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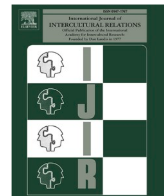

An autoethnographic examination of the development of biculturalism and the emergence of concinnation

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A B S T R A C T

This autoethnography examines biculturalism as a lifelong developmental process and introduces *concinnation* as a conceptual framework for understanding the synthesis of multiple cultural identities. Drawing from four decades of my alternating residence and professional engagement as a bilingual learner, bicultural educator and researcher sojourning between Japan and the United States, I explore how bilingual and bicultural experiences shaped my identity formation across childhood, adulthood, and professional life. Through reflective analysis, I argue that bicultural identity is neither incidental nor solely circumstantial; rather, it requires intentional cultivation, psychosocial competence, and the capacity to belong, function, and alternate between cultural systems. I propose the concept *concinnation* which denotes the harmonization of plural cultural selves, including the *introspective self*, within a coherent yet dynamic identity structure. This integrative process aligns with theoretical perspectives on acculturation and adult development, particularly Kegan's Fifth Order of Consciousness, which emphasizes reflexivity and systemic integration. Ultimately, I position biculturalism as a transformative mode of adult development with implications for second language acquisition, intercultural competence, and global coexistence. The discussion provides suggestion on further research to elucidate on the five canons of bicultural adult development and the bicultural threshold necessary for cultivating healthy and balanced biculturalism. By articulating *concinnation* as both a developmental and philosophical process, this autoethnography invites broader engagement with multicultural identity formation in an increasingly interconnected world.

The world is constructed within the beholder. We experience the world through the lenses of culture and lived experience. A Japanese person interprets reality through a Japanese worldview, just as an American understands it through an American one. To genuinely appreciate cultural plurality, one must develop the capacity to think across perspectives. Although such growth may occur through education, travel, or intercultural contact, I argue that biculturalism offers one of the most sustained and transformative pathways for expanding affective, cognitive and cultural horizons.

As a bilingual and bicultural educator and researcher, I approach this autoethnography with two aims. First, I examine biculturalism as a developmental process that can be understood and intentionally cultivated. Second, I introduce concinnation as a conceptual marker of the bicultural mindset, which is dynamic, adaptive, and capable of integrating multiple cultural frames (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). Although my narrative centers on Japan and the United States, the framework extends beyond two cultures; biculturalism should be understood within broader models of multicultural development (Phinney, 1990).

Drawing on my repeated sojourning between these societies, I trace how sustained cross-cultural engagement shaped my dual

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identities (Ward, 2000; Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000). Through autoethnographic reflection (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2010), I document the movement from bilingual learner to educator to researcher, and propose concinnation as a way to understand the enduring integration of multiple cultural selves.

Bilingual and bicultural development in Japan and the US

While my Japanese and English bilingualism flourished during my formative years attending international schools in Tokyo, adult bicultural development completed through the course of engaging in an eight year alternating life-cycle living in both cultures (Table 1). Regardless of the vastly polar ideologies of each culture, it was possible for me to develop two cultural identities and sustain balance; manage to alternate between cultures and remain sane; operate vastly different cultural identities but remain in control of the two cultural identities.

Formative years of development

The formative stages of my identity development were deeply influenced by bilingual and bicultural immersion. My earliest years were divided between Tokyo and Los Angeles, where I first encountered English as a second language. Born in Tokyo, I lived there for two years before my family relocated to Los Angeles, where I attended kindergarten and began learning English. From the age of six until high school graduation, I was educated in Tokyo—first in an English–Japanese bilingual international school through eighth grade, and later at an institution modeled after the American school system.

Long before I consciously made cultural choices, I was already living within two systems of meaning. Throughout my K–12 education, I navigated Japanese and American bilingual environments simultaneously, which shaped what I now call an “international school identity”—a selfhood formed between two cultural worlds rather than fully within either one. I spoke, read, wrote, and listened in both languages daily, yet my proficiency reflected this in-between position: my Japanese did not fully match that of students educated solely in Japanese schools, and my English, though fluent, lacked the cultural nuance of those raised in the United States. At the same time, sustained immersion in Japanese—through *kokugo* (Japanese literature) textbooks, Japanese-medium classes, kanji memorization, and essay writing—strengthened my literacy and ultimately enabled me to work and build a life in Japan. My bilingual education thus shaped not only how I communicated, but also where I could belong.

