Cultural Difference in Conflict Management Strategies of Children and Its Development: Comparing 3- and 5-Year-Olds Across China, Japan, and Korea

Hiroki Maruyama
Student Counseling Room, Aichi Shukutoku University

Tatsuo Ujiie and Jiro Takai
Department of Psychology and Human Developmental Sciences, Nagoya University

Yuko Takahama
Graduate School of Humanities and Science, Ochanomizu University

Hiroko Sakagami
Education, Psychology and Human Studies, Aoyama Gakuin University

Makoto Shibayama
Faculty of Home Economics, Otsuma Women’s University

Mayumi Fukumoto
Education, Tokyo Gakugei University

Katsumi Ninomiya
Faculty of Policy Studies, Aichi Gakuin University

Park Hyang Ah
Early Childhood Education, Kyungnam University

Xiaoxia Feng
Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Hiroki Maruyama, Student Counseling Room, Aichi Shukutoku University, 9 Katahira 2-chome, Nagakute, Aichi 480-1197, Japan. E-mail: mhiroki@asu.aasa.ac.jp

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Research Findings: The purpose of this study was to examine differences in the development of conflict management strategies, focusing on 3- and 5-year-olds, through a comparison of 3 neighboring Asian cultures, those of China ($n = 114$), Japan ($n = 98$), and Korea ($n = 90$). The dual concern model of conflict management was adopted to probe which strategy children would prefer to use in 2 hypothetical conflict situations. Results indicated that, first, for disagreement, 3-year-olds in the 3 countries equally preferred the dominating strategy. For competition for resources, 3-year-olds differed in their strategy preference across all cultures. Second, the observed strategy preference of 3- to 5-year-old children in this study was more or less different from that of older schoolchildren, regardless of culture. Practice or Policy: These findings suggest the significance of the context, the complexity of the phenomenon of the development of cultural differences, and the significance of cohort sampling.
three neighboring Asian cultures, those of China, Japan, and Korea, and to gain insight into the reasons behind these differences, if any.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN CHINA, JAPAN, AND KOREA

With regard to conflict management strategies, China, Japan, and Korea are likely to be clustered into one group, having common traits, such as collectivism, interdependent self-construal, and an emphasis on concern for the other (e.g., C. W. Lee, 2002; H. O. Lee & Rogan, 1991; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Most studies involve one or two particular Eastern cultures, calling them “Asian” and comparing them to Western cultures, but few attempts have been made to distinguish between these Asian cultures independently. However, grouping Asian cultures into one common cluster may not be valid and may overlook important differences between them.

Few studies have compared these three cultures on conflict management strategies. Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) conducted a questionnaire survey comparing American, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese students, noting that (a) Chinese prefer obliging, dominating, and avoiding more than Japanese and Koreans; (b) Chinese and Koreans prefer integrating and compromising more than Japanese; and (c) Japanese prefer obliging more than Koreans. Kim, Wang, Kondo, and Kim (2007) looked at conflict management styles of corporate subordinates and supervisors and found that Japanese use obliging styles more than Chinese and Koreans, whereas Koreans use compromising styles more than Chinese and Japanese. Yi and Park (2003) observed decision-making styles within interpersonal conflict among Americans, Canadians, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in their questionnaire survey and discovered that Koreans preferred dominating and obliging styles, whereas Japanese scored low on all styles relative to the other cultures. Judging from these findings, it would appear that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are likely to prefer different conflict management styles. However, these studies were based on adult populations, consisting of people who have already acquired the cultural norms regarding conflict management.

The purpose of this study was to trace developmental changes in children’s preference for conflict management strategies. Luo, Najima, and Dohno (2007) and Luo (2008) compared conflict strategies of Chinese and Japanese elementary school, middle school, high school, and college students across six situations. For college students, Japanese generally had a wider strategy preference than Chinese, varying strategies to avoid the expression of one’s own opinions and putting the relationship above self-interests. Chinese also liked to avoid making a scene but were more likely than Japanese to prefer assertive strategies. Likewise, for elementary school children, a similar pattern was confirmed, except that Japanese children preferred more assertive strategies relative to their college cohorts, and Chinese children were generally not as apt to adopt assertive strategies, yet they would choose to assert themselves more directly when faced with a conflict of opinion with friends. Across the developmental stages, Chinese tended to concentrate on the direct assertion and suppression of opinions, whereas Japanese had a wider repertoire of strategies depending on the nature of the conflict.

Seo (2004a, 2004b) looked at differences of opinion between friends, comparing the conflict strategies of Japanese elementary school children with those of Koreans. Japanese, compared to Koreans, more frequently preferred strategies related to self-suppression, avoiding conflict, and cooperating. Koreans, compared to Japanese, were more likely to prefer assertion and compromising.
It is apparent from this literature review that both adults and children have distinct cultural preferences for conflict strategies. The existing literature on children has approached conflict strategies from differing perspectives, but we believe an established theoretical framework should be used to examine cultural differences, namely, Blake and Mouton’s (1964) dual concern model. This model has been widely applied in cross-cultural research on conflict management strategies and has been proven useful for generating predictions based on individualism–collectivism (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Person, & Villareal, 1997; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Holt & DeVore, 2005; C. W. Lee, 1990; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

The dual concern model assumes that conflict strategies have two concern dimensions, that for the self and that for the other person. Based on the degree of each concern, the model outlines five groups of strategies: dominating (high concern for self, low concern for other), integrating (high concern for self, high concern for other), obliging (low concern for self, high concern for other), avoiding (low concern for self, low concern for other), and compromising (intermediate concerns for self and other).

