

Buddhist Tools for Developing Intercultural Communication Competence: The Seven Factors of Awakening

異文化間コミュニケーション能力に役立つ
仏教的思考法：七覚支

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キーワード

[異文化間コミュニケーション能力] intercultural competence

[七覚分（しちかくぶん）七覚支（しちかくし）] seven factors of enlightenment

[七覚意（しちかくい）] mindfulness

I. Introduction: Intercultural Competence and the Awakening Mind

In the past decade there has gradually grown, in the field of intercultural communication, a discourse regarding the importance of “mindfulness” in the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC) (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Burgoon, Berger & Waldron, 2000). However, little has been done in the way of developing applicable working models for cultivating mindfulness and through it greater intercultural competence.

This paper aims to introduce an ancient model—specifically, a model of the awakening mind, or the mind in its most aware, flexible and responsive mode—as a working model for developing intercultural communicative competence. It suggests that the Buddhist model of mind free from bias and confusion called the Seven Factors of Awakening (Pali: satta bojjhanga) presents the building blocks of the adaptability which Kim has referred to as the “metacompetence” at the heart of ICC (1991, p. 268).

Careful examination shows that the “seven factors” of this model correlate with or underlie a broad range of factors designated by scholars as key elements in the development of intercultural competence. At the same time, as a model which was designed to be applied in the course of

everyday life, it is concise enough to be a practical guide to the cultivation of mindfulness generally and intercultural competence in particular.

II. The Seven Factors of Awakening

The Seven Factors of Awakening is a description of the mind free from attachment, unfettered, unbiased. The model was developed approximately 2,500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, also known as Shakyamuni, the sage of the Shakya clan. It is recorded in numerous sutras, such as The Sutra on the Foundations of Mindfulness (MN 42), The Sutra on the Mindfulness of Breathing (MN 118), and The Connected Discourses on the Factors of Enlightenment (SN 46).

The seven factors, briefly, are 1) mindfulness, 2) investigation, 3) energy, or effort 4) joy, 5) calm, 6) concentration, and 7) equanimity. It will perhaps be useful to describe the factors and their relationship to each other in more detail before proceeding to the application of the model to the intercultural field.

First, the Pali term for “factor of awakening” or “factor of enlightenment,” is *bojjhanga*, composed of the words *bodhi* and *anga*. *Bodhi* has traditionally been translated as enlightenment, and been used to refer to a state or a person. Recently however, a number of practitioner/translators have tended to use the terms *awakening*, or *enlightening*, in order to catch the sense of moment-to-moment awareness, or mindfulness, implicit in the term. A second meaning of *bodhi* is knowledge which sees the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths: the truth of universal suffering or unsatisfactoriness, the cause of suffering, the fact that there is a way to put an end to suffering, and finally, the path to liberation from suffering. *Anga* can mean a causative factor, or a part or portion. Thus, there are two different ways to interpret *Bojjhanga*. The first is the factors causing a person to become enlightened or causing awakening. A second interpretation is the knowledge which sees a part, or aspect, of the Four Noble Truths: (Pandita, p. 97).

The first of the seven factors, which can be considered a kind of fulcrum balancing the other factors is *mindfulness*, or awareness (pali: *sati*). It is an activity, a subtle process of impartial watchfulness, or non-judgemental observation; a bright, clean alertness (Gunaratana 43, 149-150). The term *mindfulness* can often have very passive implications in English. In order to clarify the flavor of the term *sati*, which he also translates as “observing power,” the Burmese meditation Master U Pandita says it must be “dynamic and confrontative”, a penetrating awareness, which “should leap forward onto the object, covering it completely and penetrating into it” (p. 99). The main cause of mindfulness is mindfulness itself, in other words, the intention to be more aware, and “careful attention” (Bodhi, 2000, p. 1581). Reflection on the teachings is also said to be a cause of mindfulness.

The second factor is investigation. The Pali term is *dhmma vicaya*, intuitive discerning insight that distinguishes the characteristics of phenomena (*dhmma*, see Nyanatiloka, p. 41). *Vicaya* is a synonym for insight. Real investigation always turns up something, so “investigation and insight coincide” (U Pandita, p. 104). “The manifestation of investigation is the dissipation of confusion” (105). Investigation follows upon mindfulness, as a natural inquiry into the physical and mental phenomena presented by mindfulness. In the words of the Buddha, “mindful, he investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it” (Bodhi, 1995, p. 946). Although the term “investigation” is generally used to translate *vicaya*, the underlying spirit would also be reflected in such terms as “inquiry,” “interest,” and even “curiosity,” though the implication of *sustained* interest or investigation is not always suggested by the “curiosity.”

