The Impact of Cultures on International Business :
An Analysis of Cultural Contact
in the Japanese Inbound Tourism Business

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Indicative Abstract

With an increasing number of people travelling the world, Japan attracts many inbound tourists. With the Japanese government taking the lead in promoting tourism as is evident in its international campaign regarding Japanese cuisine, recent trends in tourist activities in Japan show a shift from shopping to what Chen and Rahman (2018) define as cultural contact, in which tourists engage with the local Japanese people in sharing cultural experiences unique to Japan. Many believe that it is crucial to let the world know the value of Japanese culture by preserving it and advertising it as it is effectively.

Although inbound tourism is now perceived as one of the most attractive sectors in the Japanese economy, it has begun to exhibit problems, too. Some researchers point to the shortage of infrastructure for accommodating tourist needs and demands, but others have concerns about the cultural conflicts occurring between the tourists and the locals/hosts ; due to the surge in inbound tourism, the local Japanese are now facing the need to change their ways of living or bend their cultural norms. This cultural conflict is sometimes called 'tourism pollution'.

However, is this depiction of inbound tourists as intruding outsiders threatening the peace of Japan's local communities valid? Is the coercive imposition of Japanese cultural norms on overseas guests the only possible way in Japanese inbound tourism? To answer these questions, this research takes an interpretivist as well as phenomenological approach, and collects data from four professional promulgators of Japanese culture who serve and entertain overseas guests on a daily basis. Their views on the cultural contact in Japanese inbound tourism are collected in the form of words and utterances, and the collected data are qualitatively analysed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis with minor modification, so that several themes emerge from the data. The results show that they perceive bigotry as the biggest obstacle to successful cultural contact, but other factors such as cultural awareness, defined customer service, host attributes, and mutual open-mindedness between the host and the guest can effectively counteract bigotry.

Introduction

The number of people travelling the world has shown a steady growth for the past 20 years, as is evident from the growing number of departures (World Bank, 2018). Japan is no exception to this trend ; the number of tourists that visited Japan from overseas (hereinafter 'inbound tourists') hit a record high in 2017 (Japan Tourism Agency, 2018). For many inbound tourists, enjoying Japanese cuisine is at the top of their list of things to do (Hagimura, 2017). The popularity of Japanese cuisine is partly due to the Japanese government's commitment to using Japanese cuisine as a competitive tool to attract people around the world, as can be confirmed in a document dated as early as 2005, in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that it is critical to let the world know about the proper knowledge and techniques regarding Japanese cuisine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Japan, 2005).

Backing up such a move, the Japanese government succeeded in registering *Washoku,* the traditional dietary culture of the Japanese, as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013. The purpose of registering intangible cultures as UNESCO's World Heritage is, as defined in their own manifest, to protect and preserve cultural heritages unique and local to certain areas on this planet (UNESCO, 2013). On the occasion of the registration, the then and current Prime Minister of Japan, Mr Shinzo Abe, made the comment, 'I would like to hand down Japanese cuisine to future generations' and 'to let the world discover *Washoku*' (Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, 2013). As is evident in a series of governmental documents, the focus of policymakers seems to be on safeguarding Japanese cuisine and promote awareness of its value all over the world. However, service providers, hosts, and the people on the street in Japan do not seem to share the same view. As typically seen in the rapidly growing needs of Muslim tourists for Halal food in Japan (Sugiyama, 2017), the Japanese receiving and entertaining inbound tourists are facing the need to make changes and innovations to traditional Japanese cuisine to meet fundamentally different hygienic standards and religious protocols. While the government's policies simply assume that Japanese cuisine is acceptable to and even favoured by inbound tourists as it is, the practitioners are forced to take a more flexible and practical approach to sell Japanese cuisine as an attractive product.

In addition to the food issue, a recent news item in Kyoto drew wide attention. According

to Kyoto City Bus, one of the most convenient forms of public transportation available in Kyoto but completely packed and often delayed on account of cherry-blossom viewers in the spring, they will reverse the traditional passenger-loading system that they have preserved for years to let the passengers get on from the front-side door and pay the fare immediately, to reduce the boarding and alighting time (Nikkei, 2018). Although this may seem a trivial system change, the public transportation service providers in Kyoto and other Western Japan areas have sustained the system of loading passengers from the rear-side door and letting them pay at the front-door drop-off for years. Therefore, the reversal of the bus passenger loading system in Kyoto was received with surprise by the public and became a news item. In the eyes of Kyoto citizens, this was another example of the local Japanese having to choose－or being forced－to change their way of life to better deal with the increasing number of inbound tourists.