Based on the dual concern model, Figure 1 depicts the results obtained in previous studies by visually plotting them strategy by strategy, comparing the three cultures in question.

FIGURE 1 Summary of conflict strategies preferred by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean adults (A) and children (C) based on the dual concern model taxonomy.
From this, it is apparent that Chinese consistently prefer dominating and obliging strategies throughout childhood and adulthood. Japanese prefer dominating, integrating, avoiding, and obliging strategies in childhood, whereas in adulthood they more frequently prefer obliging. Koreans in their childhood prefer dominating and obliging, whereas adults are more likely to prefer compromising.

**THE CONFLICT SITUATION AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONFLICTING OTHER**

The research discussed in the previous section has not extensively examined conflict situations, or the relational targets with which conflicts arise, perhaps because their focus has been on cross-cultural comparison, not on cross-situational differences. Most studies are limited to situations in which there is disagreement in opinions or desires. Furthermore, many studies do not specify any particular situation but merely ask for the global view of a respondent’s conflict management behavior. Others simply leave it up to the respondent to recall an actual conflict (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Gabrieldis et al., 1997; Kim et al., 2007; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Rahim, 1983, 1986; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), implying that they may differ in the severity of conflict recalled and with what type of relational target. The importance of situational factors was emphasized by Mischel (1968), who claimed that human behavior cannot be understood without taking into account situational factors. Therefore, having such inconsistency in conflict characteristics or averaging them out may lead to important findings being overlooked. In view of this issue, the present study focused on two types of situations, one in which there is a disagreement in opinion and the other in which partners compete for resources (i.e., both parties desire the use of one single commodity). In particular, competition for resources closely represents those situations in which children fight over items (Shantz, 1987), something that they do very commonly through early childhood.

Studies have also consistently shown that the nature of the relationship with the other person in conflict leads to different strategies being utilized for conflict management (e.g., Holt & DeVore, 2005; C. W. Lee, 2002; Rahim, 1983, 1986). The types of conflict management strategies can be assumed to differ with the level of intimacy with the other party. Based on a meta-analysis of existing research, Laursen (1993) concluded that the negotiation strategy is preferred more than assertion and avoidance strategies with intimate partners (romantic partners and close friends), whereas with parents and others (teachers and classmates), the assertion strategy is often selected. In the present study, different levels of intimacy were examined as a relational feature of the conflict target. Specifically, two types of targets were considered: someone close (high intimacy) and someone whom participants had been recently acquainted (low intimacy). Thus, we looked at four situations in our study, combining two types of conflict situations (disagreement in opinions and competition for resources) with two levels of relational intimacy (intimate and recently acquainted).

Particularly with children, the presence of an adult mediator (e.g., parent, teacher) in a conflict situation might make a difference in the conflict management strategy chosen. However, such difference was beyond the scope of this study; thus, we held the situation constant to that in which a parent was assumed to be present during the conflict.
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The majority of existing studies have sampled adults, such as college students and corporate employees, whereas those that featured adolescents and children looked at those in grade school and beyond. The question remains to be asked: When do changes in conflict management strategy preference occur? As shown in Figure 1, cultural difference is already evident in childhood, and it can be hypothesized that differences emerge at an earlier stage, developing thereafter. It is difficult to conceive of cultural differences right at the onset of birth, so there must be a time when conflict management strategies displayed in each culture begin to be utilized between infancy and childhood; once they begin to be practiced, these conflict management strategies develop into those that school-age children will use. In turn, these strategies develop into those that adults will use. Thus, the present study probed when culturally typical conflict management strategies develop, specifically during early childhood, across the cultures of China, Japan, and Korea.

In particular, little is known about the conflict management strategies of children in China and Korea, although Japanese studies have generally shown that 3- and 4-year-old children act as they please, mainly through action rather than talk, and 5- and 6-year-old children are able to suppress as well as verbally assert their opinions (e.g., Maruyama, 1999; Suzuki, Koyasu, & An, 2004). If one interprets this with respect to the dual concern model (see Figure 1), these results suggest that the dominating strategy is frequently used in the age group of 3–4 years (high concern for self), whereas children additionally acquire the use of obliging (concern for other) at 5–6 years. Obliging arises perhaps because Japanese children (see Figure 1) begin to participate in groups of other children of the same age in kindergarten and nursery, at 3–4 years of age, and they begin the lifelong practice of maintaining harmony within the group. Furthermore, this time in an American study, 3-year-olds were found to physically strike the conflict partner (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2004). These findings, albeit only among American and Japanese, suggest that 3-year-olds tend to self-assert in an aggressive fashion. Cultural difference may yet to appear in this early age, as children unvaryingly use the dominating strategy, but later on they learn their respective cultural virtues, and strategies become more diverged. Participation in group activities and socialization within the group allow children ages 5–6 and older to acquire strategies that are typically used in their own respective cultures. Hence, we decided to put the focus on 3- and 5-year-old children in the three countries for analyzing the development of their conflict management strategies. We hypothesized that 3-year-olds would have high levels of self-concern, would be likely to use dominating, and would be yet to acquire those strategies that are characteristic of each country, whereas 5-year-olds would have gained the use of these strategies. We thus formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Three-year-old children, regardless of culture, prefer dominating as their prevalent conflict management strategy.