This in turn leads to “tireless energy” (Bodhi, 1995, p. 947). This third factor is *virīya* – energy, or effort. It includes the persistent effort to keep the mind directed toward the object of observation. Courageous effort to see something through to the end. Patience and acceptance of physical conditions and mental dissatisfaction. (U Pandita, p. 110). It is also the energy that naturally arises out of one’s absorbed investigation. The wise attention of the investigation factor is said to be the cause of energy.

This energy/effort, in turn leads to the fourth factor, joy, or rapture (Pali: *pīti*). This is a mental state possessing happiness, delight and satisfaction, with associated sensations of lightness, energy and agility in the body. Various stages or levels of joy are described in the texts.

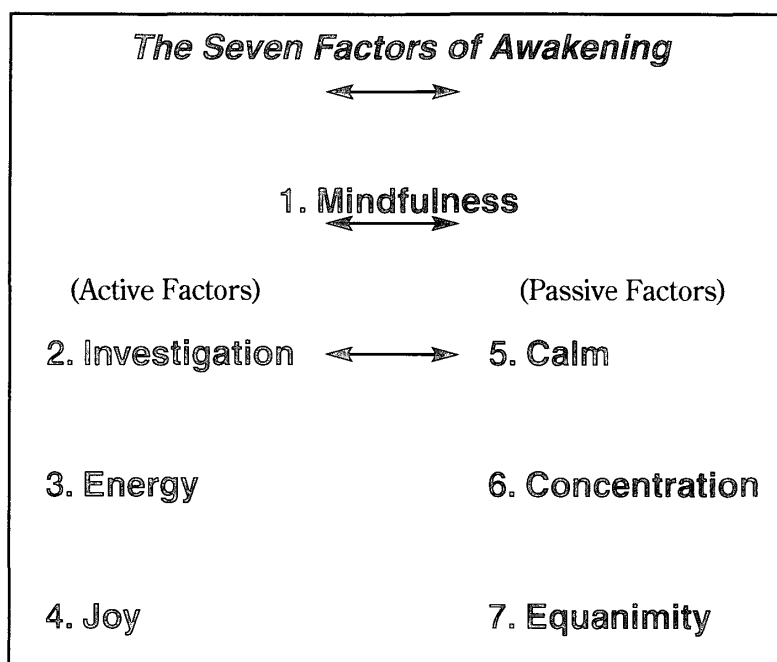
Then, “in one who is rapturous, the body and mind become tranquil” (Bodhi, 1995, p. 947). This fifth factor, calm, or tranquility (Pali: *passadhi*, literally, “cool calmness”), functions to extract the heat of the mind which arises due to restlessness, dissipation or remorse and thus calms the mind and body. Tranquility is aroused by wise attention directed toward activating wholesome thoughts and states (U Pandita, pp. 146-148).

“In one whose body is tranquil and who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated” (Bodhi, 1995, p. 947). This concentration, or absorption (Pali: *Samādhi*), is the sixth factor. It is the factor of mind which penetrates into the object of concentration and stays there. Its function is to collect the mind together, relieving one from dissipation and scatteredness (U Pandita, p. 152). Concentration permits wisdom to arise, opening up various types of insight, such as insight into impermanence, the nature of mind and matter, and the cause-and-effect relationship between them (153).

The seventh factor, *upekkhā*, or equanimity, “refers to the balancing of energy”, “the state of mind which inclines neither toward one extreme or the other” (p. 157). A balance is found between concentration and energy, and mindfulness becomes an effortless flow. Its

characteristic is the balancing of corresponding mental states so that one does not overwhelm the other. Its function is to fill in where there is a lack and to reduce where there is excess. Continuous mindfulness causes equanimity (U Pandita, p. 160).

