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Serving a Piece of National Nostalgia

Female Foreign Workers in the Multiculturazing Hospitality Sector in Japan

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This thesis will examine Japan's national nostalgia and how its political narrative manifests in the country's multiculturalizing hospitality industry through the experiences of foreign female workers. I apply the theoretical framework of "national nostalgia" and the inductive method of thematic analysis to the primary data collected from semi-structured interviews to analyze the data generated from six women who have worked in Japan's hospitality industry. I put particular emphasis on the concepts of "uniqueness," "hospitality," and "care work"—all of which symbolize Japan's hospitality concept, omotenashi, characterized by its nationalist self-image. Due to the lack of scholarship on foreign female workers in the hospitality sector and how the nationalistic discourse of *Nihonjinron*—theories of Japaneseness—affects the integration of foreigners, this study aims to find answers to how the national nostalgia imbued narrative of "cultural homogeneity and uniquity" influences the perceptions of "Japaneseness" and how this correlates with the obstacles to building a multicultural society. Furthermore, as the service-intensive hospitality concept is charged with the gendered notion of care work, I shall explore how the female gender role manifests in the hospitality sector and how social roles influence foreign female workers in Japan. This study's starting point originates in the researcher's own internship-turned-fieldwork experience of working at a traditional Japanese inn (*ryokan*) that belongs to the female-dominated service sector. Through the comparison of my own field experience and interview data, the research findings suggest that the national-nostalgia narratives employed by the country's leading elite construct an extremely gendered working domain that affects foreign female workers via the enhanced female–male gender binary. In addition, this national nostalgia-based narrative also serves as a significant obstacle hindering Japan's aspirations to transform into multicultural society (*tabunka kyōsei shakai*) which contradicts with the nation's growing need of foreign labor.

Key words: Japan, national nostalgia, foreign workers, women, the hospitality industry

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1 Introduction—"I felt nostalgic towards Japan"

In this study, I will examine Japan's national nostalgia and multiculturalizing hospitality industry through the experiences of foreign female workers. Due to the ongoing globalization, commodities and people move faster and freer than ever before. This in turn has enhanced the immigration from country to country, and Japan is on its way step by step transforming into a more multicultural society. This change is prompted and speeded by the enormous demographic changes and challenges; Japan is becoming a super-aged society with around 28% of its population being 65 or over and projecting the numbers to reach 40% by 2055, and the vast and rapidly growing amount of elderly population who also live longer will become a burden on the pension and medical care systems (Chiavacci and Hommerich 2017, 20; Kang 2017; Kingston 2019), while at the same time Japanese women give birth to fewer children with an average fertility rate of 1.3 (Brinton and Nagase 2017, 340; Kang 2017; Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). In response to these demographic realities, Sakanaka Hidenori, the former head of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau, states that Japan has two options: to either maintain its current economic capacity and power via foreign labor or to keep tight control over immigration (Willis and Murphy-Shigetmatsu 2008, 312).

Traditionally the Japanese immigration policies have been based on the remark that Japan has never been an "immigration country" (Chung 2010; Flowers 2012; Shiobara 2020). However, even though the Japanese government was against importing labor, Japan's labor shortage worsened so much in the early 1980s that the national government had to reluctantly yield and reconsider their immigration strategies as an important agenda (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008; Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 93; Liu-Farrer 2011). The term "immigrant" (移民 *imin*) is rarely used to describe permanent residents, naturalized citizens, or the long-term residents in the context of immigration policy, in statements of political elite or even in mundane conversations, thus being absent in both policy and practise (Flowers 2012). Instead, in The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) policies refer to "foreign nationals" (外国人 *gaikokujin*), and their visa status deems their period of stay and, in extension, what kind of jobs they can acquire (Flowers 2012).

Despite national government's negative perception towards immigration, there already resides 2.7 million foreign residents in Japan (Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 118; Statistics Bureau of Japan 2021b). However, while the influx of foreign residents has the potential to transform homogenous societies into more multicultural ones, transnational

migration can also reinforce the ethnic identities and nationalist debates (Tsuda 2003 in Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). Indeed, it seems that Japan's increasing multiculturalization has given rise to debates over Japanese identity and even the *tabunka kyōsei*—theory advocating Japanese citizens to live harmoniously with many cultures—related policies have enhanced the ethnic borders between the "ethnic Japanese" and "foreign other" (e.g., Burgess 2012; Lie 2001; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008; Shiobara 2020).

At the same time while Japan has been reluctant to accept a foreign workforce and to counter its demographic crisis, and increasing the previously low percentage of women in the labor force has been seen as a viable option in the eyes of the Japanese national government (Kang 2017; Paillard-Borg and Holmgren 2016; Steinberg and Nakane 2012, 1). Japan has succeeded in rising women's labor force participation rate (Kingston 2019; Miura 2012, 170), but this positive trend is contradicting the reality of Japan as a country built upon conservative gender roles and with the deep-rooted binary of masculine and feminine domains (e.g., Chapman 2020; Dasgupta 2015; Marshall 2017). In principle, women's working opportunities are more diverse than ever in Japan's history, but the underlying gender role expectations and the society which is built on women as the cornerstone of the welfare system nudges women to be employed in certain female-dominated fields with low salary and precarious work without strong job security (Miura 2012; Ogasawara 2016; Ueno 2021; See more in Chapter 3). Japanese gender gap is huge as female workers are underrepresented in many fields and unable to rise to top positions (Hara 2022; 36; Nemoto 2016; Yamaguchi 2019). In addition, Japan's is in the 116th place the World's Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index among 146 countries (The World Economic Forum 2022).

The point of departure for this research was the paradox that I personally experienced while working in the Japanese hospitality sector, in a traditional Japanese *ryokan* (旅館), during my university exchange in the summer 2019. While working there, I could not but notice the prominently gendered setting the *ryokan* embodied: all the cleaning and serving tasks were conducted by women, and the manager of the service, *okami* (女将), is also a woman. The majority of my colleagues working at the front desk greeting customers were women, and a remarkable amount of them were foreign women who presented to the domestic and international guests the "authentic" and traditional Japanese culture and hospitality, *omotenashi* (おもてなし, See more in Chapter 6.1). This is not surprising as many post-industrial countries have moved to the phase where they require a foreign workforce to counter the demographic changes due to shrinking fertility rates and the growing size of the

elderly population which causes an acute lack of workers in certain fields. Moreover, as the Japanese national government has a long history of emphasizing the homogeneity and monoethnicity of the Japanese nation (See Befu 2001; Chapman 2006; Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu, and Befu 2006; Lie 2001), the evident presence of multiculturalism through foreign presence which contradicts these claims piqued my interest. These details that I noticed inspired me to set forth to understand Japanese gendered labor and multiculturalism's multifaceted nuances.

By applying the concept of "national nostalgia" (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021), I will analyze how Japan's national nostalgia narrative manifests in multiculturalizing society and how it reproduces and enhances conservative gender roles via the experiences of foreign female workers working in Japan's hospitality sector. The data collection method utilized in this thesis is the qualitative semi-structured online interviews conducted among six foreign female workers, and the data was analyzed via thematic analysis. This study aims to contribute to the following four areas: 1) provide a contemporary picture of the Japanese gendered hospitality sector foreign female workers; 2) examine the influence of the national nostalgia narrative in the policymaking and integration of foreign immigrants in an East Asian context; 3) demonstrate how nationalist and obsolete *Nihonjinron* (日本人論) ideologies still manifest in the society and shape the perception of Japanese identity in the eyes of Japanese and foreigners; and 4) illustrate the power relations between foreigners and "the mainstream Japanese" that hinder integration and realization of a multicultural society (See more in Chapter 3.4).

1.1 Research Questions

This research focuses to gain insight on the gendered hospitality sector, foreign women workers and Japanese multiculturalism via three main questions:

1. How does the gendered societal roles affect foreign female workers in Japan?
2. How does the gender roles manifest in the hospitality sector?
3. To what extent Japan's national nostalgia affects the narrative of "Japaneseness" and how it correlates with the obstacles to realize multicultural society?

