A comparison between the UK and Japan on the effects of individualism/collectivism on the succession of group norms

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Abstract

Group-norm succession motivation refers to motivations for passing down group norms to the younger generation. The current study compared the effects of group identity and individualism/collectivism on group-norm succession motivation between Japan and the UK. Eighty-four university students from Japan and 132 university students from the UK were included in the analysis. The results showed that group identity positively influenced group-norm succession motivation in both Japan and the UK. Group-norm succession motivation seems to be promoted by the following two routes: responsibility for the younger generation and hoping they experience happiness and showing superiority over the younger generation.

Key Words: collectivism, individualism, group identity, group norm

A group norm is a standard of behavior and judgement shared by group members and includes norms that can be clearly stated and norms that are close to customs and cannot be clearly stated (Forsyth, 2009). A norm also represents the basis of a group, transforming a flock of people into a group (Forsyth, 2009). Traditionally, group norms have been maintained over time by means of learning and internalization by newcomers (Lave & Wenger, 1991); however, older members choose which norms to pass down to the younger generation (Yamada, 2012). In other words, the basis of the succession of group norms may link to the orientations or motivations of each member. Despite this possibility, there’ve been few studies investigating the mechanism of group norm succession from the viewpoint of such intrapersonal motivational processes. Inconsistencies within a group between formal and informal group norms may generate confusion in newcomers. Hence, understanding the intrapersonal motivational process that shape how norms are passed down may contribute to our understanding of how groups change over time and to designing more effective group management interventions.

Ozeki (2017) proposed a group-norm succession motivation framework, referring to the motivations of each group member for passing down group norms to the younger generation. Based on responses in interviews by Sousa, Silva, Santos, & Patrão (2010), Ozeki (2017) developed a scale to assess such motivation based on individuals’ orientations concerning the act of passing down group norms. The scale included four factors: “Responsibility,” “Duty of succession,” “Preservation of group image,” and “Fiat.” “Responsibility” represents individuals’ sense that they’re responsible for the younger generations and their welfare. “Duty of succession” refers to the fact that group members should pass down the group norms that their seniors had passed down to them. “Preservation of group image” means that group norms should be passed down to
maintain the current condition of the group. “Fiat” refers to group members’ right to decide the future of the group.

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors related to group-norm succession motivation in two different countries. Specifically, we examined the role played by individuals’ group identity (Tajfel, 1981) and their endorsement of values of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995), and compared their roles in the succession of group norms between an Asian country and a Western European country.

The present study will examine whether the effect of Group Identity (GI) is stronger in collectivistic cultural regions with regard to the group-norm succession motivation. The relationship between an individual and their group regions with regard to the group-norm succession motivation, and that this linkage should be positively linked to the four subscales of group-norm succession motivation, and that this linkage should be stronger in a collectivistic cultural region compared to an individualistic one. Thus, in the current study we hypothesize that GI should influence individuals’ behaviors and perceptions more strongly in a collectivistic region than in an individualistic one. Therefore, GI should be positively linked to the four subscales of group-norm succession motivation, and that this linkage should be stronger in a collectivistic cultural region compared to an individualistic cultural region (H1). GI is the self-perception of being a group member and the value and emotional meaning associated with it (Tajfel, 1981). Numerous studies have shown that GI is a determinant of various behaviors and perceptions in a group context and that group members with high GI prefer to observe their group norms and contribute to their group (Haslam, 2004). Hence, GI evokes interest in group norms and motivates members to pass them down to the younger generation. Individualistic/collectivistic cultural regions, at the national level, will be studied as antecedents of group-norm succession motivation. Individualism refers to a tendency to pursue personal goals more than group goals (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995), and collectivism refers to the tendency to emphasize harmony within and adaptation to the group and group goals much more than personal goals (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995).