When I attended university in Los Angeles and subsequently returned to Japan in 1984, I confronted an unsettling question: “Am I Japanese, or am I American?” The answer was neither simple nor comforting. I felt disconnected from both cultural worlds—linguistically competent yet experientially displaced. My situation exemplifies what Phinney (1990) describes as “diffuse identity status”, in which an individual struggles to integrate multiple cultural affiliations into a coherent sense of self. For many years, my “international school identity” became both a protective construct and a liminal space of belonging—a self formed through adaptation rather than rootedness.

Adult development

As illustrated in Table 1, my adult identity development unfolded in alternating cultural contexts, roughly following an eight-year cyclical pattern of living and working in Japan and the United States. Over four decades (1984–2025), I sojourned between both societies, gradually learning to function effectively in each. This continuous oscillation became the framework of my identity formation, reflecting what Erikson (1968) terms the *lifelong process of ego synthesis*—a dynamic negotiation between continuity and change.

Each relocation and reintegration required new adaptations—mastering social skills, understanding cultural norms, and internalizing folkways that enabled competent participation within each society. Through these cycles, I discovered that belonging was not a fixed state but an active process of engagement. In both Japan and the United States, I had to learn to read social expectations, participate authentically in community life, and contribute meaningfully to local contexts.

The development of my Japanese identity primarily occurred during Periods 1, 3, and 5, while my American identity deepened during Periods 2 and 4. By the third period, I began to sense a growing awareness of concinnation. Ultimately, my adult life became an autoethnographic enactment of intercultural negotiation—an ongoing process of navigating linguistic, emotional, and social belonging across two cultural landscapes.

Table 1
Eight year life cycle alternating between Japan and the United States of American.

Period	Year	Country	Main language	Status (function)
1	1984–1992	Japan	Japanese	International relations staff member
2	1992–2000*	USA	English	Administrator manager, Elementary school teacher
3	2000–2009	Japan	Japanese	Elementary school teacher, Director of English program
4	2009–2017	USA	English	Doctorate program, University lecturer and researcher
5	2017-current	Japan	Japanese	University lecturer and researcher

**In Japan for 10 months working in Japan’s first bilingual immersion program in Shizuoka, Japan*

Biculturalism as an ongoing negotiation rather than cultural harmony

Living between cultures means navigating institutions designed for people who belong clearly to one. Schools, workplaces, and everyday interactions tend to assume cultural coherence rather than hybridity. Consequently, bicultural individuals often encounter subtle pressures to assimilate—to speak, behave, and think according to dominant norms. What is framed as "adjustment" can quietly become erasure. Assimilation is frequently treated as common sense or even a moral obligation, yet it rests on the expectation that minority individuals relinquish their heritage identities to succeed (Berray, 2019). Over time, I came to recognize the hidden costs of this expectation: the possibility of rejection from both the host society and one's own community, and the ongoing psychological strain of negotiating belonging (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

These tensions are especially visible in economic and professional life. Although immigrants are encouraged to integrate, many remain confined to low-wage or unstable work despite high qualifications (Li and Halli, 2003; Ogbemudia, 2021). Even with language fluency and credentials, entry into corporate cultures can remain elusive (Sassen, 2000). Prolonged exclusion is associated with acculturative stress, negative self-perception, and alienation (Aycan and Berry, 1996), and skilled immigrants frequently encounter discrimination that limits upward mobility (Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton, & Gabarrot, 2015). Observing these patterns, I realized that adaptation is not simply a matter of individual effort; structural barriers quietly signal that one's belonging is conditional. The result is being caught between worlds, never fully accepted by either (Rodríguez-García, 2010). In response, communities often form ethnic enclaves as spaces of safety and recognition (Terzano, 2014; Beck, 2002). Yet such protection can also become reactive ethnicity, strengthening in-group bonds while deepening separation from the host society (Rumbaut, 2008). Research consistently shows that integration or biculturalism predicts greater well-being, whereas separation and marginalization are linked to higher stress (Berry, 1989; Berry and Hou, 2016). Bicultural life, then, is less a seamless blending than a continual balancing act.