To attain the most multifaceted comprehensive picture as possible and receive a wide variety of data for the analysis, I am combining semi-structured online interviews and my own

previous fieldwork experiences in a traditional *ryokan* in the *Kansai* area. In similar vein to Ali's (2014; 2015) theories of researcher's positionality, I perceive that only by understanding my own "insiderness" or "outsiderness" positionality in this study and via integrating those perceptions to the joint analysis of interview data (primary data) and fieldwork (secondary data), I am able to distance myself physically as well as psychologically from the phenomenon and gain objective results (Moore 2012). Because my primary data (interviews) and secondary data (fieldwork) are inherently qualitative, my analysis approach will also be focusing on the emphasis on the qualitative representation of the phenomena occurring in Japan's hospitality sector. Furthermore, by employing the concept of "national nostalgia" as a theoretical framework for this study, I am able to understand more deeply the underlying causality relations between multiple interchangeable factors such as societal change, Japanese government agenda, gendered labor market and resistance to multiculturalizing society.

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The structure of this thesis will be as follows: The First chapter introduces the topic and theme of this study and discusses the theoretical framework and the research questions. Chapter 2 covers the background of Japanese multiculturalism (*tabunka kyōsei*), the current situation of *tabunka kyōsei* in Japan and the criticism *tabunka kyōsei* policies have received. Chapter 3 presents the literature to understand the Japanese gendered society and labor market and illustrates how women became associated with the care work and domestic sphere. This is necessary to understand the research gap and the departure point of this thesis. The Chapter 4 explains the relevant methodology used for this study and considers the chosen methodological approaches as well as the challenges and reasoning behind them. The fifth chapter is the empirical chapter that analyzes Japan's national nostalgia and its manifestations via Japan's soft power, the *Nihonjinron* debate and how the self-essentialization prevents Japan's multiculturalization. Chapter 6 will explore the same national nostalgia narrative in Japan's hospitality industry and how it affects foreign female workers in Japan. Both of these empirical chapters include extensive discussion of the findings based on my collected data. Chapter 7 concludes this thesis with a summary of the results, identifies the limitations of this research and suggest potential future research possibilities.

1.3 "National Nostalgia" as a Theoretical Framework: Yearning for the Past that Never Was

To analyze my research data and findings, I will employ the concept of "national nostalgia" as a theoretical framework for my study. Social psychologist Smeekes together with Sedikides and Wildschut in their article "Longing for the 'good old days' of our country: National nostalgia as a new master-frame of populist radical right parties" (2021) explored the rhetoric of national nostalgia that populist radical right-wing parties (PRRP) exploit to justify arguments of loss of the ethnically and culturally homogeneous community and tested their hypothesis on native Dutch citizens to assess whether this rhetoric affected perceptions towards nativist ideology such as strengthened anti-immigration attitudes. In recent years, many other scholars have noticed and written extensively on nostalgia's effects on national identity in relation to ingroup (native population) and outgroup (foreign immigrants) relations (e.g., Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015; Smeekes and Jetten, 2019). Albeit I anchor my theoretical framework on Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides' article, I will apply other researcher's assessments as well in order to build a richer theoretical framework. Despite the national nostalgia being used commonly to examine radical politic parties in Western countries (e.g., Behler et al. 2021; Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015), I perceive that this concept can be applied to the Japanese context as a national nostalgia-based nationalistic rhetoric of Western right-wing parties shares many similarities with Japan's ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party's utilized policies and goals to defend the "homogenous Japan".

Nostalgia is defined as "predominantly positive yearning for the past" (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). Nostalgia can be felt both individually and collectively (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Behler et al. 2021). In other words, a person can experience nostalgia on the basis of an autobiographic past, but also for objects, periods or shared experiences and events in the past, including the national past (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). In contrast to individually felt nostalgia, group-based nostalgia can also be experienced in the guise of longing for a past that individuals have not experienced personally but has been bequeathed through collective memory (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). In social psychological convention, national nostalgia is specified to be form of a collective nostalgia based on national group membership that manages intragroup and intergroup attitudes and behaviors of the members of the group (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). Personal as

well as collective nostalgia is argued to be a coping mechanism which aids in repelling threats to self-continuity (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). For instance, national nostalgia is perceived to boost the positive attitude towards the national in-group while affecting negatively the perception of the immigrant out-group (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). After all, national nostalgia-based collectively nurtured national identity and sense of belonging depending on the shared past innately tend to form social categorizations that emphasize the distinctive differences between individuals (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015). In terms of multiculturalizing nations, there is a tendency to highlight a common origin by constructing an identity that separates residents into two distinct groups: the "old-timers" (ethnic majority) and the "newcomers" (immigrants) (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). In this setting, this type of binary opposition can lead to an exclusionist comprehension of national identity and anti-immigration views, framing foreign residents as a threat to the society and culture (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Behler et al. 2021; Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Jetten 2019).

National nostalgia is framed by and in sync with contemporary political aspirations and purposes (Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). Similarly, nostalgia as a rhetorical strategy has been used by both the right and the left-wing political forces to create their own narrative of multiculturalism (Grainge 1999, 621). Conservative parties perceive immigration to be one of the most important threats to a nation's identity continuation, and in many countries have adopted national nostalgia as rhetoric to counter this threat by painting a picture of a past glorious golden age characterized by ethnic homogeneity and social order which is lost due to multiculturalizing society (Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). Modern societies are multiculturalizing via increased mobility of goods and people, and these rapid societal transformations are argued to enhance feelings of nostalgia due to changed societal order (Smeekes and Jetten 2019). Indeed, some scholars define nostalgia fittingly as "yearning for the past in response to a loss" or "absence of continuity in the present" (Behler et al. 2021; Grainge 1999, 631). Therefore, during turbulent times, uncertain conditions and major changes such as demographic and economic changes, nostalgia as a political rhetoric is commonly utilized as a pillar of continuity (Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Grainge 1999, 621). Even the government itself can revert to the temporal national nostalgia narrative of a homogenous past to protect the national identity from becoming more heterogenous (Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Jetten 2019).

Interestingly, the narrated golden age might not have ever been real (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; see also Behler et al. 2021).

To return to the discussion on Japan, regardless of national nostalgia predominantly being employed in the context of Western multiculturalism and conservative party rhetoric, Japan's leading political party LDP has utilized very similar political rhetoric to further its goals. The Japanese government has supported countless times rhetoric of "homogenous Japan" which is new to the issue of immigration and multiculturalism despite Japan's imperialistic multicultural past (e.g., Chung 2010; Flowers 2012; Lie 2001). Lie (2001) and Befu (2001) theorize that *Nihonjinron* (日本人論), the theories of Japaneseness, enthralled Japanese society after it lost its national symbols following the defeat in the Second World War. Smeekes argues that collective nostalgia may fix the splintered lost social identity by mending it with a new narrative of continuity (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). *Nihonjinron* highlight Japan being ethnically homogenic country with a single language, excusing Japan's lacking integration attempts (Befu 2001; Lie 2001; Chung 2010; Flowers 2012). This reflects well with national nostalgia's perception of homogeneity and belonging; if one does not fit the ethnicity requirement, integration is impossible and exclusion imminent (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). For this reason, this study aims to fill the existing research gap of the potential of national nostalgia as an analytical frame due to the scarcity of scholarship of collective nostalgia, especially on national nostalgia (Behler et al. 2021), in an East Asian context.

2 Background on Multiculturalism in Japan—"I Didn't Know There Are So Many Foreigners in Japan"

The objective of this chapter is to present the necessary literature and context to discuss the nuances of multiculturalism in Japan. Currently the world is internationalizing. This change has resulted in a notable rise in percentage of foreign residents in countries that have previously been considered "monoethnic" (Chung 2010; Liu-Farrer, 2011; Lie 2001). By this convention, Japan has a strong government-backed master narrative of cultural homogeneity and belief in racial monoethnicity (e.g., Burgess 2007; Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006; Lie 2001). Japanese ethnicity and nationality are intrinsically linked, causing the definition of Japaneseness "to be ambivalent, contradictory and inconsistent", and the notion of monoethnicity is used against any threats to "the homogenised culture of Japan" (Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006).[1] As a result of this advocacy, Japanese citizens tend to divide individuals residing in Japan into two contrasting binary groups: Japanese (日本人 *nihonjin*) and non-Japanese (外国人 *gaikokujin*) (Lie 2001). However, Japan has never been monoethnic and is home to diverse populations consisting of many ethnicities, minorities, and indigenous people. (Burgess 2007; Lie 2001; Morris-Suzuki 2015b, 194). This attribute alone makes Japan a multicultural society. However, belatedly migration and foreign residents have become an issue in Japanese society, and to ease the tensions caused by cultural conflict, the Japanese central government has started to use the buzzword *tabunka kyōsei*, loosely translated as "multicultural coexistence" to encourage integration and cultural exchange (e.g., Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006; Demelius 2020). In this chapter, I will first define what is *tabunka kyōsei* and how it came to academic and political discussion. Next, I present the criticism *tabunka kyōsei* has received. Lastly, I will discuss the context and reasons for increased multiculturalism in Japan.