This study will also examine influence of individual-level individualism/collectivism on group norm succession motivation, and will concurrently investigate interactive effects of cultural regions and individual-level individualism/collectivism on group norm succession motivation. Traditionally, Asian countries have been referred to as collectivistic cultural regions, while North America and West European countries have been referred to as individualistic cultural regions. However, individual-level individualism/collectivism, the extent to which an individual endorses individualistic/collectivistic values, has more influence on individuals’ behavior and perception (Triandis, 1995). Moreover, individual-level individualism/collectivism works differently depending on national-level individualism/collectivism, and the former level can work independent from the latter (Na, Grossmann, Varnum, Kitayama, Gonzales, & Nisbett, 2010). Hence, the current study will treat individual-level individualism/collectivism as individual difference independent from difference between cultural regions. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) theorized the existence of a horizontal/vertical axis, capturing a fourfold typology: horizontal individualism (HI), horizontal collectivism (HC), vertical individualism (VI) and vertical collectivism (VC). Horizontal cultures prefer equal relationships, and vertical cultures tend to maintain power and status disparities based on age and social status (Triandis, 1995). Among HI, HC, VI, and VC, both VC and HC are likely to influence group-norm succession motivation the most. Individualists may be less interested in their group than collectivist, so only VC and HC may promote group-norm succession motivation. Individuals who endorse VC may be more likely to believe that older generations are responsible for the group and that older members have decision-making power. Moreover, they prefer young people to follow their decisions (Triandis, 1995). Conversely, people tend to dislike the succession of group norms derived from the authority of elderly people because mutual equality is important in HC. However, people in HC emphasize group harmony and their interests are in whether the group would last in the future. Hence, HC promotes “Preservation of group image” as well as “Responsibility” because interests in the ingroup evoke responsibility for it (Morselli & Passini, 2011). Meanwhile, previous studies have not showed specific patterns of interactive effects of cultural regions and individual-level individualism/collectivism on human behaviors and cognitions (Na et al., 2010). Thus, current study will exploratory examine this interactive effect on group norm succession motivation.

Based on the above reasoning, this study also examines the following hypotheses.
H₂: VC is positively associated with four subscales of group-norm succession motivation.
H₃: HC is positively associated with the “Responsibility” and “Preservation of group image”.

Method

Questionnaire surveys were conducted in Saitama prefecture, Japan and Kent, UK in November and December, 2017. The former is a collectivistic cultural region, and the latter is an individualistic cultural region (Hofstede, 1980). The participants were university students who were older than freshmen and belonged to clubs in their universities. Responses from 84 Japanese (56 males, 28 females) and 132 university students in the UK (20 males, 112 females) were analyzed. They have typically to leave within 4 years and new members join each year. This rapid turnover fosters generational change every year within clubs. Clubs are directly managed by their members. Therefore, members can change norms within a group easily and can choose which norms to pass down to the younger generations.

The first author translated both the Japanese and English questionnaires, which were then discussed with a Japanese teacher who had been teaching English.

Group-norm succession motivation scale: Items developed by Ozeki (2017) were used. Respondents were requested to answer about rules and customs of their clubs. They evaluated how much they agreed with each item on a 7-point scale from 1 (never) to 7 (absolutely) (See Online Appendix).

Individualism/collectivism: Items from the short version of the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale by Sivadas, Bruvold, & Nelson (2008) were used. Respondents answered how much they agreed with each item on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (absolutely).

Group identity: It was assessed using Karasawa’s scale (1991). Respondents were requested to imagine what they thought about the club where they belonged and evaluate how much they agreed with each item on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5.

Results

For all scales, average scores were calculated for each factor and used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for each variable are shown in Table 1.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the variables between Japan and the UK. GI was higher in
Japan than in the UK (t(201)=3.667, p<.001), and VC and “Responsibility” were higher in the UK than in Japan (VC; t(216)=4.990, p<.01; Responsibility: t(204)=3.345, p<.01) (Table 1).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted. The independent variables were cultural region (Japan and the UK), HI, HC, VI, VC, and GI, and the dependent variables were the subscales of the group-norm succession motivation scale. Interactional effects of cultural region and HI, HC, VI, and VC were also included in the analysis to discuss the different functions of HI, HC, VI, and VC among cultural regions.

In the first analysis, HI showed a high variance inflation factor (VIF) (more than 5), however, other independent variables did not show such a high VIF, regardless of the dependent variables. Then, HI was dropped from the analysis considering multicollinearity, and the multiple regression analysis was conducted again (Table 2). GI had positive effects on all subscales of the group-norm succession motivation (Responsibility: β=.355, p<.001; Duty of succession β=.231, p<.01; Preservation of group image: β=.260, p<.05; Fiat: β=.202, p<.01), but the interaction between cultural region and GI was not positive. VI and HC had positive effects on “Responsibility” (VI: β=.191, p<.05; HC: β=.199, p<.05). VC had a positive effect on “Preservation of group image” (β=.260, p<.05). The interactive effect of cultural region and HC on “Preservation of group image” was significant (β=.212, p<.05), a subsequent simple slope test showed that HC had a negative effect only in Japan (β=−.325, p<.05). However, the simple slope test was not significant in UK (β=.027, p=.834) (Figure 1).