Even worse, the surging numbers of inbound tourists in major sightseeing spots in Japan have begun to be perceived negatively. Reporting on the measures that local Japanese must take to meet with the needs and demands of the ever-increasing inbound tourists, Kiso (2017) argues that inbound tourists are becoming a cost factor rather than a revenue resource to Japan's local economies, or, more bluntly put, troublemakers causing *Kanko-kogai* or 'tourism pollution' to the local people living there. In his depiction, the inbound tourists seem to be intruding outsiders that invade the peaceful territory of the local people, ignore the local rules and manners, and bring in only troubles, unless they make purchases of goods and services that surpass the chaos that they leave.

Given these situations, I had several fundamental questions in my mind： Why are some, if not all, local Japanese suffering from the surge in inbound tourism, which was supposed to bring in benefits? What are the locals supposed to do to meet the needs of the inbound tourists visiting Japan peacefully? Can the local Japanese preserve their own ways of doing things while facing tourist crowds? Will the inbound tourists be happy if they are told to swallow the Japanese cultural norms imposed by the locals, or will the locals have to transform a part, if not all, of what they do to make inbound tourists happy? Are the locals' perception of inbound tourists as intruders valid in the first place? How can both the locals and the tourists be made happy? This is where the initial idea of this research was born. To refine this idea and frame clearer research aims and questions, relevant literature will be reviewed in the following section.

Literature Review

Current Issues Perceived in Japanese Inbound Tourism

Increasing the number of inbound tourists visiting Japan has been on the top of the Japanese government's agenda for the past decade. Reflecting the government's commitment, the recent increase in the number of inbound tourists is outstanding. Nowadays, it is not at all unusual to see overseas tourists on the street of Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto (Japan Tourism Agency, 2018). Among the influential literature available on this subject, Andonian, Kuwabara, Yamakawa, and Ishida (2016) address three problems about inbound tourism in Japan： 1) visitor-portfolio imbalance as observed in the overwhelming proportion of Asian tourists compared with those from other parts of the world, 2) skewed regional distribution of benefits that inbound tourism brings between the most popular urban areas－Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto－and other parts of Japan, and 3) capacity constraints in hotels and airports that hardly match the current tourist demands. They also point out that the Japanese inbound tourism stakeholders are unaware of major tourist assets existing outside the popular urban areas that could appeal to non-Asian tourists, and therefore those assets are underused. Andonian et al. (2016) thus address macro- and infrastructure-level problems of Japanese inbound tourism well, but issues and challenges at lower levels seem to be outside their focus.

Miyajima (2017) criticises the Japanese government's unfocused policy about the inbound tourism business that only promotes the vaguely defined *Omotenashi* or Japan's unique hospitality culture, and expresses concerns about the shortage of well-qualified interpreter-guides (Licenced Guides) in a variety of languages including not only English but also Chinese, Korean, or Spanish throughout Japan, and also the lack of high-standard guidebooks published in Japan, equivalent in the quality to France's Michelin Guide. He believes that Japan's *Omotenashi,* currently supported by 'well-meaning locals with limited English volunteering to help foreign visitors', would be enhanced if it were turned into profitable inbound tourism by qualified professionals with specific expertise and high-quality guidebooks (Miyajima, 2017). His suggestions are addressed to somewhat more micro-, individual level issues, but his attention does not go beyond that.

Cultural Contact and Memorable Tourist Experience

In contrast to the awareness of macro-level issues discussed above, some researchers and practitioners pay attention to the changes in the contents of inbound tourism in Japan. Aizawa

(2017) points out the recent surge in the number of repeat visitors and individual travellers in Japan and argues that the focus of the inbound tourists is shifting from shopping to cultural experiences. A similar argument can be found in Hagimura (2017), as she emphasises that the repeat tourists are more interested in the cultural experiences available only in Japan. Aizawa (2017) also claims that the repeat, individual inbound tourists have begun to visit places other than Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto, and the inbound tourist businesses in those places are now obliged to change their traditional systems such as cash-only payment or non-Internet-compliant booking system in order to meet the inbound tourists' needs.

The importance of culture in the overall travel experience can be confirmed not only in Japan but also in a more global context. Based on a survey conducted on 320 American tourists, 18 years or older, who visited one or more cultural attractions in the last five years, Chen and Rahman (2018) conclude that favourable cultural contact by visitors with local hosts will lead to memorable tourist experiences and reinforce their intentions to revisit a destination as well as to recommend the place to others.