Japan illustrates these dynamics clearly. *Kikokushijo*—Japanese returnee students educated abroad—were once stigmatized as misfits whose overseas experiences disrupted socialization (Kanno, 2003; Shimogori, 2013). Government-supported Japanese schools abroad later facilitated smoother reintegration, yet these measures primarily aimed to restore conformity (Yoshida et al., 2009). By contrast, graduates of international schools within Japan, though often bilingual and globally competent, remain structurally marginalized. Classified as *kakushu gakko* under the School Education Law, their credentials lack full recognition and their schools receive limited public support (Boyle, 2012). This disparity reveals a paradox: while bicultural skills are celebrated rhetorically, institutions continue to privilege homogeneity. From both research and personal experience, I have come to see that genuine inclusion requires more than assimilation; it demands structural recognition of bicultural identities as assets rather than deviations.

Operationalizing biculturalism

My narrative emerges from a life lived between Japan and the United States. Although these societies differ markedly, I have come to inhabit both. As a Japanese citizen working in the United States under H-1B and J-1 visas—first as an elementary school teacher and later as a university lecturer and researcher—I was not merely exposed to American culture but embedded within it, teaching, collaborating, and building a professional life. Over time, I learned to move between these cultural systems with increasing ease, maintaining continuity of self even as my frame of reference shifted.

Culture shapes how people think, feel, and act through shared beliefs, values, language practices, and behaviors (Benedict, 1934). Identity, in turn, reflects a sense of personal sameness and continuity (Erikson, 1968) that develops through social participation rather than in isolation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Research on acculturation highlights affective and cognitive dimensions of cultural identity (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011); my experience suggests that language is equally central. Across linguistic, affective, and cognitive dimensions —how I communicate, what I value and feel, and how I interpret the world—developing fluency in both Japanese and English gradually reshaped my ways of being. This section traces that development and shows how these dimensions came together in what I term concinnation—a consolidated, balanced bicultural self. Although my ethnic identity remains Japanese (Ting-Toomey *et al.* 2000), I use cultural identity as the analytical lens through which to understand both my Japanese and American affiliations. In terms of organization, following paragraph headings first identify the three dimensions and subsequently specify the period of development (Refer to Table 1).

To be Japanese

Linguistic Development (Formative years). An episode during third grade in summer break, Japanese students who were placed in A class - Japanese as first language - were given homework to write daily journals. The Japanese teacher would call students on the phone to check up upon them. During one conversation she asked me "*Ogenki desuka* (How are you?)" And I replied, "*Ogenkidesu.*" She immediately corrected me that "O" at the beginning was not to be used to refer to oneself. It was a form on honorific language addressed to a third person not to oneself. What makes Japanese linguistically complex is its system of *keigo* (honorific speech) (Prindle, 1981) and its high-context structure (Hall, 1976). Speech forms shift according to the listener's age, status, and relational distance; one uses honorific expressions with seniors but not with juniors. Rooted in Confucian principles that emphasize hierarchy, ethical conduct, and social harmony, *keigo* requires speakers to encode respect and relative status directly into language, reflecting the moral and relational order that has long shaped Japanese social and educational life (Smith, 1991; Davies & Ikeno, 2002).

Affective Development (Formative years, Period 1). Learning a language alone does not solidify one's cultural identity; rather, enduring experiences and sustained engagement with society are imperative. A significant aspect of my Japanese identity was cultivated through participation in traditional Japanese sports. During my formative years, influenced by the television drama *Judo*

Icchokusen, I began practicing judo from upper elementary school for approximately three years at the *Takanawa Police Station* near my home in Tokyo. Practicing *judo* provided me opportunities to interact with Japanese students from local public schools in Tokyo.

Etymologically, *judo* comprises two characters: *ju* (柔) meaning "flexible," and *do* (道) meaning "path." Its philosophical maxim, *jū yoku gō o sei su*, teaches that "the adaptable overcomes the unyielding"—that agility outweighs brute strength (Ariyama, Shimamoto, & Nakanishi, 2017). As an adult, I continued this pursuit through *aikido* during what I refer to as Period 1, while residing in Tama City, Tokyo. Aikido consists of *ai* (合, blend), *ki* (気, chi-energy), and *do* (道, path). Its philosophy centers not on competition but on harmony—parrying, blending, and redirecting an opponent's force rather than opposing it (Dobson, Miller, 1993; Ueshiba, 1984). Over six years of practice, I achieved a first-degree black belt. In contrast to Western contact sports like boxing or wrestling, Japanese martial arts value agility and flexibility alongside strength. Victory is not defined purely by overpowering an opponent, but by blending with and redirecting the opponent's energy. More broadly, judo and aikido have shown me that conflict and competition do not always require winning; harmony, redirection, and even loss can hold equal value.