The results showed that H1 was not supported because the interactive effects of cultural region and GI were not significant. GI was positively associated with all the four subscales of group-norm succession motivation across both countries. H2 was supported only with regard the subscale of “Preservation of group image.” H3 was not supported.

**Discussion**

GI was associated with four subscales of group-norm succession motivation irrespective of individualistic/collectivistic cultural regions, but the GI’s mean itself was higher in collectivistic cultural regions than in individualistic regions. This supported Triandis’s (1995) remarks in

| Table 2 | The effects of group identity, horizontal/vertical and individualism/collectivism, and cultural region on group-norm succession motivation |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | Responsibility | Duty of succession | Preservation of group image | Fiat |
| Country (Japan or UK) | .104 | .024 | .067 | –.132 |
| Group identity | .355 ** | .307 ** | .231 ** | .222 ** |
| Horizontal collectivism | .199 * | .007 | .226 * | .159 |
| Vertical individualism | .191 † | .271 * | .179 | .214 * |
| Vertical collectivism | .001 | .026 | .260 ** | .107 |
| Country×group identity | −.005 | −.069 | −.065 | −.024 |
| Country×Horizontal collectivism | −.001 | .154 † | .212 * | −.085 |
| Country×Vertical individualism | .058 | −.071 | −.090 | .044 |
| Country×Vertical collectivism | −.018 | .007 | −.078 | −.019 |
| Adjusted R² | .318 | .126 | .134 | .185 |
| F value | F(9, 186)=8.602 *** | F(9, 186)=4.121 *** | F(9, 186)=3.190 * | F(9, 186)=4.698 *** |

Note. †p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

![Figure 1](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
that the relationship between self and ingroup was stronger in collectivism than in individualism. GI makes people conform to group norms (Haslam, 2004), which would be universal irrespective of individualism or collectivism in the succession of group norms.

Horizontal/vertical and individualism/collectivism showed different patterns in the effects on group-norm succession motivation. The results showed that HC was linked to “Responsibility,” VI was associated with “Duty of succession,” but HC was negatively associated with “Preservation of group norm” in Japan. Additionally, VI was linked to “Fiat,” including the motivation for showing off their power to the younger generation by passing down group norms. Sensitiveness toward group norm was specific to collectivism (Paek, Lee, & Hove, 2014), but the current study showed that both individualism and collectivism had influence on group-norm succession motivation. The horizontal/vertical axis had different effects on group-norm succession motivation, which suggested that the act of passing down wasn’t necessarily a top-down one based on authority. HC was linked to “Responsibility,” which means that Responsibility was likely shaped by group interests and unrelated to group authorities. VC was associated with “Preservation of group image” and HC had a negative effect on it in Japan. This result implied that passing down group norms to maintain what the group should be is not linked to the welfare of the younger generations but may stem from the interests of the current group and a motivation of showing off authority. This result is in line with recent evidence showing that HC is related to the welfare of other people in individualistic cultures, whereas VC and HC are related to group welfare in a collectivistic cultural region (Moon, Travaglino, & Uskul, 2018). The result that VI was linked to “Fiat,” including group members’ intentions to show off their authority and superiority to the younger generation by passing down group norms, also implied that certain motivations for passing down group norms might be based on the desire to show off individual power to the younger generation, not on ensuring welfare and achievement for the group.

Overall, the results suggest that the act of passing down group norms may be enhanced by two processes: One is based on the responsibility felt towards the younger generations and their welfare. The other is based on showing off power. These suggestions were obtained by viewing individualism/collectivism as individual differences independent from cultural difference between individualistic cultural regions and collectivistic cultural regions. This approach could be helpful for cultural issues like cultural diversity in a classroom with immigrants (Schwarzenthal, Schachner, Juang, & van de Vijver, 2020).

Some limitations still remain in this study. One is that the number of respondents in the current study was low in both countries. Thus, results of current study should be interpreted with caution. Additional research is needed to replicate and extent these processes across a broad number of different contexts and geographical regions. Another limitation is that revised version of Ozeki (2017)'s group norm succession motivation scale was published in Ozeki (2020). The scale published later included two aspect of succession (McAdams & Aubin, 1992): passing down what people have, and stopping passing down what is undesirable. Researchers would need to use this revised version in the future studies. And researchers also need to take into consideration collecting data in multilevel settings then.

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