To develop their theory, Chen and Rahman (2018) first pay attention to the cultural tourist. Although the definition of the cultural tourist is not clearly presented in their research, cultural tourists generally prefer 'novelty, beauty, authenticity, and uniqueness of the cultural product' and want to 'gain knowledge, learn new things, and experience the diversity and atmosphere of the cultural product' of the destination (Chen & Rahman, 2018) (p. 160). Moreover, those tourists are likely to exercise influence on their families, close friends, or acquaintances as to the choice of tourist destination by the power of word-of-mouth (Chen & Rahman, 2018). It is therefore important for tourist destinations to satisfy the tourists and let them leave with good memories, which in turn has an impact on future behaviours, according to Chen and Rahman (2018). In the travel destinations, cultural tourists often engage with the local people through cultural experiences, which results in a cultural contact between the tourists/guests and the local hosts.

Cultural contact, a key variable in Chen and Rahman's (2018) research above, can be defined in various ways. Schortman and Urban (2015) define it as 'protracted, direct interchanges among members of social units who do not share the same identity'. In that light, the encounters of inbound tourists with local Japanese hosts are a type of cultural contact. Although cultural contact is a basic element of human life (Gosden, 2004), it has begun to draw attention as a new emerging concept in the tourism literature, as it can allegedly measure the purpose and depth of experience of tourists travelling in different cultures, as argued by Gnoth and Zins (2013).

The memorable tourism experience (hereinafter 'MTE'), Chen and Rahman's other key variable, can be defined as 'a tourism experience remembered and recalled after the event has occurred', according to Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012) (p. 13). Chen and Rahman (2018) argue that a successful cultural contact by the host and the guest who belong to different social/cultural units positively relates to the genesis of MTE, which in turn reinforces the travellers' loyalty to a certain destination in terms of revisiting and recommendation. In their study, the cultural contact is regarded as a trigger that leads to the cultural tourists' influence on other people's choice of travel destinations.

Cultural Conflict Rather Than Cultural Contact? The Reality in Japan

In today's Japanese contexts, does cultural contact lead to reinforcing MTEs? Among the few researchers addressing the cultural issues between inbound tourists and Japanese hosts, Tsuboya (2017) presents a horrifying picture ; she argues that the Japanese take pride in their own hospitality culture, but at the same time they may, sometimes even violently, try to clear off tourists if they believe that the tourists have habits or cultures different from their own or if they feel that the tourists were invading their life territory in crowds, simply because of the tourists' apparent lack of manners or the hosts' xenophobia towards the tourists. Although the Japanese hosts' defensive attitudes towards the tourists that do not conform to the local manners are understandable to some degree, and there are a number of Japanese hosts adapting to the newer needs and demands of inbound tourists as suggested by Aizawa (2017), Tsuboya's argument is still shocking because she acutely points out the possibility of hostility, even in the form of violence, between the tourists and the local people who host them. She also accuses the Japanese ethnocentric 'hospitality', which has potential hostility deep inside, as being one-sidedly obtrusive or self-complacent.

How can the Japanese hosts' culturally defensive－and even hostile－attitude towards the tourists be positioned? From a perspective of foreign-language education, Hashimoto (2000) argues that the internationalisation effort highlighted by the Japanese government tends to involve an element of further 'Japanisation' with a strong emphasis on the Japanese national and cultural identities. Phan (2013) points out, also from an educational perspective, that internationalisation in Japan shows a nationalistic aspect, with which the Japanese has resisted the overwhelming influence of the Western countries since the late 19th century. Kirkpatrick's (2017) argument is also in line with that of Hashimoto (2000) and Phan (2013), and he emphasises that the Japanese seem to believe that they can let the world know the Japanese values if they manage to translate them into English. These arguments indicate that the more

internationalised the Japanese try to be, the more defensive they may become towards the rest of the world.

If so, how can the hostile part of the Japanese hospitality towards inbound tourists be explained? Mishra and Shafak (2014) depict the mentality to believe that 'we' are unconditionally better than 'them' as nationalism. Nationalism, in their view, arises from the fear of the other, and forces people to dichotomously choose either one culture or the other, typically manifested in the saying : 'Love it, or leave it'. The Japanese hosts' ethnocentric hospitality that Tsuboya (2017) depicts above seems to resemble the nationalism defined by Mishra and Shafak (2014), because the ethnocentric hosts assume that the Japanese way is unconditionally superior to that of the inbound tourists, and they blame the inbound tourists for not following or respecting their rules, whatever the reasons may be. If Tsuboya's (2017) observations and the arguments by Hashimoto (2000), Phan (2013), and Kirkpatrick (2017) are accurate, then at least a part of Japanese inbound tourism, if not all, are now in a vicious circle to reinforce the negative impact of cultural contact on the guests' memory.