2.1 Theory and Meaning of *Tabunka Kyōsei*

As previously noted, *tabunka kyōsei* (多文化共生), loosely translated as "many cultures living together" (Demelius 2020) or generally translated as "multicultural" (Burgess 2007; Burgess, 2012), is a term which Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (総務省

[1] National nostalgia is used for the exact same purpose, see 1.3.

Sōmushō) embraced in 2006 to introduce their program for promoting The Multicultural Plan (多文化共生推進プログラム *Tabunka kyōsei suishin puroguramu*) (Demelius 2020; Nakamatsu 2014). In the plan the *tabunka kyōsei* is defined as "people of different nationalities or ethnicities respecting each other's differences and living on equal terms with Japanese as members of a local community" (Demelius 2020; Shiobara 2020). Burgess (2012) argues that in theory, the term *tabunka kyōsei* should portray foreign residents and Japanese as "equal partners" coexisting harmoniously together. In contrast to the central government's framed discourse of homogeneity, Burgess (2007) points out that the political idea of a "multicultural Japan" is framed so that it dismisses the popular myth of "homogenous Japan" and actually draws factual demographic and economic data to support the argument that further migration in inevitable.

Compared to other multiculturalization-related concepts, *tabunka* is not as visible in print media as terms such as *kokusaika* (国際化 internationalization) and *ibunka* (異文化 different cultures) (Burgess 2012). The term *kyōsei* in the coexistence discourse seems to have appeared only recently to replace *kokusaika* (Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006). *Kyōsei* consist of characters of 'together' and 'life', and it means "living alike together in a particular place" (Burgess 2012). Burgess (2012) notes *kyōsei* is used by the dominant group (Japanese) to describe their relations with the subordinate group which is the foreigners, and the way the term is used in discourse underlines the majority group's distinctiveness and separateness compared to the minority group. Moreover, it constructs a two-tier hierarchy of citizenship which upholds the Japanese/foreigner dichotomy and denies the non-Japanese access to power (Burgess 2012). Originally the term *kyōsei* was used in biology to refer to coexistence between species, and later meant Japanese–Asian relations, and finally in the mid-1990s *kyōsei* transformed to refer to "Japanese and foreigners living harmoniously together within Japan" (Takezawa 2008 in Burgess 2012). *Tabunka kyōsei* should not be mixed up with *tabunka shugi* (多文化主義, "multiculturalism") which is preferred by sociologists because it has more neutral connotation compared to *tabunka kyōsei* (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). Together with *tabunka kyōsei*, *tabunka shugi* is interpreted as a policy which supports multiculturalism (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008).

During the postwar period, diversity and multiculturalism in Japan was based on nationality opposed to ethnicity (Chung 2010). Even though terms *ibunka* and *kokusaika* are still used by local governments, *tabunka kyōsei* is slowly replacing them (Shiobara 2020). Multiculturalism's root is in conveying the importance of maintaining equality and cultural

diversity, and that in a truly multicultural society, co-existence, tolerance, and mutual respect would be perceived to bring benefits to the nation (Burgess 2007). Burgess (2007) notes that multiculturalism is not necessarily seen as supporting immigration but can be a belief that values it. According to Flowers (2012), the term *tabunka kyōsei* was meant to broaden and deepen superficial engagement with foreigners beyond the "consumption of the exotic". She also argues that *tabunka kyōsei* policies have become a valuable part of the discussion about diversity and difference in Japan, but it is uncertain whether policies such as The Multicultural Plan results in increased engagement among different cultures. Lastly, Morris-Suzuki notes (Morris-Suzuki 1998 in Burgess 2007) that if the meaning of culture includes values such as "possession of the same knowledge, values, and experiences", then every national society can be defined as multicultural. Many academics agree with Morris-Suzuki's notion of cultural variation and highlight the uncontroversial truth that multiculturalism clearly exists in Japan (Burgess 2007; Lie 2001; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 221).

2.2 The Beginning of Multiculturalism in Japan

One precondition for birth of multicultural communities is migration (Flowers 2012). Nakamatsu (2014) points out that the public policies on immigration and immigrants in many countries are usually guided by principles like segregation, assimilation or multiculturalism and reflect many demographic, historical, political and social changes and conditions. Lie (2001) traces the beginnings of multiethnic Japan by citing that the fall of *Tokugawa shogunate* gave rise to multiple minorities. First, the collapsed status hierarchies still left the former *burakumin*[2] as outcasts of the society, following by the Meiji state annexing *Ezochi* (*Hokkaidō*) and *Ryūkyū*, thus transforming *Ainu* and *Okinawan*s into minority groups (Lie 2001). Furthermore, as a consequence of Japan's Asian conquest, the influx of Taiwanese, Koreans and people from Japan's other colonized countries settled in Japan creating even more multicultural and multi-ethnic Japan through massive movement of people (Lie 2001). Some of this ethnic heterogeneity was reduced after the collapse of Japan's colonial empire but it would be misleading to consider Japan ethnically homogenous during the postwar

[2] *Burakumin* (部落民) minority consists of people who are descended from pre-*Meiji* castes which practiced occupations that were considered "dirty" like executioners or butcherers.

period until the arrival of the new wave of foreign workers who enhanced the foreign presence in Japan (Lie 2001).

Japan is one of the very few non-Western countries who have accepted a large influx of migrant workers since the 1970s, and during the 1980s the labor needs of Japanese factories and construction sites were supplemented by foreign laborers especially from Asia and South America (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008; Kim and Oh 2010). At that time there was a threefold increase in the number of foreigners entering Japan from 1970 until 1988 (Lie 2001). In 1984 under the leadership of Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, Japan pledged itself to transform into an international country (Chapman 2006; Flowers 2012). At that time, the national government introduced the term *kokusaika* and launched several policies to help Japan internationalize domestically as well as internationally (Chapman 2006; Flowers 2012). Although not directly related, multiculturalism is seen as a continuation to *kokusaika* (e.g., Burgess 2007; Chapman 2006). The Multicultural Japan boom started from mid-1990s, when the term *tabunka kyōsei* first appeared in 1993 to printed media which spurred the word "multicultural" to become a common term in writing in Japan (Burgess 2007; Nakamatsu 2014). As a result, the academics *Nihonjinron* genre (日本人論 Theories of Japaneseness), which highlights Japan's "monoehtnicity", was critically examined for the first time and it was admitted that social variation and diversity had a long history in Japanese society (Burgess 2007; Lie 2001).

Tabunka kyōsei got the official definition in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' 2006 Multicultural Plan, where *tabunka kyōsei* shakai (多文化共生社会 multicultural coexistence society) was described as a society "where people of different nationalities and ethnic groups live together as members of one community, in mutual acceptance of each other's cultural differences and making efforts towards building an equal relationship" (Bugess 2007; Nakamatsu 2014). The Multicultural Plan emphasized four themes: "communication support, livelihood support, multicultural community building and improvement of systems for implementation" and advocated foreign residents' equality and rights for the same government services that the local population had. (Nakamatsu 2014). Previously many multicultural policies were aimed at the oldcomer immigrants such as *Zainichi* Koreans,[3] but when the new immigration wave rapidly increased the number of

[3] *Zainichi* Koreans (在日韓国人) are the ethnic Korean minority in Japan who are descendants of Korean immigrants prior to 1945.

foreigners in Japan, the government shifted its policy-focus to support the newcomer foreign residents and interethnic cooperation (Nakamatsu 2014; Shiobara 2020). To encourage Japanese and foreign residents' interethnic interactions, the local governments have established international exchange offices which organize cultural activities, events, and festivals (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). In general, multicultural coexistence is implemented through various local assistance services and cultural projects organized by local governments (Flowers 2012; Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). The cities with large condensation of foreign populations offer foreign workers different kinds of consultation services (ranging from legal to employment issues), language and translation services, information handbooks and pamphlets, health insurance and emergency medical coverage and public housing to name a few.