From the review of the previous research here, the development of conflict management strategies appears to begin during the period between 3 and 5 years of age, continuing on into school age. Hence, we hypothesized that conflict management strategies in each country would
begin to diverge between ages 3 and 5 to those typical of each culture (see Figure 1). Thus, Hypothesis 2 in the present study was as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Conflict management strategies of 5-year-olds in China, Japan, and Korea are consistent with those of school-age children in their respective cultures (see Figure 1).

In addition, it is possible that conflict management strategies differ according to conflict situations and levels of intimacy, as mentioned before, so we decided to explore the following research question:

Research Question: Do children differ in their conflict strategies with the situation and level of intimacy with the target across the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures?

**METHOD**

**Participants**

China, Japan, and Korea have three grades in kindergarten and nursery: lower grade (3–4 years old), middle grade (4–5 years old), and upper grade (5–6 years old). In our study, we focused on the lower and upper grade samples only. Although the ages of the children vary and may overlap between grades, we were only concerned about the number of years of schooling experience they had (i.e., all children in a particular grade started schooling at the same time, regardless of age). For the sake of convenience we refer to 3- to 4-year-olds as 3-year-olds and 5- to 6-year-olds as 5-year-olds to give a better idea of their respective developmental age. In China, 57 children in the 3-year-old group (34 boys, 23 girls, average age $\bar{x} = 48$ months, $SD = 2.3$ months, age range = 42–52 months) and 57 children in the 5-year-old group (27 boys, 30 girls, average age = 71 months, $SD = 2.6$ months, age range = 63–79 months) were sampled in Beijing, the nation’s capital of 10 million people. In Japan, 53 children in the 3-year-old group (30 boys, 23 girls, average age $\bar{x} = 48$ months, $SD = 4.0$ months, age range = 41–54 months) and 45 children in the 5-year-old group (26 boys, 19 girls, average age $\bar{x} = 73$ months, $SD = 4.2$ months, age range = 65–81 months) were sampled in Tokyo, the nation’s capital of 10 million people, and Nagoya, a city of 2 million people. Finally, in Korea, 45 children in the 3-year-old group (27 boys, 18 girls, average age $\bar{x} = 53$ months, $SD = 4.0$ months, age range = 44–58 months) and 45 children in the 5-year-old group (23 boys, 22 girls, average age $\bar{x} = 77$ months, $SD = 4.0$ months, age range = 68–83 months) were sampled in Pusan, a city of 3 million people, and Changwon, a city of 1 million people. These cities are representative of large cities in their respective countries, so we believe the demographics are more or less equivalent across the three cultures.

Sampling was conducted first by visiting kindergartens and asking for their cooperation in obtaining participants. In Japan and Korea, kindergarten refers to schools for 3- to 6-year-olds, whereas nurseries refers to schools that accommodate children from 0 years old. China, in contrast, does not distinguish between the two. Because our analyses did not involve comparisons between the two, we hereafter refer to them as kindergarten. A letter describing the purpose of the research and a request for cooperation was distributed to the parents of the children. Parents who consented to have their children participate were contacted. The participants were both the
children and their parents. Table 1 summarizes basic demographic traits of the families of the participants.

### Conflict Management Strategy Task

The children in this study were not of an age for which self-reports were reliable, so we created tasks that would project how they would respond. Our tasks consisted of stories enacted by puppets that involved conflict situations, and we asked children to continue the stories as the protagonist.

Two types of conflict situations (disagreement and competition for resources) and two levels of intimacy conditions (intimate and recently acquainted) were created, generating four stories (two conflict situations × two levels of intimacy) in total. In the disagreement episode, two children are playing together, but they disagree on which equipment (slide or horizontal bar) they want to play with. In the competition for resources episode, two children are playing together in the park, but there is only enough equipment (spring rocker) for one child. In addition, a practice story was created to familiarize the children with the procedure. In conclusion, a total of five story episodes—practice, disagreement (intimate), competition for resources (intimate), disagreement (recently acquainted), and competition for resources (recently acquainted) vignettes—were developed. The puppet characters consisted of a bear (main character), a monkey

| Characteristic       | China   | Japan | Korea |
|----------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Father               |         |       |       |
| Average age          | 37.4    | 38.1  | 38.7  |
| Years of schooling\(^a\) | 16.7   | 15.5  | 14.3  |
| Employment type      |         |       |       |
| Full time            | 103     | 94    | 83    |
| Part time            | 4       | 0     | 1     |
| Homemaker/unemployed | 3       | 0     | 0     |
| Unknown              | 4       | 4     | 6     |
| Mother               |         |       |       |
| Average age          | 34.6    | 37.2  | 36.1  |
| Years of schooling\(^a\) | 16.0   | 14.8  | 14.5  |
| Employment type      |         |       |       |
| Full time            | 95      | 5     | 22    |
| Part time            | 7       | 20    | 10    |
| Homemaker/unemployed | 9       | 70    | 53    |
| Unknown              | 3       | 3     | 5     |
| Household incomes\(^b\) |       |       |       |
| Less than $50,000    | 15      | 25    | 61    |
| $50,000–$100,000     | 69      | 54    | 22    |
| More than $100,000   | 28      | 16    | 3     |
| Unknown              | 2       | 3     | 4     |

\(^a\)Years of schooling is the number of years of enrollment in formal educational institutions, including elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and diploma/degree-granting vocational school. \(^b\)Household incomes are in US dollars (converted at current rate during experiment).