However, is every cultural contact in Japanese inbound tourism governed by an ethnocentric or nationalistic hospitality? Yamazaki (2016), a business person and *Chanoyu* or traditional tea ceremony master with rich experience in communicating Japanese culture to a non-Japanese audience, presents an intriguing argument in this matter. In his essay on promoting the Japanese culture throughout the world, he insists on enforcing or even imposing Japanese cultural norms on anyone regardless of nationalities. It is understandable why he makes such an argument because he is a *Chanoyu* or tea ceremony master himself, and as a teacher he must preserve the traditional teaching of *Chanoyu* in every possible way. What is interesting, however, is that despite his claim of the need to impose Japanese cultural norms, he also acknowledges the necessity to modify or relax the rigidly Japanese approach, at least temporarily, when teaching the way of tea to people from different cultures. That is because, according to Yamazaki himself, the Japanese *Chanoyu* has its own problems and needs improvement if it tries to modernise or internationalise itself, as typically seen in *Seiza* or the straight sitting style that forces the tea ceremony guests to sit on their knees during the *Chanoyu* ceremony, which causes problems to both the Japanese and inbound tourists and makes *Chanoyu* unpopular in today's modernised lifestyle. He also warns that *Chanoyu* masters should be humble about the Japanese tradition when meeting with people from overseas, because there are cultural traditions in other parts of the world that are older than the few-hundred-year- or at most one-thousand-year-old Japanese ones. All in all, his attitude towards Japanese culture is rather ambivalent, embracing both coercive, enforcing approaches

and adaptive, accommodating attitudes towards his non-Japanese audience. Which approach is more appropriate is still unclear in his essay.

In a sense, today's inbound tourism in Japan is becoming a platform where Japanese locals encounter, communicate, and sometimes even conflict with people from completely different cultures. Led by the Japanese government's initiatives, more and more tourists are coming to Japan. The government's focus is on the macro-level policies, and the issues about cultural contact, despite its significant impact on the overall travel experience, are neglected or at least overlooked by the government and policy-makers but left in the hands of a people on the street or other professionals who host these tourists every day. If the issues about the cultural contact occurring between the host and the guest remain overlooked or unaddressed, the dark side of Japanese inbound tourism may expand so the negative outcomes surpass the potential benefits that it could generate.

Research Design

Research Questions and Aims

Given all these, I set my research aims and questions as follows.

- Japanese policymakers' and influencers' emphasis on increasing the number of inbound tourists may be neglecting issues regarding cultural contact that might occur between the tourists/guests and the local people/hosts.
- What issues or challenges are the professional promulgators of Japanese culture facing when serving and entertaining inbound tourists?
- How are those problems being solved in practice?

Epistemological Basis

For this research, the hosts' experiences in and interpretations of intercultural communication with the guests will be a starting point. Epistemologically, therefore, this research takes an interpretivist approach, with which I explore the hosts' 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of' intercultural encounters with the visiting guests, as suggested by Gray (2014). Moreover, this research is phenomenological. Phenomenology presumes that social reality should be understood with people's experiences of that social reality as a basis (Gray, 2014). With a phenomenological approach to the aims and questions specified above, I as the researcher should lay aside my own understanding of the phenomenon, but must revisit the hosts' experiences so that new meanings emerge from the

phenomenon, as Gray (2014) suggests. This approach suits not only the interpretivist epistemology but also how I would like to depict the intercultural communication between the hosts and the guests. Further, the new meanings that arise from the hosts' experiences will be the major knowledge that this research generates.

Methods

Since the nature of this research is interpretivist/phenomenological, and the time available for this research was rather limited, I decided to make this project a practitioner research with a well-defined scope. For this purpose, I also decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with the people who have rich experience in hosting inbound tourists and communicating with a non-Japanese audience. I chose three *Chanoyu* masters and an intercultural coordinator practicing in Kansai or Tokyo, because they are likely to be torn between the conflicting demands of the specific Japanese cultural norms and those of people from different cultures. The language to be used in the interview is either Japanese or English or both, depending on the interviewee's preferences.

All the interviews were completed between 45 and 60 minutes, with some preset questions accompanied with ad hoc, in-depth questions. All the interviews were either recorded or videotaped, depending on the availability of recording devices at the time of the interview. The preset questions include :

- Have you encountered inbound tourists or non-Japanese guests who refuse to follow your instructions because of cultural or religious reasons?
- If so, what did you do?
- Why did you choose to do so?