The use of the term "multicultural" was to challenge the conventional view of Japanese society as being monocultural and homogenous (Burgess 2007). One indication for diversity in Japanese society is the fact that more than 2.7 million "foreigners", about 2% of the total populace, reside in Japan (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2021b; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 118; Takahashi 2020, 131). In addition, one out of 50 babies are of mixed ethnicity in Japan, which also reveals that homogenous Japan is just a myth (Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 118). Recently, *tabunka kyōsei* has transformed into an important part of policy discussion about difference and diversity in Japan because the current policies set very narrow parameters for "culture" that excludes sexual minorities and other similar groups who might belong to a broader definition of culture (Flowers 2012). Thus, Flowers argues that in *tabunka kyōsei* discourse and policies, "multiethnic" would be a more appropriate description as they currently focus on "foreigners" and not on the external diversity found inside Japan's borders such as the presence of *Zainichi* Korean residents and *burakumin*.

2.3 Criticism of *Tabunka Kyōsei*

Multicultural coexistence society has been criticized throughout the years. One of its weaknesses is that the definition given by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications is highly abstract and idealistic, and the roles of the participants are undefined (Demelius 2020; Shiobara 2020). Nakamatsu (2014) agrees that the phrase *tabunka kyōsei shakai* seems to be unfamiliar at a grassroots level among the minorities it is supposed

to empower. Furthermore, *kyōsei* is often presented to be a state of harmonious existence that will be achieved without a question (Chapman 2006). The Multicultural Plan is pointed out not reflecting the realities that non-Japanese residents face in Japanese society (Shiobara 2020). In addition, because it is assumed that difference comes from outside Japan, migration is the focus of society's development of place-based *tabunka kyōsei* policies (Flowers 2012). This conception leaves almost assimilated groups and minorities outside of policymaking (Flowers 2012). *Tabunka kyōsei* is criticized to put emphasis on the binary opposition of Japanese and foreigners, and in the process enhancing and enforcing the belief of homogenous Japan (Lie 2001, 48; Burgess 2007). When *tabunka kyōsei* highlights the foreign—mainstream opposition, non-Japanese are seen inferior compared to mainstream Japanese because they have not become self-reliant, and in turn undermines the autonomy and rights of foreign residents and transforms them to vulnerable people in need of support from Japanese government and Japanese people (Shiobara 2020). Moreover, the constitutional guarantee of equal treatment of foreigners with Japanese nationals does not guarantee equality nor individual human rights as the constitution is acknowledged as very equivocal. (Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu and Befu 2006, 2–3; Shiobara 2020). One reason for the lack of equality is perceived to be the lack of sanctions and penalty provisions of the international human rights laws that Japan has ratified, thus letting the human rights violations go without consequences (Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu and Befu 2006, 103).

In addition, the central government delegates most of the responsibility of arranging the smaller compartmentalized projects and implementation of the multicultural policies to local governments under the "the umbrella of local internationalisation" (Nakamatsu 2014). Reason for this is that the Japanese government perceives that local municipalities are responsible for the welfare of their residents, including both native and foreign residents (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). However, in this way the central government tries to avoid the conflicts which would ensue if foreign workers would not be embraced properly as the national government itself has not taken enough measures to facilitate the social integration of foreign workers (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008; Iwabuchi, Kim and Hsia 2016, 57). In spite of the Japanese government's several adjustments to *tabunka kyōsei* policies and events leaning towards multicultural communication, without proper guidelines the local government's attempts to accommodate local multiculturalism focuses on shallow linguistic and cultural assistance which in turn encourage superficial toleration of the foreign other (e.g., Burgess 2012; Demelius 2020; Liu-Farrer 2020; Munia 2015). Only in the face of notably increased

concentration of foreign population—such as in the case of areas with acute demand of foreign workforce to cover the industrial needs[4]—local municipalities are forced to address the problems of foreigners and provide diverse services (Green 2021; Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 98; Noguchi 2007). However, in the case of municipalities with small accumulation of foreigners, those local governments have been reluctant and inactive in assisting foreign residents (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008).

Additionally, many *tabunka kyōsei* projects are shallow and superficial multiculturalism and *tabunka kyōsei* policies overemphasize the importance of intercultural communication (Iwabuchi 2010; Shiobara 2020). The *tabunka kyōsei* projects arranged by the local communities are merely cosmetic, narrowly focused and situational internalization and might spread and enhance superficial stereotypes of foreign cultures, usually through the "3F (food, fashion, festival)" (Demelius 2020; Shiobara 2020). Flowers (2012) agrees that there is certain "consumer/migrant" relationship between Japanese and the ethnic other. For example, the leisure industry participants at tourism travel seminars in Japan have been requested by the Japanese government to wear "ethnic" dress for receptions, which also denies ethnic other's own subjectivity. However, it is noted that even the local government officials view the policy as unrealistic in principle and assimilationist in practice" and deem that social cohesion achieved through assimilation would prevent segregation (Nakamatsu 2014). The policy's culture-orientated approach results in a paradox where any discrimination or injustice towards foreigners is perceived to be not socially constructed problems but personal matters that can be solved by Japanese and foreign residents themselves (Shiobara 2020).

In contrast, the way to achieve equal civil and political rights with the Japanese population is perceived to be naturalization (Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu and Befu 2006, 100). This in my opinion is related to the government's assimilationist stance. The Japanese national government keeps tight control on immigration and divides the people into beneficial foreigners who are provided with public services and unbeneficial foreigners who are excluded from society (Shiobara 2020). The government presumed that the strict border control ensures the harmonious coexistence because it prevents the "illegal or imposter" people entering who would threaten the national security, but in reality, the *tabunka kyōsei* policies enhance the control over foreigners (Shiobara 2020). Furthermore, the official

[4] Many of unskilled labor are concentrated in the vicinity of manufacturing institutions and factories, for example *Nikkeijin* (日系人, people who are descendants of Japanese emigrates and have later returned to Japan) working in automobile factories (e.g., Roth 2017, 335; Tsuda 1999, 687).

tabunka kyōsei discourse legitimizes social integration policies of the local and national governments and forces the foreign residents to assimilate into Japanese society while at the same time the same society is neglecting and disowning the cultural diversity it deems undesirable (Morris-Suzuki 2015a; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020). It is criticized that Japanese society's approval of diversity is decided by person's usefulness from the viewpoint of economic rationality (Liu-Farrer 2020; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020). It is also implied that individuals who have assimilated better—such as persons behaving as Japanese or speaking the language fluently—are seen as more desirable and less as a threat to the Japanese culture and thus welcomed as "law-abiding, locally functioning and well-adjusted residents" (Nakamatsu 2014; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 20).

2.4 Reasons for the Increase in Foreign Population in Japan

Nation-states becoming multiethnic through three mechanisms, which are state-making, colonialization, and migration (Lie 2001). The more prosperous and powerful the nation-state is, the more multiethnic it will be in general (Lie 2001). As briefly discussed above, the central government of Japan utilized internationalization policies starting from the 1980s to increase immigration (e.g., Chapman 2006; Flowers 2012; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008). As implied earlier, the Japanese government has been against immigration or previously preferred an assimilationist approach to immigration (Nakamatsu 2014; Shiobara 2020), but it has had to change the absolute attitude towards immigration due to the prominent demographical changes occurring in Japan. Kim and Oh (2011) point out that Japan passed the threshold of "aged society" in 1994, and according to United Nation's reports, Japan has now transformed into super-aged society with more than 20% of the populace being 65 years old and older (United Nations 2017). At the same time, the birth-rate in 2018 was 1.3 children per woman in Japan (The World Bank 2020).

Furthermore, Japan's demand for low-wage service labor and manual work became a pressing issue in the late 1980s because Japanese nationals were not willing to take the so-called "3K jobs" (*kitsui, kitanai and kiken*, translated as difficult, dirty, and dangerous) due to the demanding working conditions, long hours of work and low salary (Lie 2001). In addition to these demographical changes and the shrinking labor force, the composition of the labor force itself has changed. The number of women in the labor force nearly doubled between the 1960s and 1980s to alleviate the dire need for workers. By internationalization and accepting

foreigners, Japan tries to alleviate the societal problems caused by an aging population, low birth-rates and a dropping labor force (Demelius 2020; Kingston 2019). However, Japan is still estimated to need around 600.000 foreign workers annually if it wants to keep its current labor force ratio (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). Due to the amends made to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, now thirty years since the revision there are approximately 2.47 million foreign nationals residing inside Japan's borders (Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 249). The number of foreigners is only 2% of the total Japanese population, but significant as 6.1% of registered marriages in Japan are international, thus Japan will continue to become even more multicultural through the mixing of ethnicities (Kim and Oh, 2011). All these changes contribute to Japanese demographical changes and force Japan to evaluate its stance towards immigration and how they will arrange multiculturalization in Japan.