The narrative now turns to my relationship with my mother. Growing up, she often repeated the saying *chinmoku wa kin* (silence is gold), gently reminding me that when I did not know how to respond, it was better to say nothing at all. I took her words seriously. Over time, silence became not just advice but habit—an instinct I carried with me into adolescence and adulthood. Remaining quiet felt safe. It spared me the risk of saying the wrong thing or disturbing the atmosphere around me. In group settings, I naturally settled into the role of listener, watching carefully, reading the room, and relying on context rather than words. Speaking felt secondary; understanding came first. This disposition reflects Japanese norms that value indirectness, sensitivity, and social harmony (Mori, 1997). In Japan's high-context communication style, meaning often resides less in what is spoken than in what is shared and understood without words (Hall, 1976; Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Silence, then, is not absence but expression—a way of signaling empathy, restraint, and attunement to others.

Cognitive Development (Period 3). Working in Japan did not simply strengthen my Japanese identity—it quietly reshaped how I understood myself. Across three professional periods, I spent twenty-three years employed in Japan, but Period 3, when I served as Director of the English Program at a private elementary school in Tokyo, was the most formative. The change came less through dramatic events than through daily routines. Each morning began in the *kyōin shitsu* (teachers office room). At the vice principal's call of *kiritsu*, we stood and greeted one another in unison—*ohayō gozaimasu* (good morning). Meetings stretched for hours, prioritizing consensus over efficiency. These small, repeated practices trained my attention toward the group rather than the individual. One moment clarified this shift. I encouraged a sixth-grade student to solve a problem independently, believing autonomy was supportive. A colleague later corrected me, "You need to be more sensitive and guide the student." The remark exposed the limits of my American assumptions. Here, care meant guidance, not independence. The proverb *deru kugi wa utareru* —"the nail that sticks out is hammered down"—suddenly felt less metaphorical and more instructional. Classroom routines reinforced the same logic. Through *nicchoku* (daily duties), students cleaned, organized, and led greetings together, learning responsibility as collective rather than individual. Immersed in these structures, I gradually internalized their values. I stopped experiencing collectivism as external expectation and began to practice it instinctively. My identification with Japan became both professional and personal.

According to cross-cultural research, the Japanese self-construal is characterized as interdependent, and Japanese culture is commonly categorized as collectivist (Heine, 2016). An interdependent self-construal emphasizes relationships, interconnectedness, group harmony, and collective goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1999). Japanese society is group-oriented and prioritizes maintaining harmony and solidarity over individual achievement. The allocentric cognitive style typical of Japanese individuals suggests that they tend to consider others' perspectives before their own (Mio, Barker, & Rodriguez, 2016).

The transition, however, required letting parts of my American identity recede. Having been educated and socialized in the United States, where self-expression was encouraged, I initially experienced the Japanese school culture as restrictive. Over time, it felt less like constraint and more like commitment. Building an English program within a Japanese school had long been my goal, and adopting Japanese modes of thinking and leading became both practical and intentional. By the end of this period, Japan no longer felt temporary. It felt like home. I did not imagine returning to the United States; my future seemed firmly rooted where the group, not the self, defined belonging.

To be American

Linguistic Development (Formative year). Having completed all of my higher education in the United States, I consider myself linguistically well versed, particularly in areas related to my academic specialization, such as biculturalism. Yet I vividly recall an episode from when I was eighteen, upon entering a college in Southern California, that challenged my assumptions about language and hierarchy. On the first day of class, my English professor addressed the students and said, "Call me John." This moment was striking. No teacher— even in the international schools I had attended in Japan—had ever suggested such familiarity. In my prior experience, teachers, and especially professors, were to be addressed with formal titles, such as Dr. John Edwards, as a fundamental expression of respect.

