



Memories of the umbrella

~when common meets the uncommon~

Student Healthcare Center, Counseling Team

Every year, when I encounter the rainy season in Japan, it always reminds me of the days I lived in a place where having umbrellas was rare. I lived in a place where our options for transportation were mainly limited to private cars, with parking areas in almost all the facilities around town. It did rain in our area – it was just that we didn't walk outside. However, since I had only lived in Tokyo up to that point, I didn't doubt myself about bringing an umbrella on rainy days, as this was my common sense.

The first rainy day of the school year was a memorable one. I was the only person in school who had a charming umbrella (some did have umbrellas, but it was golf umbrellas that would fit at least 3 people). Some wore rain jackets, but most of the students chose to run from their cars to the school entrance. My umbrella caught a lot of attention, which turned into a photoshoot where we posed with the umbrella, which resulted in a fun Facebook post (Facebook was the main source of fun and drama back then). The day I brought a pocket umbrella was even more interesting. My friends had a

rough time folding it back, and again, taking a video of how my friends struggled to fold it back became another Facebook post, which went viral among our group. As I watched my friends fully enjoy the umbrella, I realized how these cultural differences could be something that you would never expect. I did expect other bigger difficulties – ethnicity, language, religion, politics, and traditions, but I didn't guess this common sense would be challenged.

This was one of the humorous examples of my culture shocks, but I had ones that were not at all humorous, or ones that I struggled to understand. Different places, different common sense – yes, of course, but my experience of living abroad gave me a chance to realize that “common sense” is not “common” on the other side of the world, and it would just be “personal sense”. It was probably my phase in life to get a reality check. A phase to understand, acknowledge, realize, and accept, and if that sense fits my perspectives or standards, I could blend that within myself and make my own “personal sense”. It took a while for



me to come to this point of thought, but looking back, now I feel my experience was worthwhile.

I learned later on that culture shock is a topic in psychology, and some academically define it as "feeling of disorientation". That feeling of alienation, unexpected and stressful but yet adventurous, challenging, and uplifting feeling – maybe that was all part of culture shock. Reading it academically gave me a good definition of my emotions, and it did give a fair number of good answers to the questions I had when I was abroad,

so if you feel that you are struggling right now, maybe reading a few articles might help.

Living in a different country brings out so many emotions, and it feels like learning a new side of yourself. If you feel like a fish out of water and find it difficult to breathe, please visit the Student Healthcare Center or make an appointment via the website. We'll try to find a way for you to breathe easier!

July 18th, 2025

For more information about the Student Healthcare Center, please visit the website below.

<https://www.titech.ac.jp/english/student-support/students/counseling/counseling>

References

"The Psychology of Culture Shock" <https://vertoeducation.org/blog/psychology-of-culture-shock/>

Xia, J. (2009). Analysis of impact of culture shock on individual psychology. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 1(2), 97.