In the past, even though Japan is seen as hesitant in immigration policies, the government has not restricted the inflow of foreign workers even in the Revised Immigration Act in 1989 (Lie 2001). However, in 1992 the national government outlined the Basic Plan of Immigration Control which made a distinction between skilled and unskilled workers to control the inflow of economically beneficial foreign workforce (Lie 2001). Later, Japan's immigration policies seem to be influenced by demographic and economic changes and the fear towards ethnic conflicts and terrorism (Lie 2001). In contrast, in the Basic Plan for Immigration Control 2005 edition perceived a possibility for allowing medium-skilled workers and emphasized foreigners' right to the social security system and a comfortable living environment. Following those plans, the 2010 plan suggested raising the range of acceptable workers substantially and underlining the *kyōsei shakai* policies which were introduced in the Multicultural Coexistence Plan in 2006 (Nakamatsu 2014). One of the pioneers of *tabunka kyōsei* model is Sakanaka Hidenori who is the former head of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau. Sakanaka has been a vocal and influential commentator on immigration issues ever since the 1970s, and especially in the 2010s he advocates for the expansion of the immigration population from the current level of little over two million to around 10 or even 20 million (Morris-Suzuki 2015a).

Despite the various criticism *tabunka kyōsei* policies have received, Japan is step by step transforming into a more multicultural society. Among OECD member states, Japan has the fourth highest annual influx of foreign residents (Takahashi 2020, 130). Another indication for this is that recently Japanese government has implemented several adjustments to mold

itself into more enticing destination of labor migration by easing the previously tightly restricted immigration. The national government launched in April 2023 new visa status "Highly skilled professional" (HSP) for researchers and engineers to lure more highly skilled professionals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 May 2023). On the other hand, even though highly skilled foreign workers have been accepted the government has refused to recognize them as immigrants (Shiobara 2020). Furthermore, Japanese national government drafted new immigration policy which recognized manual labor also as a "specified skills" in April 2019 (Kondoh 2020; Takahashi 2020, 130). Under the terms of this new "specified skills" category, the foreign workers are proposed to find employment in 12 fields and those with background in nursing or construction sector are eligible to extended their stay for longer term (Ryall, 26 April 2023). In addition, after being criticized for terrible working conditions, serious exploitation and various other abuses, the notorious Technical Intern Training Program (技能実習制度, *Ginō Jisshū Seido*) which exploited low skilled workforce was abolished in 2023 (Morita 2023; Tauchi, 10 April 2023). These previously exploited individuals are now allowed to enter Japan with actual visas and work compensations. However, only time will tell whether these new amends to Japan's immigration policy and the presence of foreigners will make Japan to move from toleration to embracing its own increasing diversity and reality as an "immigration country".

3 Literature Review on the Gendered Labor in Japan—"Not a Service Industry Problem”

This section focuses on Japanese gendered labor and strong gender norms promoted by the Japanese government. A strong relationship between the gender roles and the type of work woman are required to conduct surfaced during the study; not only the society, rather the labor market itself is extremely gendered and built on conservative gender roles (e.g., Chapman 2006; Dasgupta 2015; Marshall 2017). In her study about women’s labor force behaviour in Japan, Yukiko Abe (2013) notes that women’s participation in the labor force lingers behind many other developed countries. This chapter will explore how gender binary manifests in every facet of Japanese society, including national identity, welfare system and labor market. According to the Statistics Bureau of Japan’s (統計局 *Tōkeikyoku*)[5] provided statistics from 2021, Japan’s labor force participation rate in the “15 years old and over” category was 62.1% (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 124). If observed by gender, the rates were 71.3% for male and 53.5% for female (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 124). Traditionally women’s low labor force participation has been believed to be the remnant of patriarchal values and conservative society (e.g., Morris-Suzuki 2015; Nemoto 2016). In addition, Japan’s labor market is not gender neutral (Broadbent 2003, 26; Ogasawara 2016, 127; Ueno 2021, 9). Men dominate the politics and legislative positions (Assmann 2014, 11; Dalton 2015, 122) as well as many other fields that are considered “masculine” (Assmann 2014, 9; Broadbent 2003, 26; Parreñas 2012, 272). Furthermore, the female employment is highest especially in the "medical, health care and welfare" sector, followed by the category labelled as "accommodations, eating and drinking services" and "living-related, personal and amusement services" (The Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 128). All these categories fall under the tertiary industry, amounting 50.9% of total employed women (The Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 128).

Based on the above statistics, there seems to be a pattern connecting the type of work women are conducting in Japan and conservative gender roles which can be summarized as “care work”. The most prominent employment types for women heavily involve caring; for example, the most prominent categories for female workers are “service workers” and “clerical workers”, 68.5% and 60.2% respectively (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 130). It is

[5] This bureau is subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (総務省 *Sōmushō*, also known as MIC).

also important to note that number of women as non-regular staff members is 53.6% (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 131). This is a drastic difference compared to the ratio of men of which only 21,8 percent are non-regular workers (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 131).[6] Based on OECD's 2017 statistics, Japan's gender wage gap is 22.1% which means that women earn only eighty percent of what a man employee earns in Japan (OECD 2021). Approaching from this angle, Japan can be claimed to be a gendered society.

Why is the gender binary so persistent in Japan and what are the reasons for it? The answer lies in the way labor markets have been structured in the postwar era Japan, but also in the traditional view of suitable domains of men and women. The objective of this chapter is to give a better understanding of the history and causal relations behind Japanese society and the enforced gender roles. First the connection between female occupations, hospitality sector and hegemonic gender roles will be explored. Next, it will tackle the multifaceted connections between the gender norms, politics and labor legislation via the breadwinner model which indirectly maintains the conservative agenda of gendered divisions advocated by the national government. Finally, societal obstacles which prevent attaining gender equality and elimination of the gendered division of labor in Japan are considered.

3.1 Women as Embodiment of Hospitality and Care

The gendered division of labor in Japan mainly identifies women as domestic workers and caretakers (Broadbent 2003, 42). In a similar vein, the female-dominated hospitality industry in Japan which belongs to the service sector is plagued by the same stereotypes and expectations. As the above statistical examples highlight, women workers work prominently in the accommodation, eating and drinking services (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 128). The vast majority of Japanese accommodation services consist of traditional inns (旅館 *ryokan*) which are considered to be an extension of domestic services, and the hospitality provided there incorporates closely the aspect of cozy and relaxed atmosphere served by women staff (Alalsheikh 2016, 36; Alaslsheikh and Sato 2016, 126). As serving is considered

[6] In Japan, workers are offered two types of employment contracts. Regular workers enjoy many benefits and stable employment, whereas non-regular workers lack any type of work security and may suffer abuse like attendees to Japan's notorious the technical intern program (TITP) have experienced. Especially women have been marginalized in the labor force and are disproportionately represented, however, also foreigners suffer from this marginalized status (e.g., Bélanger et al. 2011; Bishop 2005; Vogt 2015).

nurturant and women embodiments of care and politeness (Yoshida 2001, 361), women are perceived to be well-suited in this type of work based on their gender (Broadbent 2003, 15, 19; Nemoto 2016, 222; Lee 2010, 647). Unlike hotels were service can be also provided by men, especially in the context of traditional Japanese inns women embody the traditional values and serve customers (Yoshida 2001, 362). Furthermore, the inn proprietress, called *okami*, is always a woman and usually the wife of the owner (Yoshida 2001, 362). This echoes the gendered expectations of Japanese women as managers of household and by proxy, protectors of tradition and continuation associated with feminine duty (Koyama 2013, 184; Morris-Suzuki, 2015b). In addition, serving food, cleaning, and taking care of the guests reminds of household tasks and responsibilities women already have at home, and these typical female jobs in Japan that are perceived to require less skills (Broadbent 2003, 15, 19; Nemoto 2016, 222; Lee 2010, 647). Thus, the Japanese service sector must be considered via the underlying assumption of women as caretakers providing nurturing labor which reminds domestic chores and is perceived as low skilled (Broadbent 2003, 42; Parreñas 2012). Based on these ideals, the work performed by females is built on gender ideologies which are constructed on stereotypical view of women as daughters, mothers, and wives (Broadbent 2003, 15, 19; Nemoto 2016, 222).[7] The fact that typically *ryokan* owner's wife is the *okami* and workers are called "*onee-san*" (お姉さん sister) underline this fact.

