of intimacy on interpersonal categories, although the scores of the styles used with less-intimate persons are generally lower than those of the styles used with intimate persons. In this research, the participants were asked to voluntarily recall a certain person in light of social status and intimacy. This method caused an imbalance in the number of people in each interpersonal category, as shown in Table 1. As a result, the Games-Howell procedure was used in multiple comparisons when analyzing the categorical differences in order to avoid inflating the Type I error. Moreover, this research adopted a between-subjects design, wherein the variance of within-subjects due to situational differences was not examined. Therefore, more refined methods should be adopted in future research to detect the differences in the strategy use in the relational categories.

Research question 1 dealt with combined patterns of styles on the interpersonal categories. The five styles are integrated into three patterns: self (dominating), low-self (obliging and avoiding), and mutual (integrating and compromising). These three patterns affected each interpersonal category positively or negatively. These results support the previous research that dealt with the dual concern model (Asahara, 1999; Cai & Fink, 2002). For example, the dominating and the mutual-oriented styles of integrating and compromising were used more, whereas the obliging and avoiding styles were used more with the people in the *najimi-no-tanin* category (e.g., senior acquaintances at the workplace). These results revealed that not one but several styles were used with a person belonging to a category.

In conclusion, this research has suggested that by examining ingroup-outgroup categories more precisely, it is possible to delineate Japanese communication strategies with regard to interpersonal conflict handling styles as collectivistic. The Japanese change their conflict handling styles with people falling under the five relational categories of *miuchi*, *kino-okenai-kankei, nakama, najimi-no-tanin,* and *muen-no-kankei.* Self- and mutual-oriented styles were used more with ingroup members, while other-oriented and low-self-oriented styles were used more with outgroup members. Although previous research focused only on the dichotomous concept of ingroup vs. outgroup, future research should take into consideration these elaborate concepts of relational categories in investigating the behavior and psychological concepts of people from cultures that are different from Western cultures.

Although this research revealed the importance of contextual differences in the conflict handling styles in Japan, the following factors need to be considered in future research. First, the sample used in this research consisted entirely of female college students.

Males as well as people of different age groups should be included as research data if the findings of the research are to be generalized as prevalent Japanese phenomena.  Further, this research succeeded in delineating Japanese characteristics with regard to interpersonal conflict management; however, cross-cultural comparisons are needed to corroborate whether these characteristics can be applied to other cultures in Asian and Western countries.

Second, this research adopted scenario methods, which are sometimes criticized as being incapable of revealing people's actual behavior and only revealing their likely actions in imagined social interactions.  Future research should employ more sophisticated methodologies to investigate interpersonal strategies.  Despite the conspicuous limitations of this research, we hope that it serves as a catalyst for more elaborate research and unveils the complex phenomena of social interaction with others, particularly with regard to interpersonal conflict management styles.

**Appendix. Scenario**

You are in the same group with _____. Because the group decided to go to a trip, you became the person in charge of planning the budgeting and the destination of the trip.

You were contemplating that the other group members as well as yourself would feel pleasant and relaxed if you were to choose a luxurious hotel in a resort area where people could unwind, although this option would be slightly expensive. As you were wondering whether you share your ideas with your partner, just then, she addressed you.

Your partner told you that it would be better for the rest of group members and herself to choose an inexpensive budget hotel in order not to financially burden the other members; they would also be able to do some sightseeing in an urban area where they can use their own free time as they see fit.

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