### Table 1

Demographics of the Families of Participants in China, Japan, and Korea
(intimate friend), the bear’s mother, and a pig (recent acquaintance), and they were attached to what we refer to as the apron stage (see Figure 2). The order of presentation, the types of conflict episodes, the stories, and the characters are in Table 2.

**Procedure**

Parents of the potential participants were asked to give the researcher time to conduct the tasks either at home or at kindergarten. During the task, the researcher sat in front of the participant, held a puppet in hand, and gave the following instructions:

Now I am now going to tell you some stories. Do you want to hear some stories, [child’s name]? In my story, there will be Teddy Bear and Teddy’s best friend, Monkey. Can you hold them for me [handing the bear and the monkey puppets]? In the story, there will be times when Teddy

| Order of Presentation | Conflict Episode            | Intimacy         | Story                                                                 | Characters                  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1                     | Practice episode            | Close (high intimacy) | Choosing the cake he or she wants to eat | Bear, monkey, bear’s mother, bear’s mother |
| 2                     | Disagreement of opinion     | Close (high intimacy) | Wanting to play in the park with a friend but there is a difference of opinion in what equipment to play with | Bear, monkey, bear’s mother |
| 3                     | Competition for resources   | Close (high intimacy) | Wanting to play in the park with a friend but there is only one piece of equipment | Bear, monkey, bear’s mother |
| 4                     | Disagreement of opinion     | Recently acquainted (low intimacy) | Wanting to play in the park with someone just met but there is a difference of opinion in what equipment to play with | Bear, pig, bear’s mother |
| 5                     | Competition for resources   | Recently acquainted (low intimacy) | Wanting to play in the park with someone just met but there is only one piece of equipment | Bear, pig, bear’s mother |
isn’t sure what he should do. I want you to think and tell me what Teddy is going to do next, [child’s name]. Okay, thank you [retrieving the puppets]. Now please listen to the story.

After the researcher read aloud a scenario of the practice vignette using puppet characters consisting of a bear (Teddy), monkey (Monkey), and mother bear (Teddy’s mother), children were asked some questions about the episode. Four versions of the scenario were randomly administered, varying based on the nature of the conflict and the level of intimacy with the conflicting party: disagreement (intimate), competition for resources (intimate), disagreement (recently acquainted), and competition for resources (recently acquainted). These scenarios are included here as Appendices A and B. The characters in the episode were designated as Monkey in the intimate scenario and Pig in the recently acquainted scenario. The administration of the vignettes was recorded with a video camera with the consent of the parents. Each participant completed the task in approximately 20 min. A questionnaire about personal information about the participant was completed by his or her parent.

The questionnaire, conflict management strategy task, and procedural manual were translated into Chinese and Korean. A Korean–Chinese translator with trilingual proficiency (including Japanese) translated the materials from Japanese into both Chinese and Korean. The translated versions were then checked by native speakers of the respective languages.

Classification of Data

Strategies arising from the free responses of participants to the puppet scenarios were classified and counted based on the dual concern model. Each response was translated by a bilingual (language of response and Japanese language) graduate student of the respective culture, paying special attention to verbal nuances and nonverbal cues. This information was then coded by Japanese coders. When more than one strategy was mentioned, each was counted separately, and thus the sum of frequencies of strategies is greater than the number of participants. Responses that were difficult to classify were labeled as “other.” Because avoiding is a strategy that is deployed when conflict has yet to become salient—that is, openly known to both parties—we did not consider it a strategy to be included in our scenarios. In actual fact, few strategies that would be classified as avoiding were observed. Thus, in the present study, analysis was conducted on the four conflict management strategies of dominating, compromising, integrating, and obliging based on the dimensions of concern for self and concern for other in accordance with the dual concern model.

The strategy classification was conducted by the researcher and a graduate student majoring in psychology who was thoroughly trained to perform the classification. We determined interrater reliability by randomly drawing 10 participants from each age group in each country and calculating kappa coefficients as an indication of raters’ agreement. The result was $\kappa = .81$, indicating a sufficient agreement rate. After two raters reexamined the classification of the responses on which agreement had not been attained, complete agreement was obtained. Consequently, all of the remaining responses were classified by the first author. Table 3 displays the classification of the conflict management strategies.
RESULTS

Frequency of Conflict Management Strategies

To examine the strategy that was most prevalent in each age group, vignette, and country, we conducted chi-square tests using frequencies of strategy preference. Because there were four strategies, multiple comparisons were performed after we adjusted for the significance level using Ryan’s method, which conducts multiple comparisons based on means (see Ryan, 1960). Because of the small number of participants, rather than risk Type II error at a significance level of 5%, we treated the analyses as merely explorative in nature, using a level of significance of 10%. The results that follow are grouped by country. Figures display the frequencies with which each strategy was preferred by 3- and 5-year-old children in the three countries as percentages (the frequency of preference divided by the total frequency of all preferences). Sex differences were considered in the choice of strategy, but no differences in the frequency of choice were found in any culture or any age group by sex. Thus, we did not see any significance in probing further into sex differences in our study.