Moreover, it can be argued that the stereotypical conception of men and women's professions is still very prominent in Japan because many of the occupations women are holding are tied to the lens of masculinity or femininity, thus emphasizing their proper gender roles (Broadbent 2003, 15, 19; Nemoto 2016, 222; Lee 2010, 647). The prior mentioned gender stereotypes are pervasive in Japan, and according to gender essentialism, women are associated with adjectives such as "emotional, irrational, and unprofessional" and hierarchically deemed suitable to be men's assistants (Nemoto 2016, 222). Broadbent (2003) agrees that the paid work done by women has been equated as "temporary or auxiliary assistants to the male colleagues" by the employers (Broadbent 2003, 15). It is noted that Japan's conservative Liberal Democratic Party and the social elite utilize the legislation to keep women's labor cheap and that they rely on certain conformity, only weakly prompting employers to hire more women (Nemoto 2016, 219, 221). Women have limited opportunities

[7] The ideology of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (良妻賢母 *ryōsai kenbo*) coined by Nakamura Masanao in 1875 set the foundations of moral and gender expectations towards Japanese women as revered mothers (Marshall 2017; Sechiyama 2013, 77). In addition, feminist movements in Japan have employed "motherhood" to define Japanese women throughout Japan's modern history (Eto 2005, 316, 325; Morris-Suzuki 2015b; Muta 2009).

for upward labor mobility and are poorly paid without proper job security (Broadbent 2003, 19; Nemoto 2016, 218). Thus, women's labor whether it is full-time or part-time is seen "as peripheral and unskilled" (Broadbent 2003, 5; Zhou 2015, 115). In addition, Japanese women themselves are reinforcing the pattern as when they choose career, women often choose the so-called "female occupations" like customer service, producing notable gender-based job segregation in Japan instead of STEM jobs (Zhou 2015, 114–115). In the female-dominated fields, the work performed by women are seen as extension of their domestic roles as mother, wife or daughter and the work they conduct resemble domestic chores as they are perceived to be innately build for those type of roles which are nurturing (Broadbent 2003, 15, 19; Nemoto 2016, 222; Lee 2010, 647). For example, there seems to be a gender bias against men in childcare industry, many deeming it being a feminine profession (Osaki, 15 Nov. 2020).[8]

3.2 The "Corporate Warrior": Japan and the Breadwinner Model

Japan's profound tendency for care-based binary at labor market and conservative gender roles are not centuries-old tradition but a deliberate contemporary construction of the leading elite. Post-war Japan enjoyed the benefits of economic miracle with seemingly limitless economic growth, followed by abundance of working opportunities (e.g., Tipton 2015, 220; Hatase and Matsubayashi 2019; Townsend 2013, 498). Japan's unemployment rates were remarkably low in the 1970s and 1980s, only at 2%, and because it supported the robust economic growth, Japan was considered as a "model state" by the West (Tsutsui 2020). The economic miracle is closely tied to gender roles and how they were advocated in Japanese societal structures. Japanese left political parties would have wanted to develop Japan into a welfare state, but the leading Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) wanted to keep the high and stable employment, support restricted state welfare provisions as well as retain the small government. To achieve this, the LDP decided to externalize the welfare to the private corporations and households (Miura 2012; Schoppa 2006). Thus, the conservative LDP fused the economy with welfare provisions provided by women which allowed the exponential

[8] When hiring foreign workers, Japanese companies require high enough level of Japanese language skills. Thus, foreign male workers do not seem to be advantageous in general, but the international trend of women working in the perceived "feminine fields" highlight this issue as these fields are seen as unskilled and precarious work compared to STEM fields that men are more likely to be employed at. (See for more Adachi 2013; Ikkatai et al. 2020). In addition, overwhelming amount of the highly skilled foreign workers seem to hold visa in "engineering" or "specialist in humanities/international services" (75.6%) (Krishnan, 28 Nov. 2019; Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2018).

economic growth but also forced women to be the uncompensated caretakers in the domestic sphere (Broadbent 2003, 47; Chiavacci and Hommerich 2017, 123; Miura 2012, 48).

Until the bursting of Japan's economic bubble, another feature that enabled Japanese economy's exponential rise was the alleged Japanese-style employment system which was connected to the idea of the system being unique compared to other countries (e.g., Befu 2001, 1; Ohtsu and Imanari 2015, xvii; Tsutsui 2020). In the center of this triad model which supported Japanese economic growth was the breadwinner white-collared salaryman and his full-time income dependent housewife (専業主婦 *sengyō shufu*) (Dasgupta 2015, 9; Goldstein-Gidoni 2019). In the *sengyō shufu* model, women were expected to carry out the housekeeping and the provide family's welfare by caring for children and elderly relatives (Aronsson 2015, 38–39; Broadbent 2003, 90; Lee 2010, 647; Mosedale 2011, 131). This was especially important during the 1970s when the state welfare and social services were reduced and government actively encouraged women to work as fulltime family supporters (Broadbent 2003, 91; Goldstein-Gidoni 2019; Nemoto 2016, 5). With this combination, the economic prosperity was ensured through the husband and wife's distinct gender roles stemming from the earlier hegemonic family model and perceived ideal gender roles.[9]

As illustrated above, the national government has reproduced an image of home managing wives as the primary caretaker. The national government not only expects women to support their families and take care of children and the elderly, rather they are also expected to expand their care in the service sector in various roles such as elderly carer, nurse, or teacher (Adachi 2013, 640; Aronsson 2015, 38; Broadbent, 2003, 42). This is not just a governmental plan but echoes a certain value system more deeply rooted in Japanese society. This ideology can be summarized with the proverb "men have job, women have household" (男は仕事、女は家庭 *otoko wa shigoto, onna wa katei*) (Broadbent 2003, 5; Koyama 2013, 184). A fundamental attribute to this binary model is the gendered ideology associating masculinity with public sphere and production whereas femininity was associated with the household and consumption (Koyama 2013, 184; Morris-Suzuki, 2015b). The husband of the family who receives benefits such as lifetime employment and seniority-based salary and contributes to society directly with his loyalty and long working hours while the wife compliments him by freeing the husband of other responsibilities such as childrearing and household management

[9] The same mix of Confucian and Western gender values dictated also the framework of hegemonic ideal nuclear family, *koseki* and *ie* systems (E.g., Chapman 2020; Sugimoto 2014, 163–164; White 2018).

(Dasgupta 2011, 11; Mosedale 2011, 131; Zhou 2015, 119). However, this made the wives dependent on the income of their husband, despite the fact that symbolic value and respect was added to the role of the housewife (Goldstein-Gidoni 2019; Nemoto 2016, 44). Despite the effects of prominent women's liberation movements and the economic struggles caused by the oil crisis in 1973, the conservative government together with labor unions sought to strengthen the Japanese-style employment structure which heightens women's role in the domestic sphere (Ehara 2013, 97; see more Eto 2005; Shigematsu 2012.).

The gendered breadwinner discourse is tightly embedded to the socio-political and economic ideology of the postwar Japanese state partnership between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), bureaucracy and private industries which provided the foundation for Japan's political economy until the economic collapse (Dasgupta 2011, 10). Furthermore, this kind of structure which was thought to ensure economic success was attained not only through a dedicated paid workforce but together through the uncompensated work that women provided in the domestic sector (Dasgupta 2011, 11; Miura 2012; Schoppa 2006). Nevertheless, if Japan wants to keep its economic growth and cope with the demographic changes such as aging population and falling childbirths, this type of binary division based on different gender-based responsibilities is not viable anymore and the society needs to encourage more women to combine work and children (Assmann 2014, 6; Marshall 2017).

3.3 Homemaker, Valued Employee, or Both? Women's Double Burden and the Gendered Labor

Cabinet Office's survey from spring 2023 divulges that over 80 percent of respondent think that women are burdened by childcare and household (JIJI, 14 March 2023). Kawaguchi and Lee (2017) argue that classic, strong gender norms slow down the institutional changes based on the division of labor within households. These same cultural norms contribute to men's participation in household work despite the fact that women even when full-time worker conduct almost all the household chores (Kawaguchi and Lee 2017; Tsutsui 2020). Compared to other post-industrial societies, Japanese men's participation to household chores and child rearing is low (Brinton, Mun and Hertog 2021; Brinton and Nagase 2017, 360; Mizukoshi, Kohlbacher and Schimkowsky 2016). Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' survey on "Time Use and Leisure Activities" conducted in 2021 reveal that husbands used around 51 minutes to household chores whereas wives' weekly average was 3 hours 24

minutes (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2021a).[10] The burden of fulfilling various expectations and combining the work and family has resulted in the practice of women working until marriage and quitting workforce upon childbearing (Ehara 2013, 97; Yu 2009; Zhou 2015, 106). Not all women leave the labor force, but the burden to solely take care of the child due to husband's fulltime work obligations and the possibility of inflexible career influence some to leave work force until children are older (Sugimoto 2014, 174; Yu 2009).