Edward T. Hall (1976) describes U.S. culture as low context, where meaning is conveyed explicitly through language rather than inferred through social roles or situational cues. When your professor explicitly instructed students to use his first name, he removed ambiguity and made expectations transparent—an important feature of American communication norms. As I progressed working in the US during period 2 and 4, it remained a challenge to call my mentors, especially in graduate school, by their first name. However, as a faculty member at universities in Southern California, having respect and astonishment for having a professor say, call me John, with much respect, it was not difficult for me to have my college students address me by my first name.

Affective Development (Formative Year; Period 2). One of my earliest emotional lessons in "becoming American" happened on

a football field. On the morning of a home game during my junior year, I took the TOEFL exam and arrived late to the stadium. By the time I reached the sidelines, the game had already started. I remember walking straight toward the coach, fists clenched, jaw tight, visibly frustrated. I didn't explain myself—I performed my urgency. My body did the talking. The display was deliberate. I wanted him to see how badly I wanted to play. It worked. He glanced over and shouted, "Yuji, go in! I sprinted onto the field, lined up at nose guard, and stomped my feet like a horse pawing the ground, adrenaline surging as I prepared for contact. In that moment, intensity and aggression didn't feel excessive—they felt expected.

Attending an American high school in Tokyo, surrounded largely by U.S. expatriate students, I was immersed in a sports culture that celebrated competitiveness, strength, and self-expression (Griffiths *et al.* 2019). Practices were loud and punishing. Drills like "Bull in the Ring," "Oklahoma," and "Gassers" rewarded toughness and emotional display (Berg, 2013). Energy was external, not contained. Excitement, frustration, pride—everything was meant to show.

This contrasted sharply with the emotional restraint I associated with Japanese athletics. In judo or other martial arts, composure signaled discipline; overt displays of emotion felt inappropriate. Even victory was quiet. Where Japanese sport taught control, American football encouraged release. Over time, these embodied experiences shaped me as much as language or cognition. Even now, hearing the "Star-Spangled Banner" before a Super Bowl stirs an immediate, physical sense of belonging. My American identity, I realized, was not only something I thought or spoke—it was something I felt in my body.

Another formative moment occurred during Period 2, when I was working as a business manager at a newly established graduate school and research center in Encinitas, California. The director, an American hired to build the program in coordination with the California Council for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (CCPVE; now known as the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE)), was energetic and outspoken. His style was direct—sometimes so direct that it felt abrasive to me. During one meeting, he abruptly brushed past my comments and continued as if I hadn't spoken. I felt dismissed, as though a young Japanese manager had no standing in the room. My instinct was to say nothing. In Japan, silence can signal respect or careful thought, and I chose not to disrupt the meeting. But afterward, it became clear that my silence had not communicated respect—it had made me invisible. I began to understand that in the U.S., quietness can be read as uncertainty or disengagement. If I wanted to be taken seriously, I had to speak. So later that day, I did something that felt unnatural: I asked for a private meeting and calmly explained how his behavior had affected me. To my surprise, he apologized. The conversation reset our working relationship. That small act changed more than our dynamic. It changed me.

American professional culture, grounded in egalitarianism and individual agency, expects people to advocate for themselves—"the squeaky wheel gets the grease." Voice signals competence. Silence can suggest the opposite. For me, learning to speak up was not just a communication adjustment but an identity shift. The restraint I had long associated with humility began to feel like self-erasure. Finding my voice became a form of negotiation between cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 1997) —learning when to hold back and when to assert myself with clarity and confidence. Speaking up was not simply adopting an American habit; it was becoming someone who could exist fully in both worlds.

Cognitive Development (Period 2). Later in this period, I taught at a Southern California public elementary school in a Japanese immersion program. Most of my students were fourth-generation Japanese Americans, and their classrooms centered on something I had rarely experienced in Japan: the open celebration of individuality. Students regularly gave *I Am a Star* presentations, publicly naming their talents and interests (Terry, 2000). Differentiated instruction assigned rotating roles—leader, assistant, note-taker, presenter—so that each child practiced contributing in a distinct way (Tomlinson, 2014). No one was expected to fade into the group. Each student was expected to be visible.