This balancing between states can also be seen among the seven factors of awakening (see chart). Mindfulness can be seen as the fulcrum or balance, while the other six factors can be divided into active and passive. It is possible that the investigation, or interest, factor, can lead to overexcitement, causing one to lose one's calm. On the other hand, one can fall into an overly quiescent state which lacks the investigation/interest factor and contributes little to clear understanding. Likewise, the arousal of energy can sometimes overwhelm concentration and tend toward scattered mind states, or too narrow a focus can sometimes lead to a loss of energy. Similarly, if equanimity is lost an overjoyed state is not helpful for developing clarity, balance, or effective functioning. On the other hand, if one tries to enforce a state of equanimity upon the mind, the natural joyousness of experience can be lost.



III. The Seven Factors of Awakening and Intercultural Competence

Having laid out the basic principles of the Seven Factors of Awakening model, we can now proceed to examine the relationship between the seven factors and intercultural competence. The issue of how to define intercultural competence and what comprises it has been debated for decades in the field of intercultural communication. In this article, I will primarily analyze

intercultural communication competence in terms of two influential models. However, I would like to refer to Wiseman's recent survey of the state of studies on ICC. He depicts a growing consensus that intercultural communication competence "involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures" (2002, p. 208). As there are a vast number of approaches to analyzing intercultural competence, it would be impractical and redundant to try to survey them all. The point of this paper can be made with reference to a limited number of models of ICC. In this study I examine two very different approaches – Brent Ruben's early model which was influential in much later thinking on ICC, and Young Yun Kim's system theory based approach.

According to "Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Communication Effectiveness " (Ruben, 1987), originally published in 1977, "seven dimensions of importance to intercultural competence can be identified" (p. 40). Below I will take these up one by one and correlate them with awakening factors, examining how the factors can be seen as underlying the skills and capacities Ruben specifies.

1. *The capacity to be flexible.* Flexibility is the opposite of holding fixed views. It requires inquiry, or investigation not only into the other person's views, but into one's own as well. Equanimity is also a key factor in maintaining flexibility. If one is attached to a certain outcome, obviously this will impact the ability to be flexible. Ruben describes this dimension in terms of a balance between task-related orientation (requiring effort and concentration) on the one hand, and relational/process orientation (requiring joy, calm, and equanimity) on the other. Flexibility is also conceived as the capacity to refrain from self-oriented behaviors, for which interest (in others), joy, and equanimity would seemingly be good antidotes.
2. *The capacity to be nonjudgmental* (maintaining a non-evaluative posture while fully hearing the other's message). Again here, the key point would seem to be equanimity. Without it, any nonjudgmental stance would merely be posturing. Ruben comments on this capacity, writing, "People like to feel that what they say is not being judged by someone else before they have had an opportunity to explain themselves fully" (p. 41). The contribution of the interest/investigation and calm factors to this capacity should also be readily apparent.
3. *Tolerance for ambiguity.* The same three factors as above would seem to underlie this ability as well. Ruben describes this dimension in terms of "the ability to react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort" and also, "the ability to quickly adjust to those around them" (p. 42). Calm, equanimity and an investigating mind would seem to provide the tools needed for this task.
4. *The capacity to communicate respect.* Here self-esteem is emphasized. Lack of self-esteem is based on the feeling that "I'm unimportant." Showing interest in someone gives precisely the

opposite message. However, in some cultures where individuality is deemphasized, one needs to be careful of showing too much attention to an individual. Therefore mindfulness and equanimity are also necessary for appropriate application of this dimension. Ruben suggests the display of sincere interest in others through “eye contact, smiles and words of encouragement” (p. 42), which will require sufficient presence of the energy and joy factors.

5. *Personalizing one's knowledge and perceptions.* This dimension would be certainly require the factors of investigation and concentration, and probably cannot be accomplished in any consistent manner without a healthy dose of equanimity. In particular, the investigation into one's own body and mind would be important for developing this dimension. It is relevant here that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (awareness of body, feelings, mental states and mental objects) is said to underlie the development of the Seven Factors of Awakening.
6. *The capacity to display empathy.* If we understand the equanimity factor as an open, non-judgmental state, then, coupled with the second factor, interest, it would certainly incline one toward empathy. In fact, the Buddhist teaching called the Four Divine Abodes declares that in the heart freed from confusion, empathetic joy naturally arises, along with loving kindness, compassion and equanimity.
7. *The capacity for turn taking.* Perhaps this dimension of the model is a bit too narrow to truly be considered a category of ICC, but I believe that fundamentally Ruben is pointing toward a balance between the needs of oneself and others to contribute to a discussion, project, etc. Of course the equanimity factor is definitive of balancing. Also, the first two factors, mindfulness, or attention, and an interested and inquiring mind, should incline one to facilitate culturally appropriate opportunities for each person to contribute their views and feelings in a given situation. In many situations this could take the form of turn taking.