In an attempt to revitalize Japan's economy and alleviate labor shortage, the former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his administration launched the economic reforms "Abenomics", of which one core pillar was the "Womenomics" that aimed to increase women in leadership position, to increase childcare facilities, encourage men to assume more active parenting role and to achieve better work life balance by reducing the infamously long working hours of Japanese companies (Matsui et al. 2014, 7; Nagase 2018; Kang 2017). Of women aged 15 or over, the labor force participation rate amounts only 53.5% compared to 71.3% of men in 2021 (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022, 124). A survey by the Intelligence HITO Research Institute (2015) indicated that three in four young women would rather not be promoted due to negative aspects like bigger responsibilities, longer working hours and lack of female role models (Moriyasu, 14 May 2015). On the other hand, more and more young Japanese women yearn to become fulltime housewives (Sony Life Insurance Company, 1 Nov. 2022).[11] Full-time housewife stubbornly continues to receive cultural appreciation despite leading Liberal Political Party attempts to lure more women to combine family and work (Marshall 2014; Nemoto 2016)**.** Also, it is important to note that Japanese government's recent efforts in implementing gender equality is based on utilitarian approach to make use of women to counter the demographic changes and not on feminist ideals (Assmann 2014, 5). This emphasis on women's various roles implies that the gender norms not only affect how Japanese labor division and how labor market are constructed, even the society is dependent on the system built on heteronormative traditional gender roles and expectations (e.g., Miura 2012; Ogasawara 2016; Ueno 2021).

[10] Japan is an extreme case of gender-based division of household labor, but in Western countries the statistics are only slightly better. In Finland, the average of women's daily household chores was 3 hours and 15 minutes compared to men's 2 hours and 38 minutes. In the European Union, 91% of women with children took part in household tasks whereas only 30% of men did chores on daily basis. (Tilastokeskus 2022; EIGE 2021).
[11] This survey is conducted by a respected private institution, and bear in mind that life insurance companies usually have quite accurate data as they collect it for marketing and not for shaping public opinion.

However, the current strict division, government's family policies and low wages sustain the continuation of gendered division of labor (Aronsson 2015, 34; Goldstein-Gidoni 2019). One other social construction which encourages women to stay at home is the tax policy known as "one-million-yen wall", which separates households to primary and secondary earners: the full-time husband and parttime worker wife (Marshall 2017; Kodama and Yokoyama 2018). The state-corporate relationship has also still preserved some tax exemptions which favor single-earning households with welfare benefits such as housing benefit, family allowance and wife's pension. Based on the primary earners income levels, this policy discourages secondary earners who are usually the wives who have given up their career after childbirth to restrict their working hours in order to not to earn more than one million yen unless they end up to higher tax stratum and losing the benefits (Marshall 2017; Miura, 14 Dec. 2022). The conservative dualistic employment system which leads men into long-term employment and women into short-term employment track is argued to be constantly imposed, resulting in women's shorter careers and return to the labor force as parttime workers (Aronsson 2015, 68). It is noted that the base for this kind of dualistic system has long vanished despite the continued support of various institutions dubbing it as "Japanese tradition" (Yu 2009). Under Japan's recessionary economy, double-income households would be a considerable asset (Aronsson 2015, 34).

Japanese government has partly awoken to the reality of importance of female laborers by enacting the "Equal Employment Opportunity Law" in 1985 to boost employment equality between genders (Abe 2011; Ducanes and Abella 2008). Prior to the law together with the breadwinner model the labor market undermined by gender discrimination in education and work opportunities (Ducanes and Abella 2008). Regardless of the labor market opportunities and policies allowing more women to enter workforce, Zhou (2015) asserts that the Confucian culture with deeply rooted patriarchal values still embedded in Japanese contemporary society. In Japan, the national consciousness of suitable gender specific role divisions between men and women is claimed to be more influential than in other developed countries (Zhou 2015, 113). For instance, Goldstein-Gidoni (2019) points out that managers seem to still expect total devotion and support long working hours and prefer women to primarily stay home managing the households. Direct result of this is the fact that women are employed in great numbers in perceived feminine care work related fields such as healthcare and service industry (Statistical Bureau of Japan 2022, 130; Parreñas 2012, 272; Zhou 2015, 115). Furthermore, despite the implementation of Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the

Political Field to increase the number of women in the political sphere, the 2019 election saw the number of women representatives fall from 47 to 45 in Lower House Elections and after Kishida Cabinet's reshuffle only two women got nominated as ministers (KYODO, 1 Nov. 2021; 11 Aug. 2022). Thus, the structural stereotypical gender roles of breadwinner husband and homemaker wife remain strong in Japan and are reflected in career paths as well as unequal employment opportunities (Mizukoshi, Kohlbacher and Schimkowsky 2016).

3.4 The Research Gap

The background analysis and literature review have revealed certain gaps in the existing literature that this study aims to contribute to. Firstly, there seems to be a lack of research on foreign women in Japan's service industry. For example, much of the previous research about foreign women focuses on female labor working in the entertainment and sex industry such as hostess clubs (e.g., Aoyama 2009; Kamise 2013) or the foreign female workers in the elderly care industry (e.g., Efendi et al. 2022; Świtek 2016). However, even though these women share some common realities and problems while residing in Japan, the workers in the service industry, like the hospitality business, have a different context. For example, they do not bear the same stigma nor racism, but struggle with inclusion and diverse expectations on other fronts.

Secondly, there is a scarcity of scholarly work on the influence of national nostalgia narratives and policy making in an East Asian context. Most of the studies about the national nostalgia narrative are conducted in Western context (e.g., Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; Behler et al. 2021; Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). Even though the Japanese leading elite's narrative shares many similarities with Western populist party rhetoric, it is important to expand from the Eurocentric focus. In addition, as national nostalgia rhetoric's tendency to highlight the homogeneity, monoethnicity, and collective identity serve as an obstacle to foreign residents' integration and creates hierarchical structures, it is vital to study because even if Japan is not perceived as a traditional destination for labor migration, it still is a rising country of immigration (Burgess 2012; Chung 2010; Takahashi 2020, 130).

Thirdly, *Nihonjinron* is rightfully deemed fictionalized self-essentialism, obsolete, and not based on proper academic theory (e.g., Befu 2001; Sugimoto 1999). However, its

contemporary effects on Japanese self-essentialization via government policies, perceptions of Japanese national identity, and its role as an invigorator of cultural and ethnic barriers between the ingroup (Japanese) and outgroup (foreigners) has received less focus. For instance, there is a clear indication that *Nihonjinron* has had a profound impact on shaping Japanese postwar identity (Befu 2001, 101) which cannot be overlooked. The lingering effects of *Nihonjinron* ideology are visible in various facets of Japanese society, and still affect the Japanese people's idea of race, cultural differences as well as perceptions of foreigners (Hambleton 2011; Yamamoto 2015). Newer, more discreet manifestation of this phenomenon is cultural policies such as "Cool Japan" (Hambleton 2011).

Finally, considering all the above-mentioned features of Japanese society and work life, there seem to be unequal power relations in the culture and the society itself. According to the results of the literature review, there is power relations between foreigners and "the mainstream Japanese". Due to Japan's conservative society, women have to balance several roles and fill various expectations and ideologies associated with domestic life and work. Ali (2014) states in her study about empowerment and power relations in Northern Pakistan that women are constantly forced to alter their lives by "balancing various expectations and passions associated with home and work". She notes that the unequal power dynamics stems from multiple factors such as cultural values, societal ideologies, and social and political structures (Ali 2014). Considering all these points, I hope to fill the existing research gap.

4 Methodology—Research Approach, Design, and Primary Data

In this chapter, the methodology, research approach, research design and primary data will be discussed. In my research, the initial research plan that involved travelling had to be changed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, this chapter will present the original research plan and illustrate how it has evolved and changed. Secondly, the research approach and other relevant technicalities are considered from various angles and the characteristic of the data is discussed. Lastly, the methodological discussion will include some considerations for researcher's "insiderness" or "outsiderness", which is crucial in understanding the fieldwork, data analysis and the context of this study.