Conflict Management Strategies: China

In disagreement with an intimate target, dominating was more frequent than integrating and obliging among 3-year-olds (integrating: $\chi^2 = 9.14$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 6.53$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). For 5-year-olds, compromising and obliging were chosen more than integrating ($\chi^2 = 6.55$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; see Figure 3).

In disagreement with a recently acquainted target, dominating was more frequent than integrating and obliging among 3-year-olds (integrating: $\chi^2 = 16.33$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$;
obliging: $\chi^2 = 6.82$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), and compromising was more frequent than integrating ($\chi^2 = 6.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). For 5-year-olds, obliging was chosen more than integrating ($\chi^2 = 6.26$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; see Figure 3).

In competition for resources with an intimate target, compromising was more frequent than dominating, integrating, and obliging among 3-year-olds (dominating: $\chi^2 = 9.53$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 14.23$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 7.11$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). For 5-year-olds, compromising was more frequent than dominating and integrating (dominating: $\chi^2 = 16.33$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 12.45$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$), and obliging was more frequent than dominating and integrating (dominating: $\chi^2 = 10.71$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 7.35$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; see Figure 4).

In competition for resources with a recently acquainted target, compromising was more frequent than dominating, integrating, and obliging among 3-year-olds (dominating: $\chi^2 = 6.08$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 16.13$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 9.53$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). For 5-year-olds, no strategy was significantly more frequent than any other ($\chi^2 = 3.24$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; see Figure 4).

FIGURE 3 Conflict management strategies in China: Disagreement (%). †p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01.

FIGURE 4 Conflict management strategies in China: Competition for resources (%). *p < .05. **p < .01.
Conflict Management Strategies: Japan

In disagreement with an intimate target, dominating was more frequent than integrating and obliging for 3-year-olds (integrating: $\chi^2 = 12.80$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 8.91$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) but not for 5-year-olds (see Figure 5).

In disagreement with a recently acquainted target, dominating, compromising, and obliging were more frequent than integrating among 3-year-olds (dominating: $\chi^2 = 12.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; compromising: $\chi^2 = 7.36$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 6.40$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), whereas no such differences were found among 5-year-olds (see Figure 5).

In competition for resources with an intimate target, compromising was more frequent than dominating and obliging ($\chi^2 = 8.91$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) among 3-year-olds, and integrating was also more preferred than dominating and obliging ($\chi^2 = 4.00$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$). For 5-year-olds, compromising was chosen more than dominating and obliging ($\chi^2 = 4.57$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$) and integrating was more frequent than dominating and obliging ($\chi^2 = 10.71$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; see Figure 6).

FIGURE 5 Conflict management strategies in Japan: Disagreement (%). *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

FIGURE 6 Conflict management strategies in Japan: Competition for resources (%). †$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. 

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In competition for resources with a recently acquainted target, compromising and integrating were more preferred than dominating among 3-year-olds ($\chi^2 = 8.07$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Likewise for 5-year-olds, compromising and integrating were more frequent than dominating (compromising: $\chi^2 = 6.23$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 9.94$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; see Figure 6).

**Conflict Management Strategies: Korea**

In disagreement with an intimate target, dominating was more frequent than compromising, integrating, and obliging for 3-year-olds (compromising: $\chi^2 = 10.71$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 7.35$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 6.00$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). For 5-year-olds, dominating was more preferred than compromising and integrating (compromising: $\chi^2 = 13.76$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 5.54$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; see Figure 7).

In disagreement with a recently acquainted target, dominating was chosen more than compromising and integrating for 3-year-olds (compromising: $\chi^2 = 9.80$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 5.26$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$). For 5-year-olds, obliging was more frequent than compromising and integrating (compromising: $\chi^2 = 6.37$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 8.00$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), and obliging was selected more than compromising and integrating (compromising: $\chi^2 = 4.00$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 5.40$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; see Figure 7).

In competition for resources with an intimate target, no single strategy was preferred more frequently than any other among 3-year-olds. Among 5-year-olds as well, no strategy was preferred more frequently than any other (see Figure 8).

In competition for resources with a recently acquainted target, dominating, integrating, and obliging were more frequent than compromising among 3-year-olds (dominating: $\chi^2 = 6.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; integrating: $\chi^2 = 4.57$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$; obliging: $\chi^2 = 5.40$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$). For 5-year-olds, no strategy was significantly more frequent than any other (see Figure 8).

**Prevalent Conflict Management Strategies in China, Japan, and Korea**

Based on the analysis of frequency of conflict management strategies, changes in prevalent strategies in each vignette in the three countries were extrapolated to a plane defined by two axes of...
concern for self and concern for other to develop a graphic model. Prevalent conflict management strategies were defined as strategies that were preferred significantly more frequently than other strategies.