As shown above, the seven factors of awakening comprise or underlie the various dimensions of Ruben's model. Next I would like to take up Young Yun Kim's model of ICC. Kim's model in many ways is already consistent with the approach of this paper. The Buddhist conceptual framework underlying the Seven Factors of Awakening model could be characterized as a systems theory. The Buddhist theory of dependent origination (Pali: *paticca samuppāda*) recognizes the interconnected, interdependent existence of all things. Any existent depends on the conditioned factors that comprise it. If the factors change and dissolve, the thing itself is transformed into something else. One classical statement of the principal, found in the Majjhima Nikāya, 115.11, is as follows: “When this exist, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases” (Bodhi, 1995, 927).

Wiseman (2002, pp. 212-213, paraphrasing Monge, 1977) states, “The central contribution of

systems theory is the notion that communication process is an integrated system consisting of interdependent units working together to adapt to a changing environment.” Kim, in using a systems approach to ICC, “seeks to ground the concept in its most basic and general level,” and to establish a domain (or content) free meta-theory or perspective as a basis for domain-specific theories (1991, p. 261). This seems also to describe well the Buddha's attempt to depict the universal principles of mind and matter, of which, to the observant mind, all specific events could be seen as illustrations. The application of the Buddhist model to the field of Intercultural Communication has been discussed in more detail in other places, but for the purposes of this paper these few comments should suffice.

Consistent with Kim's attempt to establish a basic and generally applicable model, she separates the idea of ICC from particular communication outcomes, and “emphasizes that ICC should be located *within* a person as his or her overall capacity or capability to facilitate the communication process between people of differing cultural backgrounds and to contribute to successful interaction outcomes” (p. 263). She then proceeds to establish three “key challenges that individuals must manage in all intercultural encounters in varying degrees: namely, cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying stress” (p. 265).

The first challenge, cultural difference/unfamiliarity, would include difficulties in recognition of verbal and nonverbal codes and behaviors, and interpretation of underlying assumptions. The second challenge, intergroup posture, is a function of the differences in social identity formation in differing societies. The difficulty of overcoming the distance between these differing psychological postures causes interactants to see themselves and each other through the lens of intergroup membership, with its attendant tendencies toward in-group loyalty and out-group discrimination (p. 266).

These first two challenges lead to stress experiences, which are “inherent in the very nature of the intercultural communication context because stress is a generic process of a human system, which is experienced whenever the capabilities of the system are not adequately equipped to manage the demands of an environment” (p. 267).

Kim refers to the ability to deal with these challenges as “*adaptability* – the ability of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment” (p. 268). Depicting this adaptability as the “metacompetence” central to ICC, she breaks it down into cognitive, affective, and operational (behavioral) dimensions.

The cognitive dimension of adaptability is the “‘sense-making’ activities for ascertaining the various verbal and nonverbal codes one receives” (p.269). In terms of intercultural encounters, Kim identifies the following psychological concepts as corresponding in meaning to adaptability:

cognitive simplicity/complexity, narrow/broad category width, cognitive rigidity/flexibility and perspective taking. In terms of awakening factors, mindfulness/attention combined with investigation/inquiry, would seem to address all of these psychological concepts directly. Inquiry is the very basis of cognitive complexity in that it examines categories in order to make further distinctions and clarify meanings. It also has the power to discriminate common characteristics as well as differences, leading to broader category width. The attitude of inquiry is also the heart of flexibility, as rigidity is a result of the failure, or refusal, to inquire into and examine one's own positions and those of others. As well, the skill of "perspective taking" comes out of the attitude of interest, the spirit of inquiry into to attitudes and feelings of others. As stated before attention (mindfulness) and equanimity are obvious supporting factors.

The affective dimension of Kim's model is defined in terms of emotional and aesthetic tendencies of an individual's internal system," "motivational and attitudinal predisposition," and in particular, "readiness to accommodate intercultural challenges." Related concepts include "adaptive motivation," "affirmative self/other attitude," "ambiguity tolerance," "empathy," and "empathic motivation." Negative correspondences include, "group anxiety," "ethnocentrism," and "prejudice." (P. 269).