At first, I experienced these practices as pedagogical techniques. Over time, they became personal. As I encouraged students to voice their strengths, I began doing the same. I spoke more directly, claimed my expertise, and stopped minimizing my presence. What I was teaching cognitively, I was internalizing psychologically. This shift reflects the individualistic orientation commonly associated with U.S. culture, which prioritizes autonomy, voice, and self-expression (Mio et al., 2016; Triandis, 1995). The classroom subtly cultivated what Triandis (1989) calls an idiocentric self-construal—the self as independent and self-defining. Differentiated practices, consistent with Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, further affirmed that each person possesses unique, expressible strengths. Immersed in this environment, I gradually adopted the same logic. By the end of this period, I no longer felt like a Japanese educator merely applying American methods. I had begun to think like an American teacher. Individuality was not just something I encouraged in students—it had become part of how I understood myself.

Concinnation[1]: coming to terms with the plurality of my existence

In the process of developing biculturalism, I came to realize that I had retained two distinct yet intertwined cultural identities. My inquiry moved beyond the simple questions, "Am I Japanese?" or "Am I American?" In my thirties—during what I refer to as Period 2—I began to ask a deeper question: "What does it mean to be Japanese?" To be Japanese, must one necessarily grow up and complete K–12 education in Japan, possess native fluency in the Japanese language, or hold Japanese citizenship? Similarly, I wondered, "What does it mean to be American?" Over time, I have come to understand that identity is a peculiar and multifaceted construct.Now, in what I define as Period 5, I see my identity as encompassing both Japanese and American elements. I can choose to act, behave, and "be" Japanese. I can also choose to act, behave, and "be" American. Depending on the context—geographical, social, or professional—I

[1] According to the Oxford English Dictionary this word is now obsolete. It is only recorded in the mid 1600s. This article adds a new definition to the word as described in the context.

can embody either identity. This fluidity arises from my lived experience of working and functioning in both societies. I am capable of engaging in both languages at a level sufficient to sustain a fulfilling life within each culture. Moreover, I embody a culturally fluid self, with identities that alternately blend or remain distinct depending on the environment (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Huynh, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen, 2018). In these interactions, I fluidly alternated between Japanese and English, often with both conscious and unconscious awareness. This interplay of language and thought—of being and becoming—reflects what I describe as the concinnation of my existence: a harmonious yet dynamic composition of plural selves, continually negotiated and redefined across cultural boundaries. The concept of concinnation requires me to elaborate on two additional orientations: hybrid cultural fluidity and introspective self.

Hybrid cultural fluidity

This section explores how my bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Huynh et al., 2018) is lived in everyday practice, shifting between blendedness and compartmentalization depending on context. At times, my languages merge naturally through *chanpon*, a form of code-switching in which Japanese and English intermingle within the same conversation—"*Genki (How are you)*? *Kyo (today)* what did you do?"—particularly with other multilingual speakers (Nishimura, 1995; Poplack, 1980; Willis, 1992). In professional settings such as conferences, I move fluidly between cultural frames, speaking English with an international researcher and then immediately turning to Japanese with a colleague, an example of frame-switching (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). This integration also shapes my teaching: in my English classes in Chigasaki, I blend Japanese classroom norms with strategies learned in California, incorporating Quickwrites and small affirmations such as "pat yourself on the back" or "hug yourself" to encourage students' confidence and motivation. Even cognitively, the boundaries blur; while speaking one language, a word from the other often surfaces first. These moments of lexical crossover rarely disrupt communication, revealing how both linguistic systems remain simultaneously active. Together, these everyday shifts reflect a culturally fluid self—one that does not move between two separate identities, but lives within both at once.

Introspective self

In my mid-thirties, while pursuing a master's degree in Boston, I experienced a moment that deepened my understanding of concinnation. Immersed in American culture and speaking primarily English, I suddenly wondered, "Can I speak Japanese?" The question was startling—my fluency had never been in doubt—yet it revealed a brief sense of disconnection from my Japanese identity. Perhaps the stress of academic life and cultural immersion had temporarily distanced one part of myself from another. This experience led me to reflect on dissociative identity disorder (DID), in which distinct personality states exist without mutual awareness (Şar, Dorahy, & Krüger, 2017). Although I, too, experience multiple selves—a Japanese self, an American self, and an integrated self (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005)—my identities remain consciously connected rather than dissociated. I am always aware of each mode, and they coexist in dialogue rather than isolation.This awareness suggests the presence of a deeper, observing self that integrates my multiple identities. I wonder whether this integrative function resembles Carl Jung's concept of the *Self*, which encompasses both definite and indefinite qualities and seeks the union of opposites (Stein, 1995), as well as Viktor Frankl's notion of *logos*, the human search for meaning amid the transitory nature of existence (Frankl, 1984). I understand this deeper layer as an inner governor—an introspective self that harmonizes my plural identities. What once felt disorienting has become a source of creative and existential freedom. The introspective self functions as a borderless, culture-transcending core that regulates and connects one's identities. It bridges the individual and the community, enabling the integration of contrasting cultural orientations—such as allocentric and idiocentric perspectives—and the flexible blending of "Japanese-ish" and "American-ish" traits. For me, identity remains an ongoing process, guided by this deeper self that quietly observes, integrates, and shapes who I am becoming.