Collected data were interpreted qualitatively in a thematic analysis method, a common analytical approach in qualitative research, often employed by psychologists. This method is useful to extract some patterns and therefore important themes from the collected remarks or texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Generally speaking, thematic analysis will be conducted in six phases as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). However, to reflect the size of this research project and the collected data, I simplified their six-staged procedure and instead set five stages to identify important themes and to answer my research questions (See Figure 1 : Thematic analysis steps for this research). Despite the simplification, the new five-staged process does not omit any important process included in the original one. For this particular project, I conducted four interviews, and summarise the remarks made in the interviews into 109 sentences, to each of which I tagged a single code or two. I repeated the coding process

twice to refine and integrate codes, and finally identified important themes apparent in the

**Figure 1 : Thematic Analysis Steps for This Research**
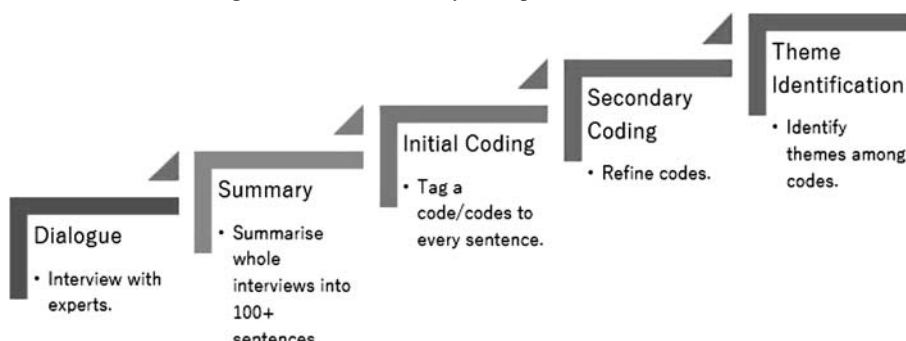
remarks of the interviewees.

The results of the analysis are explained in detail in the following section.

Results

As a result of the analysis, I identified five important themes in the interviews, all of which help me answer the research questions specified above. The themes are : cultural awareness, defined customer service, bigotry, host attributes, and mutual open-mindedness (See Figure 2 : Emerged themes).

Figure 2 : Emerged themes
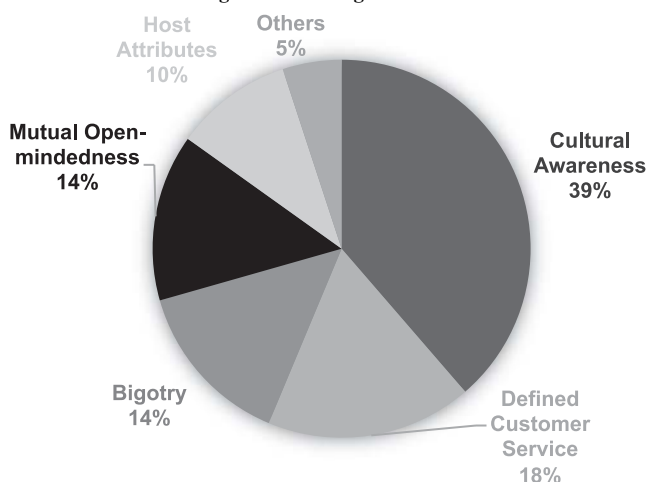
In the section that follows, I would like to summarise each of the themes that emerged from the analysis and add detailed explanations for them. It should be emphasised at this stage that, although I treat these five themes as different and independent, they are not mutually

exclusive, but rather overlap each other to a certain degree.

Bigotry

The theme that the interviewees repeatedly refer to as being the major challenge in intercultural communication is bigotry. Bigotry, in its dictionary definition, means '[i]ntolerance towards those who hold different opinions from oneself' (Oxford Living Dictionaries, n.d.). The interviewees testified that bigotry can appear in both guests and hosts.

It is very interesting that all the interviewees shared difficult experiences that they had when their guests were indifferent to Japanese culture. Such guests had little or almost no interest in Japanese culture, and they refused the Japanese food or other cultural experiences suggested by the interviewees who were their hosts. With such indifferent or unengaging guests, there can be little or almost no meaningful cultural contact. It is worth mentioning, however, that one interviewee argues that the number of visitors indifferent to Japan's local culture were many when Japan still maintained a low profile in the international arena a few decades ago ; however, recent visitors, younger and more active than the guests of the older generations, tended to be readily interested in, friendly to, and accepting of Japanese cultural experiences. Although the increasing numbers of inbound tourists are allegedly causing problems with the local Japanese, the recent boom in the tourism in Japan may be bringing more understanding travellers than before.

Japanese hosts, too, can show an intolerant or even hostile attitude towards the different customs, behaviours, and views brought by non-Japanese guests, as suggested by the interviewees. Most of the interviewees sensed or witnessed intolerance against the guests' cultures in the remarks and attitudes of their bosses and masters belonging to the older generation, although the interviewees take it as negative examples rather than best practices to learn. However, such intolerance is not necessarily unique to older generations, as predicted by Tsuboya (2017) that I referred to in the previous section. When either indifference or intolerance becomes evident, there cannot be mutual respect between the guest and host, and this will hinder cultural contact.