As explained earlier, the framework for the Seven Factors model is a vision of universal interdependence expressed in Buddhism as "dependent origination". This model is precisely aimed at overcoming fixation in an ever-changing world, and its attendant suffering. It is a fundamental posture of willingness to accommodate whatever arises, a posture of adaptive motivation. Interest, energy, joy and equanimity are certainly the key elements of an affirmative self/other attitude. In the same way the attitude of genuine interest in others is the opposite of intolerance. Coupled with joy and equanimity, it turns the uneasiness and resistance toward ambiguity into exploration, learning, and even adventure.

As for empathy and empathic motivation, we should return to the term *bojjhanga*. Its basic meaning points to a knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path which includes *sammā sankapa*, right, or total, intention. Central to *sammā sankapa* is the Four Divine Abodes, which as explained above, includes empathetic joy. One feels joy at the contentment and accomplishments of others. One is happy that others are happy. When one is with other people, one examines whether the factors of interest and joy are present in relation to them. It is difficult to overcome self-concern and cultivate real interest in and empathy toward others without a good measure of equanimity.

Regarding the negative elements of the affective dimension, group anxiety arises in part out of a lack of information regarding the other group. An attitude of investigation/interest can go a long way toward dissolving projection and mistrust. However, there is usually an aspect of purely subjective attitudinal tendencies involved in intergroup anxiety as well. The ability to calm the

body and mind is also a major factor in relieving anxiety of all types. Prejudice and ethnocentrism are also built on selective perception and active ignoring of information. Joyful and energetic inquiry, with fears calmed, when coupled with equanimity, will surely dissolve the bases of these barriers to communication.

The operational, or behavioral, dimension refers to a person's abilities to be flexible and resourceful in actually carrying out what he or she is capable of in the cognitive dimension" (pp. 269-270). The basis for the operational dimension is found in the cognitive and affective dimensions, and this paper has suggested that the seven factors are the comprise the mindset underlying those dimensions. Thus, it would be redundant to analyze the operational dimension in detail.

IV. Putting the Seven Factors to Work

The idea that the mental aspects underlie the behavioral aspects is consistent with the spirit and underlying theory of the Seven Factors model. The famous first verse of the Dhammapada says, "All states have mind as their forerunner, mind is their chief, and they are mind-made" (Rahula, 1974, p. 125). This teaching on the Seven Factors is a tool intended to help us observe the subtle dimensions of the way in which our intention shapes our world.

The application of the Seven Factors model is in checking the mind state to see if all the factors are present and balanced. As a rule, people have strong tendencies to be stronger or weaker in particular factors, and the model can remind them to pay attention to nurture the weak links in the midst of daily activity, as well as in periods of review and quiet reflection. The observation of the factors makes it clear to us when the mind is manifesting in other less wholesome ways. This gives us a chance to reinforce positive awareness and stop feeding unconscious, unwholesome patterns on a very basic level. If one has such an intention, this can lead to the fundamental restructuring of our intrapersonal, interpersonal and intercultural communicative tendencies.

V. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the model of the mind found in the Buddhist teaching of The Seven Factors of Awakening has the capacity to function as an extremely useful tool for the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC). In doing so it has made several points:

1. It has argued that the seven factors comprise or underlie the fundamental skills and capabilities that researchers have proposed as dimensions of intercultural competency, including the "metacompetence" of adaptability.

2. It has demonstrated a range of factors in common with the systems-based approach to intercultural competence as delineated by Young Yun Kim. The ability to view things within a broad vision of interdependence is, I believe, integral to the process of developing adaptability.
3. Though this paper has not directly addressed the issue of culture specific knowledge, which is certainly necessary for ICC, it suggests that the seven factors represent a mind state motivated to and capable of learning such knowledge.
4. It has suggested that, after decades of refining our theoretical understanding of ICC, there is a need for practical tools that can be used by interculturalists and others interested in developing deeper levels of communication competence. The Seven Factors model is both concise and complete enough to serve as such a tool, or as a model for the development of other tools.
5. It attempts to define and refine the concept of “mindfulness,” as well as advance it’s application. It is hoped that, in this way, it can make a meaningful contribution to the discourse on “mindfulness” which has become a locus of creative and constructive discourse in the intercultural field, as well as to the practical development of intercultural competence.

Abbreviations

MN Majjhima Nikaya

SN Samyutta Nikaya

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