Disagreement: Differences by Intimacy and Age

In all three countries, 3-year-olds frequently preferred dominating with both intimate and recently acquainted others (see Figure 9). According to the framework of the present study, this indicates a high concern for self (see Figure 1). In China, toward both intimate and recently acquainted targets, obliging was found to be common, indicating that the focus of concern shifts from self to other, whereas for intimate targets alone, compromising along with obliging were prevalent. Japanese 3-year-olds also preferred compromising and obliging strategies toward recently acquainted targets. By age 5, though, no strategy was found to be prevalent with either intimate or recently acquainted others. For Korea, dominating was frequently preferred, as was the case with 3-year-olds toward intimate targets, indicating high concern for self; for recently acquainted targets, obliging in addition to dominating became prevalent, indicating high concern for self and other concurrently.

Competition for Resources: Differences by Intimacy and Age

In China, 3-year-olds frequently preferred a compromising strategy with both intimate and recently acquainted others (see Figure 10). By 5 years of age, an obliging strategy was frequently preferred with an intimate target, in addition to a compromising strategy, indicating that the focus of concern had shifted from self to other. In Japan, 3-year-olds frequently preferred compromising and integrating strategies with both intimate and recently acquainted others, indicating concern for both self and other (see Figure 1). The same tendencies were confirmed for 5-year-olds as well. In Korea, with intimate targets, both 3- and 5-year-olds showed no prevalent strategy. For recently acquainted targets, 3-year-olds frequently preferred dominating,
integrating, and obliging strategies, indicating concurrently high concern for self and other. By 5 years of age, there was no prevalent strategy.

DISCUSSION

Development of Cultural Difference in Prevalent Conflict Management Strategies

The purpose of the present study was to examine when children’s conflict management strategies develop, comparing three Asian cultures of China, Japan, and Korea. From this explorative inquiry, we raise the following discussion.

Hypothesis 1 hypothesized that the dominating strategy would be largely preferred as a conflict management strategy by 3-year-olds in all three cultures. However, although dominating
was equally popular in the disagreement situation among 3-year-olds in all three countries, strategies varied in the competition for resources situation, implying that by age 3 cultural differences are already present. The reason for this may be that conflict arising from competition for resources is similar to fighting over the possession of objects, something commonly experienced by young children. Children likely receive influence from cultural socialization through parents and caregivers and have formed their strategies through interaction with other children. By contrast, 3-year-olds are less likely to experience conflict from disagreement, and in such a situation cultural influence is minimal. Such differences in how conflict strategies vary with both age and culture exhibit preliminary evidence that situations and contexts are indispensable in any investigation of conflict and conflict management strategies. Even young children are able to distinguish which strategy is most appropriate to which situation. Whereas the majority of studies on this theme lean toward situations involving disagreement, this study examined a

FIGURE 10 Differences by intimacy and age for competition for resources. Arrows denote change in the prevalent strategy with age for each country. The bold solid line indicates the prevalent conflict management strategy for both the intimate and recently acquainted conditions at 3 or 5. Country in solid line box = prevalent conflict management strategy in the intimate condition at 3 or 5; country in dotted line box = prevalent conflict management strategy in the recently acquainted condition at 3 or 5; number before country name = age; solid arrow = development of conflict management strategy in the intimate condition from age 3 to 5; outlined arrow = development of conflict management strategy in the recently acquainted condition from age 3 to 5.
series of situations. Furthermore, those studies that account for situations do not define conflict (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Gabrielidis et al., 1997; Kim et al., 2007; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Rahim, 1983, 1986; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). However, it is hardly conceivable that conflict management strategies actually function in that way in reality. In order to justly investigate cultural differences, experts must concern themselves with the issue of, in a particular culture, in which context which strategy is used. For this reason, future research should focus on the unique aspects and demands of each conflict situation independently.

Hypothesis 2 hypothesized that conflict management strategies of 5-year-olds in China, Japan, and Korea would be consistent with the conflict management strategies of school-age children (see Figure 1). However, we found much variation in the preference for strategy between 5-year-olds and schoolchildren that were not noted in existing research (see Figure 1). This can be interpreted in three ways. The first deals with the type of conflict. As shown in Figure 1, most studies have used differences of opinion as the source of conflict (Luo, 2008; Luo et al., 2007; Seo, 2004a, 2004b). If the age group is restricted to differences of opinion of 5-year-olds, the results of 5-year-olds and older children overlap. However, the age groups differ for competition for resources, requiring further inquiry. Second, the development of cultural difference in conflict management strategies is a more complex phenomenon than we first thought. The present study was designed on the assumption that cultural difference in conflict management strategies would begin to manifest itself between infancy and childhood, continue to develop from childhood to adolescence, and continue on to adulthood. However, the trajectory of the development of cultural differences may not be so simple. Rather, this development appears to be a more fluid and variable phenomenon. The third issue has to do with the effect of cohorts. Whereas the majority of existing cross-cultural studies on conflict management were conducted in the late 1990s or early 2000s, our research was conducted some 10 years later. This 10-year period has been a decade of upheaval for the entire world, including China, Japan, and Korea, and the cultures of each country have undergone drastic change. Culture lends itself to change; hence, strategies that were characteristic 10 years ago may not be valid in today’s social environment. It is risky to conclude that a certain culture prefers a certain conflict management strategy when the knowledge on which such a conclusion is made is more than a decade old. The current state of each culture needs to be taken into account, and conflict studies should be repeated over time to examine fluctuations with time.