Definition and interpretation

The neologism concinnation encapsulates an awareness of one's multiplicity and the associative relationships that exist among multiple cultural identities. It denotes the capacity to recognize, integrate, and harmonize these identities into a coherent yet dynamic whole. For the bicultural individual, identity is not bifurcated but integrative—an ongoing negotiation between cultural frames that together constitute an integrated-hybrid self. Each identity functions as both autonomous and relational, contributing to a greater whole that is continually in flux. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, concinnate refers to the "skillful and harmonious adaptation or fitting together of parts; harmony, congruity, consistency." Within the context of the acculturation process, concinnation may be understood as the outcome of *integration* (Berry, 1980; Berry, 1997) or *integrated biculturalism* (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Moreover, it parallels the concept of hybridizing and integrating proposed within the transformative theory of biculturalism (West, Zhang, Yampolsky, & Sasaki, 2017). Thus, concinnation transcends mere coexistence of cultures—it reflects a reflective and agentive act of synthesis. To be bicultural—to attain concinnation—is to inhabit the interstitial space between cultures while recognizing the creative potential of that in-betweenness. The bicultural individual perceives the differences, similarities and the convergences between cultural customs, values, and communicative norms. Given the fungible and fluid nature of consciousness, such an individual can weave elements from each culture into a personalized synthesis of living. As an individual aware of my concinnation, I know I am Japanese. I know I am American. And on the flip side, I can choose not to be Japanese. I can choose not to be American. I can be integrated. And perhaps most quietly but ultimately, I remain an observer or an *introspective self* of my identities.

Concinnation examined from the fifth order of consciousness

The emergence of an individual who realizes concinnation can be interpreted through Robert Kegan's (1994) theory of the *Fifth Order of Consciousness*, which represents a postmodern form of meaning-making characterized by systemic integration and reflexivity. Within this order, individuals are no longer constrained by the need to preserve a single, stable identity; instead, they are capable of perceiving themselves and others as participants in a network of interconnected systems. According to Kegan (1994), individuals operating at the Fifth Order are able to understand and integrate diverse systems—social, cultural, and ideological—as trans-systemic and trans-complex. They engage with others cultures of mind not through an absolutist lens, but by inhabiting the interpretive frameworks that shape others' experiences. As Kegan writes, "Postmodernism suggests a kind of 'conflict resolution' in which the Palestinian discovers her own Israeli-ness, the rich discovers his poverty, the woman discovers the man inside her" (p. 321). This metaphor illustrates the consciousness capable of recognizing the self within the other and the other within the self.

From this standpoint, concinnation—the harmonious blending of distinct elements—emerges as a developmental capacity of the Fifth Order. Only when an individual perceives the intrinsic value and raison d'être of both cultural or ideological systems can they engage in genuine synthesis. Such an individual not only discerns the differences but also appreciates the shared essence between cultural traditions, enabling participation in both without dissonance. In my own life, as an educator navigating bicultural contexts, I often find myself oscillating between differing cultural paradigms—Western epistemologies that prioritize rationality and individualism, and Eastern frameworks that emphasize relationality and interdependence. Early in my teaching career, I experienced tension between these systems. I struggled to reconcile the Western emphasis on measurable outcomes with the Eastern notion of education as a holistic, lifelong cultivation of wisdom. Gradually, through self-reflection and dialogic engagement, I began to perceive these frameworks not as contradictory, but as complementary, integrative and creative. This realization marked a personal movement toward what Kegan might describe as the *Fifth Order of Consciousness*—a capacity to hold multiplicity without fragmentation. To exist in this integrative space requires a radical acceptance of diversity—not merely as tolerance, but as active engagement. The individual who realizes concinnation learns to live harmoniously within complexity, drawing strength from difference rather than seeking its erasure.