Cultural Awareness

All the interviewees emphasise that the awareness about different cultures on both sides of the guest and the host have positive impacts on countering bigotry. Although the term 'cultural awareness' may have varying meanings, what the interviewees meant can be summarised in the Collins English Dictionary's definition : the 'understanding of the

differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values' (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). By acknowledging and assuming differences between 'us' and 'them', both guests and hosts can fight against bigotry, according to the interviewees. In this light, cultural awareness can be defined as a prerequisite for cultural contact in inbound tourism.

It is understandable that guests, visitors, and/or inbound tourists should have interests in and understanding of the Japanese culture, at least to some degree, by which they can soften the culture shock that they might undergo in Japan and thus enjoy various cultural experiences. It is interesting that all the interviewees emphasise that the Japanese hosts should, instead of forcing tourists to do as the Japanese do while in Japan, give detailed explanations to the inbound tourists as to why certain things are done in a certain manner in Japan; by doing so, the interviewees believe that most guests and tourists will understand and follow the hosts' instructions and suggestions. In that sense, the Japanese people's profound understanding of their own Japanese culture is critical, because otherwise detailed explanations by the host are impossible. However, one interviewee believes that many Japanese people lack even a basic understanding of Japanese traditions, which makes such a waste of under-utilised Japanese tourism assets.

Defined Customer Service

The interviewees also address the controversial cultural issue in inbound tourism: Should Japanese cultural norms be imposed on inbound tourists as they are, or should there be a room for accommodation? Their ambivalence is similar to that of Yamazaki (2016), as I mentioned above. However, their stance on this issue is clearer than Yamazaki's: yes, they believe that they should and will modify Japanese cultural norms for inbound tourism, but only within the clearly defined scope of business.

The interviewees' view is fascinating because they clearly distinguish what they offer to the temporary inbound tourists from the Japanese cultural norms that they must preserve and protect. In other words, they know that they are a 'gateway' to the Japanese culture that many inbound tourists and guests encounter for the first time; therefore, they are happy to accommodate the non-Japanese people's needs and demands and introduce innovations in their products or services, especially in the business sense. However, at the same time, they know how they can preserve the Japanese cultural norm as is, because they themselves are experts of the Japanese cultural traditions. Such an approach will be possible only when they have a profound awareness and understanding of the Japanese cultural traditions. In a way,

distinguishing the cultural modification for business purposes from the preservation of the Japanese cultural norms is a tactic based on the cultural awareness argued earlier. With this flexibility, the interviewees' approach seems far more practical than the government's statements that combine, or somehow confuse, inbound tourism with the preservation of the Japanese culture, as explained in the introductory section of this paper.

Host Attributes

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is that certain attributes of the host, such as enthusiasm and bi- or multi-lingual proficiency in their engagement with the guests and tourists from different cultures, can boost cultural contact with the guests. Most interviewees assert that they are fundamentally fond of engaging with the people themselves, and all of them speak at least two languages fluently. The importance of bi- or multilingual proficiency on the host side is acknowledged by not only the interviewees but also the literature by Hagimura (2017) or Miyajima (2017). This theme has much in common with the cultural awareness argued above, in that these are both technical and cognitive skills. More than one interviewee stated that, even if the guests build emotional barriers that resemble bigotry, they will patiently speak to the guests and do their best to open their minds.

Although the interviewees only name host attributes that can enhance cultural contact with the guests, there can be unfavourable attributes that can have a negative impact. For example, if the host is obsessed with their own routines and protocols and hates making changes to what they usually do for the guests, they may treat the guests as ignorant pupils that should blindly follow the host's instructions and suggestions, and thus cultural contacts that could lead to MTE will be unlikely. Monolingualism on the host side will never be helpful in making a meaningful contact with the guests. The interviewees' suggestions as to favourable host attributes may be useful for creating a set of criteria to select or train future hosts in Japanese inbound tourism.

Mutual Open-Mindedness

The final theme that I extracted from the interviews is mutual open-mindedness. One interviewee specifically used the term 'be open', but other interviewees also referred to the importance of being open-minded towards the difference between the guest and the host. As mentioned in the bigotry section, it is sometimes very difficult to accept the opinions and views different from one's own. All the factors that I have mentioned so far, such as cultural awareness, defined customer service, or host's enthusiasm and multilingual proficiency, can

help us defy bigotry and get along despite the differences.

However, as one interviewee specifically emphasises, detailed explanations based on the host's profound cultural awareness can work for the inbound tourists only when the host himself is open-minded towards the guests' cultures. In other words, the host must respect the guest's culture, even when the host tries to provide Japanese cultural experiences to the guests. In contrast, the Japanese government's stance towards Japanese cuisine assumes that detailed explanations－and perhaps proper teaching to people from overseas－about Japanese culture will suffice. In fact, more than one interviewee makes a remark regarding the importance of detailed explanations or proper teaching, too. However, according to the interviewee in question here, if the host lacks open-mindedness towards the guest's culture and shows a patronising or even condescending attitude towards the guests by regarding them as ignorant pupils to be taught by cultural masters like themselves, detailed explanations of Japanese culture, however accurate, will not work to create cultural contacts but rather result in destructive consequences.