Our research question inquired about differences in the preference for conflict strategy by situation and intimacy and the corresponding cultural differences. Chinese school-age children and adults both had been shown to frequently use dominating and obliging (see Figure 1). Especially in a disagreement situation, concern for self was emphasized, and dominating was shown to be predominantly preferred (Luo, 2008; Luo et al., 2007). By contrast, our study demonstrated that Chinese children had high concern for the other in the disagreement situation, showing a shift in compromising and obliging strategies. For this reason the results for 5-year-olds compared to schoolchildren were only partially similar. In competition for resources, compromising and obliging strategies were also frequently preferred. We can offer the following interpretation as to why dominating was not preferred but compromising and obliging were. Because of the influence of the traditional Confucian culture in China, deference to adults, such as parents and caregivers, is valued (e.g., Lin, 2010; Sun, 2011). Incidentally, Chinese caregivers tend to intervene in conflicts between children early by teaching them specific resolution strategies (Liu & Kuramochi, 2008). In the hypothetical conflict situations of the present study
in which a parent was present, children preferred obliging and compromising to accommodate the other, the way they were taught to routinely do.

The previous research with Japanese school-age children showed that dominating, integrating, avoiding, and obliging strategies were frequently used (see Figure 1). In the disagreement, Japanese 5-year-old children did not show any prevalent strategy. As evidenced by the fact that there were four strategies in the previous research, as shown in Figure 1, it is possible that several strategies were preferred similarly. According to Luo (2008) and Luo et al. (2007), Japanese preferred more strategies than Chinese did; in other words, in the difference of opinion situation, Japanese 5-year-olds and schoolchildren tended to prefer the same conflict strategies. In the competition for resources situation, Japanese children preferred both compromising and integrating strategies, suggesting that concerns for both self and other were high, and this does not conform to schoolchildren. This may be due to the influence of Japanese education by parents and caregivers in kindergartens. Japanese parents and educators emphasize consideration for others and maintaining harmony between parties (Karasawa et al., 2006; Liu & Kuramochi, 2008). Consequently, as a result of such socialization, children likely acquire strategies such as taking turns (compromising) and playing together (integrating).

Previous research on Korean schoolchildren showed that dominating and obliging strategies were frequently used (see Figure 1). In the disagreement situation, as Korean children grew from age 3 to 5, dominating, indicative of concern for self, continued to be prevalent with intimate others, whereas obliging, indicative of concern for other, became prevalent with recently acquainted others. This trend was in keeping with the conflict management strategies of schoolchildren. However, obliging was evident only with recently acquainted others. In past research, adapting one’s own behavior to the other was attributed to the Korean custom of expressing feelings of care to others through self-sacrifice (Seo, 2005). Accordingly, when there was disagreement with recently acquainted others, children may have expressed feelings of care toward those they were likely to become closer to in the future by preferring obliging. In competition for resources, 3-year-olds preferred dominating, integrating, and obliging to only recently acquainted others, whereas no clear preference was seen for other situations. This does not correspond to results for schoolchildren, suggesting that several strategies are preferred equally.

Studies like the present one use an intricate experimental design, requiring much effort; hence, samples are limited in size. In such a situation the danger in overlooking what could have been a significant result is likely, so we decided to treat trend effects (<10%) as significant.

Conclusions

China, Japan, and Korea are often thought to be similar in that they emphasize collectivism, interdependent self-construal, and concern for other. However, the present study revealed that conflict management strategies in the three countries already differ at age 3. For disagreement, 3-year-olds in the three countries equally preferred dominating, but the same 3-year-old group differed in its strategy preference for competition for resources. It was also found that for disagreement, our 5-year-olds resembled older children in their strategy preference across all three countries, but for competition for resources, these 5-year-olds differed. These findings suggest the significance of the context, the complexity of the phenomenon of the development of cultural difference, and the significance of cohort sampling. The findings also imply that it is not correct to assume that the Eastern Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea conform to a
single prototype. Such findings may also be generalized to cross-cultural comparative research at large. To characterize a culture from a limited, stereotypical viewpoint is likely to lead to an inaccurate understanding of culture. To prevent this, it is important to take context into account and form a developmental viewpoint. These perspectives must be taken into consideration in future cross-cultural comparative research.

Limitations

The present study was designed to examine children’s strategies in three countries by using the two dimensions of concern for self and concern for other as well as their representations of conflict management strategies. However, because conflicts were presented as salient occurrences from the start in our vignettes, avoiding, which averts conflict in advance, could not be examined. East Asians are known to have a tendency to show concern for others and for this reason prefer conflict strategies such as integration or avoidance (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Furthermore, compared to Americans, Japanese have been reported to use avoiding (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994). In particular, avoiding by Japanese is intended to show social consideration toward the other party and to avert dilemmas for both oneself and the other party after a conflict manifests itself (Nakatsugawa, 2007, 2008). It is possible that China and Korea each has its own particular cultural intent, and thus future research needs to address avoiding as well. To that end, observational research on naturally occurring conflict situations between children in kindergartens and examination of intention and motivation of strategies is warranted.

In any cross-cultural study, sampling equivalency in terms of demographic characteristics is an issue. In this study, our main concern was the disparity in income among the families of the children. We compared the average household incomes of the cities sampled in our study. The average annual income was about US $13,000 for families in Beijing (Beijing Statistical Information Net, 2009), whereas it was about US $60,000 in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2011) and about US $37,000 in urban areas of Korea (Statistics Korea, 2009). These figures were converted based on the currency rate as of December 31, 2008, which was around the time that this study was conducted. The incomes of our participants generally reflected these country means, except for those in Beijing, which seemed to be higher than the average.