Discussion

In this discussion, I reflect upon the broader meanings and implications of biculturalism as experienced through my own educational and professional journey. My reflections are situated within the larger discourse of bicultural identity development and second language acquisition, emphasizing how language, culture, and self-awareness interact to form a dynamic process of human growth. From the perspective of a bicultural educator, I explore the ways in which bilingualism and biculturalism foster not only individual transformation but also mutual understanding and societal harmony.

Becoming through language

When I entered new cultural contexts, language was always the first barrier I encountered, yet I gradually realized it was never merely about vocabulary or fluency. Each new language required me to interpret the world differently—to recalibrate how I understood relationships, authority, politeness, and even the self. What initially felt like a technical task of communication became an epistemological shift: learning to speak also meant learning to make meaning. Freire and Macedo (1987) remind us that language and culture are inseparable—language is culture, and culture is language—and I felt this intimately as my assumptions, reactions, and sense of self shifted alongside my speech.

This transformation was not only personal but also ideological. Agar's concept of *languaculture* clarifies that language and culture form an integrated system of meaning Agar (2006), while Kroskrity (2004) shows how language ideologies shape how identities are constructed and evaluated through everyday talk. In my own life, becoming bilingual and bicultural meant inhabiting multiple subject positions rather than simply translating between codes. Yet the work of adaptation often fell disproportionately on migrants like me, while members of the host society remained unchanged. Over time, I came to see multilingualism not as a compensatory skill demanded of newcomers, but as a shared human responsibility—one that fosters empathy, mutual recognition, and the flexibility needed to live together in an interconnected world.

Bicultural adult development programs

Reflecting on my bicultural trajectory, two interrelated ideas emerge as central to understanding bicultural adult development.

The Five Canons of Bicultural Adult Development. What follows is not intended as a definitive model, but rather as a conceptual framework drawn from lived experience that may warrant further empirical examination. First, biculturalism appears to unfold as a developmental process rather than an accidental byproduct of migration. I tentatively describe this process through five guiding canons. Identity, to begin with, is a choice—specifically, a conscious and ongoing negotiation of affiliation with one's heritage culture, host culture, or both. Belonging to each culture requires psychosocial competence, including language fluency, familiarity with social norms, and the capacity to sustain meaningful relationships. Beyond belonging, one must function within each cultural context through concrete participation—work, service, or community engagement—which solidifies one's legitimacy as a member (Biwa, 2022). Bicultural individuals must also alternate between cultural systems, moving fluidly across settings and behavioral repertoires (Maffini and Wong, 2012). Finally, they must strive for balance, sustaining both identities without allowing one to eclipse the other.

When such equilibrium weakens, biculturalism becomes difficult to maintain. Together, these canons suggest that bicultural competence is cultivated intentionally over time; however, further research is needed to clarify how these dimensions operate across individuals and contexts.

The Bicultural Threshold. Second, I conceptualize what I call the bicultural threshold—a point at which an individual has accumulated sufficient experience, competence, and participation in both cultures to sustain two coherent identities simultaneously. Crossing this threshold does not imply perfect harmony but rather the capacity to integrate multiple cultural frames into a relatively unified sense of self. Without comparable development in both spheres, individuals may default to a primarily monocultural orientation. This notion, too, remains exploratory and would benefit from systematic study, yet it offers a useful heuristic for understanding the uneven pathways of bicultural growth.

My own crossing of this threshold became apparent only in retrospect. In my twenties, I immersed myself fully in Japanese professional and martial arts communities in Tokyo. In my thirties, work in Encinitas and later teaching in a bilingual immersion school in Los Angeles strengthened my American identity and educational values. Returning to Japan in my forties to direct an English program required me once again to inhabit Japanese norms and expectations. Moving repeatedly between these worlds, I gradually recognized that I was no longer adapting temporarily but living competently and authentically in both. Through these accumulated experiences, I came to understand myself not as shifting between identities, but as sustaining two cultural selves at once—a realization that, for me, marked the crossing of the bicultural threshold.

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Yujiro Shimogori: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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There are no competing interests to declare.

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