This theme significantly overlaps and even resembles other themes such as cultural awareness and the host attributes discussed above. However, the major difference here is the mutuality highlighted by the interviewees themselves. Open-mindedness must be shown both by the hosts and the guests so as to boost the cultural contact between them. Moreover, while other overlapping themes such as cultural awareness and host attributes involve an aspect of knowledge and skills, mutual open-mindedness concerns values linking the host and the guest such as friendship, equality, or trust.

Finally, in relation to the host attributes discussed above, another interviewee claims that the host must be able to view the differences as fascinating rather than troublesome to overcome the difficulties arising from the cultural differences. This is another type of manifestation of mutual open-mindedness. Thus, being open-minded both to the cultures of the Japanese and the guests will bring benefits, too, for the inbound tourism in Japan.

Discussion

Synthesis of Findings

The five themes that emerged from the data exhibit different qualities, and these differences should be clarified for the discussion that follows. First of all, bigotry is a factor that will always work negatively in the cultural contact between the host and the guest and thus never show a positive influence. Indeed, if bigotry is present or perceived in either the host's or

guest's attitudes or both, the cultural contact will be devastated. Despite the scale of its negative impact, the high frequency of references to this theme in the data collection process indicates that bigotry is perceived as the biggest, and perhaps most recurring but most resistant impediment against cultural contact in the eyes of the interviewees. The question of course arises whether human beings can ever be free from bigotry.

Cultural awareness will, in contrast, have a positive impact on the cultural contact between the host and the guest if it exists. Most of the interviewees perceive cultural awareness as a counter against bigotry. Moreover, if cultural awareness can counteract bigotry, then it can also be a prerequisite for effective cultural contact, as mentioned above. However, as shared in the interviewees' accounts, cultural awareness cannot be taken for granted in both the hosts' and the guests' minds. This indicates that there may be a need for pre-service or on-the-job training programmes or workshops to improve the hosts' or service providers' cultural awareness.

Defined customer service is slightly different to the two themes above, because it is a tactic for business rather than mental or cognitive skills. All the interviewees agree that they would accommodate the needs and demands of the inbound tourists and alter or modify the Japanese cultural norms if it resulted in making their service to the guests easier or better. In a sense, this tactic justifies the hosts' deviation from or even resistance to the Japanese cultural norms to which they would have to conform as a cultural promulgator. However, it is worth emphasising that defined customer service is justifiable only within the scope of business ; the modification of Japanese cultural norms in business settings and the preservation of Japanese traditions are clearly distinguished from each other in the eyes of the interviewees, who are engaging in the inbound tourism business far more practically and pragmatically than the Japanese government assumes.

Host attributes can be either favourable or unfavourable, and thus may have both positive and negative impacts on cultural contact. Some interviewees point out that attributes such as an enthusiasm for enjoying the cultural differences with the guests as well as bi- or multi-lingual proficiency will positively influence the cultural contact. However, there could be some unfavourable attributes that could have a negative impact, as discussed in the previous section. This theme may be a slightly minor and subordinate factor in comparison with bigotry, cultural awareness, and defined customer service, but the existence of favourable attributes will enhance communication between the host and the guest. In this sense, the favourable host attributes can be perceived as a booster to cultural contact.

Finally, mutual open-mindedness functions as a means of linking the host and the guest in

an amicable manner and enhancing the effectiveness of their communication. Although mutual open-mindedness has a lot in common with other factors such as cultural awareness and host attributes, it is distinctive in that it is about values shared between the guest and the host rather than a set of knowledge and skills. The mutuality of the value also makes this theme distinctive from the others.

Synthesising the remarks made by the interviewees, I would like to argue that acknowledging the difference as in the cultural awareness might be an important technical skill in cultural contact. Defined customer service is a set of practical skills or tactics to make the business easier or more effective. However, being open-minded to as well as accepting the cultural differences might require mental readiness at a higher level than other elements of the cultural contact between the Japanese hosts and the inbound tourists/guests. One interviewee describes the act of being open-minded in the Japanese traditional culture as a nail that sticks out to be hammered down, by which the interviewee implies that not many people in the traditional Japanese cultural communities are being open-minded when they come into contact with people from different cultures, and s/he has also suffered from the peer pressure in his/her cultural community that forces the community members to conform to the traditional cultural norms. Being open-minded is the big first step, and if open-mindedness is achieved by both the guest and the host, that will be the most fundamental remedy for problems occurring in the cultural contact being made in Japan today.