From this, it would appear that Japanese and Korean participants were average families, whereas our Chinese participants were more wealthy than average. We must concede that there was some degree of sampling bias in our study, and this may have had some effect on our results. Despite this, we believe that our study still has value in that it is a groundbreaking study probing when children acquire conflict management strategies across cultures, whereas most existing studies have compared how adults might approach conflict. We aim to conduct further investigation into the actual developmental process of how children acquire their strategies with a more refined methodology and sampling procedures.

Future Implications

The present research addressed cultural difference in conflict management strategies in China, Japan, and Korea and its development, including different conflict situations and levels of intimacy. Because 3-year-olds showed some difference in some situations, it is necessary to examine conflict management strategies prior to age 3 in order to analyze when cultural difference emerges.
The socialization of children—in this case, the acquisition of conflict strategies—is dependent on children’s parents and their families, as well as the kindergartens and schools they attend. In particular, the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of parents exert a significant effect on children’s behavior, as well as those of their teachers. One must also not neglect the influence of education at the schools and the length of time children spend at school. Also, attention needs to be paid to theoretical frameworks of children’s development, including cognitive, social, and behavioral theories. Although children may be affected by their guardians, families, and schools, such influences must meet the child’s own development framework to be effective in socialization. Past studies have claimed that children take on cultural scripts at certain ages (e.g., Lightfoot, Cole, & Cole, 2013; Rogoff, 2003), but how such cultural acquisitions play into their development framework has not been adequately investigated. Perhaps theory of mind and empathy development may be the key to clarifying the complex interaction between development frameworks and culture learning through the influences of adults and education. This phenomenon is likely to be fluid and variable, and research should address it as such. Future research should probe the relationship between development frameworks and cultural influences in order to understand better the process by which children acquire strategies to deal with conflict situations.

The present research was conducted by applying the framework of the dual concern model a priori on children’s responses in conflict situations that were prepared as experimental conditions. It is noteworthy that similar situations and strategies may be characterized differently across cultures (Rogoff, 2003). Meanings of dominating, compromising, integrating, and obliging strategies may differ from culture to culture. We concede that this issue should have been given more consideration in our study, but still the findings were significant. Specifically, questions that were answered—such as when cultural difference in conflict management strategies arises among children in China, Japan, and Korea and whether cultural difference in conflict management strategies and its development differ depending on conflict situations and levels of intimacy—were considered. This research was able to demonstrate cultural differences by using a unifying model of conflict strategies of 3- and 5-year-olds. In effect, our study offers some important suggestions as to how cross-cultural research can be conducted. Future research should consider what meanings situations and strategies bear in their respective cultures and incorporate a developmental viewpoint.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Disagreement (Intimate)**

1. Experimenter: The first story. One day, Teddy came to a park with his/her mother.
2. Teddy: I see Monkey! Monkey! Monkey! Let’s play together!
3. Monkey: Sure, let’s play together! What do you want to do, Teddy?
4. Teddy: Let’s go down the slide.
5. Monkey: No, I want to play on the horizontal bar.
6. Teddy: But I want to use the slide!
7. Monkey: But I want to play on the horizontal bar!
8. Experimenter [to the child]: Now look here, [child’s name]. Teddy and Monkey want to play together but they want to do different things. What do you think Teddy would do now?
   [Note 1: Repeat the question only once if he or she does not respond]
9. Child: [Responds]
   [Note 2: If he or she responds nonverbally, do not verbally confirm what was intended]
10. Experimenter [to the child]: I see.
11. Experimenter: Tell me how Teddy and Monkey played [depending on the child’s response, allow him or her to continue on for about 20 s].
   [Note 3: If the child did not respond, skip telling how they played and continue with the next line]
12. Mother: Teddy, we’ll go home.
13. Teddy: Okay. Bye, Monkey.
14. Monkey: Bye, Teddy.
15. Experimenter: Everyone goes home.

APPENDIX B

Competition for Resources (Intimate)

1. Experimenter: On the next day, Teddy came to a park again with his/her mother.
2. Monkey: Teddy, Teddy!
3. Teddy: That’s Monkey! Hi, let’s play together again!
4. Monkey: Yeah, let’s play together!
5. Teddy: I want to ride the spring rocker toy today.
6. Monkey: I want to ride the spring rocker toy too.
7. Teddy: I will ride the spring rocker toy!
8. Monkey: I will ride the spring rocker toy!
9. Experimenter [to the child]: Now look here, [child’s name]. There is only one spring rocker toy in the park. What do you think Teddy is going to do now?
   [Note 1: Repeat the question only once if he or she does not respond]
10. Child: [Responds]
   [Note 2: If he or she responds nonverbally, do not verbally confirm what was intended]
11. Experimenter [to the child]: I see.
12. Experimenter: Tell me how Teddy and Monkey played [depending on the child’s response, allow him or her to continue on for about 20 s].
   [Note 3: If the child did not respond, skip telling how they played and continue with the next line]
13. Mother: Teddy, we’ll go home.
14. Teddy: Okay. Bye, Monkey.
15. Monkey: Bye, Teddy.
16. Experimenter: Everyone goes home.