Thus, I would like to conclude that the major challenge for positive cultural contact in Japan's inbound tourism business is bigotry on the part of both the Japanese hosts and inbound tourists/guests. However, this challenge can be effectively countered or diminished by other positive endeavours that have emerged as themes from the collected data, such as

Figure 3 : Cultural Contact－the Relationship of Elements

cultural awareness as a prerequisite, defined customer service as practical tactics, host attributes as a booster, and, most importantly, mutual open-mindedness as an overarching solution for favourable cultural contact. The relationship among these factors is illustrated in Figure 3 : Cultural contact − the relationship of elements.

Enthusiasts rather than Victims : Desirable Cultural Contact Makers

In this research, the words, phrases, and remarks made by the interviewees were analysed. However, what was distinctive throughout the data collection process other than their words is their own enthusiastic attitudes towards enjoying the cultural differences with the guests that they entertain. As briefly mentioned in the Host Attributes section above, the interviewees perceive such enthusiasm as a favourable host attribute that can boost cultural contact. It was fascinating that all the interviewees regard themselves as enthusiasts meeting with people from different cultures and utilising their creativity and ingenuity to the fullest to make the first cultural contact with the guests successful. To them, accommodating the guests' various interests, needs, and demands is enjoyable rather than troublesome. More than one interviewee agreed that the more difficult their guests are to deal with, the more excited they become to make the guests happy and satisfied. No one believes that the surging numbers of inbound tourists are turning them into a victim of 'tourism pollution', because of which they must bend their principles and the cultural traditions that they should protect. Although the findings of this small research are hardly generalisable to a wider context, the fact that all the interviewees show the same attribute indicates that desirable cultural contact makers may have this enthusiasm to communicate with people and enjoy the differences in common.

Conclusion

The government-led increase in the number of inbound tourists from overseas visiting Japan has shown both bright and dark sides of the trend. Inbound tourism is now one of the most attractive industries in the Japanese economy, but at the same time it has begun to be seen as a potentially troublesome phenomenon, especially in the eyes of the local citizens or hosts that are to receive and entertain the inbound guests. That is because the surging numbers of tourists are considered as invading and threatening the peaceful living and cultural environment of the local communities that they visit. In fact, as is evident in the political discourse made by the Japanese government as to the registration of Japanese cuisine as a UNESCO World Heritage, some, if not all, Japanese people hold a quite nationalistic view

and believe that the inbound tourists must accept and follow the Japanese cultural norms as is the case when they make a cultural contact with the local people or hosts. The Japanese have no duty to bend their principles and traditions for tourists, who are considered equivalent to intruding outsiders.

However, this research has revealed that professional promulgators of the Japanese culture who are making cultural contacts with the inbound tourists on a regular basis have different views. They perceive bigotry－intolerance towards people holding different views or values－ as the biggest obstacle for successful cultural contact. However, they believe that the awareness of their own and others' cultures will counteract bigotry and thus function as a prerequisite for the cultural contact makers. Recognising that they are practically the gatekeepers of the Japanese culture that many inbound tourists encounter for the first time ever, they also clearly distinguish cultural contacts that they make in their business from cultural preservation and justify their decision to modify what they offer to accommodate the tourists' needs and interests. They also think that some favourable host attributes, such as enthusiasm to communicate with people and bi- or multi-lingual proficiency, can boost cultural contact with guests. It is worth emphasising that they themselves are enthusiastic cultural contact makers enjoying the cultural differences with the inbound tourists and making the best use of their ingenuity to entertain the guests, rather than victims of the 'tourism pollution' who are troubled by intruding outsiders. At a higher level of mental readiness, they believe that mutual open-mindedness on the side of both hosts and guests is necessary for successful communication and cultural contact to come into effect, although being open-minded is difficult in the traditional cultural communities in Japan. Successful cultural contact can thus be realised, at least within the scope of this research, by the mutual efforts by both the host and the guest rather than the coercive demand for guests' unilateral compliance with the host culture.

Although this research has identified intriguing themes regarding cultural contact in the Japanese inbound tourism business, it shows a number of limitations. First, this research being a genuinely exploratory project, the findings herein are very descriptive ; the causal relationship among variables could be clarified further with a different approach. The sample size is also limited, whereas this small sample size enabled me to well explore the hitherto unknown area of cultural contact in the Japanese inbound tourism business. In addition, this research adopts Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, but to analyse the collected data more comprehensively, further elaborate methodology combining both deductive and inductive or qualitative and quantitative approaches may as well have been appropriate. Despite all those

limitations, however, this research can be defined as a pilot study for a larger-scale research project on the topic of cultural contact in the tourism business in the future.

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