4.1 Methodological Concerns

4.1.1 Defining "the Field": A Traditional Inn and a Gendered Domain

The idea for this thesis developed after my own experience working at a traditional Japanese inn (旅館, *ryokan*) in summer 2019 as a foreign worker and gained first-hand opportunity to experience the traditional Japanese work environment. The *ryokan* was located in the *Kansai* region[12] (関西) and was owned by a single family who also owned two other hotel complexes in the same area. The area where the *ryokan* resides is one of the oldest hot spring spots (温泉 *onsen*), and the hot springs there are believed to have healing prospects. Throughout history, the area has been popular among the high-class members of society, making the area very special and a famous tourist destination because of its long history and preserved traditional atmosphere. As the *ryokan*'s history extends to 800 years prior, the company seems to try to ensure the high quality of service and targets affluent and relatively affluent guests who can appreciate its unique position. All three of the hospitality complexes which belong to the company have different qualities and services; the oldest building has 20 traditional Japanese rooms on four floors and three different room types which can house 2–5 guests each; the modern hotel-style inn has around 10 rooms with Western luxury hotel interior; and the last inn has traditional Japanese rooms suitable for elderly people and those individuals who have

[12] The *Kansai* region is located in the Western part of Japan's main island *Honshū* (本州). The former capital Kyoto is also in the *Kansai* area, and *Kansai* is seen to be the host of a long history of tradition and culture.

troubles with the traditional Japanese architecture.[13] By a lucky coincidence, besides luxury *ryokan*, I also reached an informant who worked at a hotel resort belonging to a hotel chain. The hotel in question is rather luxurious and holds certain prestige as a provider of customer service. I also got hold of two part-timers, one who worked in an earthquake memorial hall in *Kansai* and another who worked in a big retail chain store in Tokyo. All of these establishments are considered to be part of the service sector and a female-dominated field (See Chapter 3). I define my field as Japan's dynamic, multiculturalizing, and gendered hospitality sector. Due to the fact that this study's emphasis is on the hospitality sector and that I did not have a chance to visit other establishments personally, I refrain from describing them in detail and focus on contextualizing the concept of *ryokan*.

Ryokan originates from Japan and is a unique thing in Japan. *Ryokan*s focus on customer service much like hotels. However, a *ryokan* differs from a hotel in the sense of its customer service style. In most cases, Japanese traditional inns might go very far to show the traditional spirit of Japanese hospitality (おもてなし *omotenashi*). *Omotenashi* is the dominant service concept in the Japanese-style hospitality. *Ryokan*s are the main providers of *omotenashi*, making it their selling point (Alalsheikh 2016, 62; Morishita 2015, 157). *Omotenashi* manifests conservative ideals and history that is related to the Japanese mindset and philosophy to selflessly care wholeheartedly for customers; it might be argued that they go all out to make customers' experiences unforgettable. *Ryokan* belongs to the hospitality sector and employs a significant number of women. What piqued my interest was the fact that it had a great number of women working there, of which many were foreigners just like myself. As around two-thirds of the *ryokan* staff were women, it can be deduced that the service industry, which a hospitality business like *ryokan* represents, is a very gendered domain (See Chapter 6).

In particular, women's working conditions and rights differ from those of men's and women's engagement in care-related positions is taken for granted. Another gender-related issue is that the wages for care-related work are significantly lower than in other sectors. Furthermore, besides working and contributing to society, women are also expected to manage other fields related to domestic work and childrearing in Japan (e.g., Lee 2010; Bishop 2002; Kohara and Bipasha 2021). Overall, there also seems to be a lack of studies about foreign women who

[13] In traditional Japanese Houses, it is common to sleep and eat on the *tatami* mat floor (畳), and there are no elevators so climbing many stairs is inevitable and et cetera.

engage in the service industry as many of the current research focuses on female labor in the entertainment and sex industry such as working at hostess clubs (e.g., Aoyama 2009; Kamise 2013). These issues, together with the troubles of implementing multiculturalism and integrating foreign residents in Japan, make this study topical and relevant to pursue. Thus, I consider my study to be situated in Japan's gendered service industry and the current context of internationalising Japan.

4.1.2 The Original Plan and Adjustments

In the beginning stages of this research, I had planned to utilize participant observation together with one-to-one open-ended interviews among non-Japanese female workers in Japan's service sector. Through participant observation, I hoped to situate myself in the working environment of these women, who would be my study subjects, because I expected that an ethnographic study would help me access experiential perspectives of foreign forwards in the local context. This could allow me to compare the data because I would have seen and experienced similar circumstances myself. Furthermore, participating in their everyday lives could cultivate our relations and ease any possible power relations that might have formed due to the rigid researcher–researched dichotomy (See 4.3). Participant observation also offers a natural form of exchange between individuals as researchers share the same tasks with the research participants as equals. It could provide more spontaneous data as participants conduct their normal daily duties without feeling reservation because of the familiar environment, because getting data from marginalized foreign workers could have been difficult simply by interviewing.

I considered my initial experience of working at the ryokan as my first "fieldwork experience", but as my first "fieldwork" happened before the official start of this research, I wanted to conduct another solely for data acquisition in mind. However, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic made it difficult to travel and enter Japan for the second fieldwork opportunity and the method to acquire data had to be switched solely to conduct semi-structured online interviews. I decided to concentrate on quality over quantity in data collection as I wanted to understand more deeply the realities of foreign female workers in Japan. Qualitative research entails analyzing and collecting non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio data to understand concepts, research subjects' experiences or their opinions (Gibson and Brown 2009). Qualitative research enables amassing comprehensive insights

about an issue or generating new ideas for the research itself. I perceived that interview as a method would suit my purpose best because an interview innately provides qualitative and extensive data and is flexible to organize. In addition, interviews are also an insightful way to observe the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the participants. Interviews are split into three main categories which are structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Robson 2002, 70). I deemed a semi-structured interview being the most convenient approach for my research. Semi-structured interviews as consist of specified key themes which are formulated to key questions (Gibson and Brown 2009). He lists the strength of the semi-structured model being the research flexibility; researchers try to shape the pre-defined interests into topics and if necessary, change the order of questions or even research themes based on the natural flow of the conversation rather than pressuring the interviewee to fit their ideas into pre-defined order of question (Gibson and Brown 2009) Semi-structured interviews are conducted with one respondent at a time and includes a blend of open- and closed-ended question together with possible follow-up questions (Adams 2015). Via an open-ended interview situation, it is easier to access the "experimental" or "insightful" perspective of the informants as they offer their own narrative, thus in my opinion being an adequate method for obtaining quality data. As my research themes and topics are sensitive in certain cases because of Japan's history of exploiting foreign workers, semi-structured interview seems like an excellent way for me to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere to discuss difficult topics.

Another beneficial trait of a semi-structured interview is the opportunity for the less formal distinction between researcher and research subject (Gibson and Brown 2009). Holstein and Gubrium (1995, in Gibson and Brown 2009) point out that the less formality creates a "climate of mutual disclosure" between researcher and research subject by allowing the interviewee to have a significant involvement in how the conversation develops, thus creating "the creative interview". Gibson (2009) adds that this way removes the interactional barriers making the researcher an "objective outsider". I perceive this as an asset as my interviewee can freely share his or her own narrative in situations they deem safe and confidential because of the less formal atmosphere and conversational style. Furthermore, Adams (2015) reminds that one-on-one semi-structured interviews are at their strongest when the researcher needs to ask possibly probing questions on topics that respondents are reserved to answer among peers in group interviews. The interviewer can also observe the body language and the reactions of the interviewed persons. In addition, in a situation where the informants would not be fluent in the interview language, talking might be easier for them in comparison to a written format.

Although, compared to other methods the semi-structured interviews can prove to be more labor intensive and time-consuming and researchers need to be well-versed and sensitive about relevant substantive issues (Adams 2015).

Despite my fears that the changes in data acquisition methods would cause me problems, the changes were not too drastic and time-consuming, and the new situation helped me methodologically more than if I had followed the original plan. I was concerned about the possible fieldwork and all the technicalities; if the researcher does not build an applicable research plan before entering the field, the fieldwork might not bring any remarkable findings or data. For example, I would have to plan accurately the whole timeline for the fieldwork to be efficient and successful, contact the *ryokan*, ask their permission to work there once more and possibly need to answer their questions and assure any concerns that my presence and observation would bring forth. In addition, this kind of ethnographical participant observation would have required me to stay in Japan for months to access the relevant data, and in that case, I would have had to apply for a research travel grant to cover the cost of travel and living, not to talk about the travel in the *Kansai* area which would have been expensive if I could not have stayed in the vicinity of my field.[14] Furthermore, the new online approach provided me with the possibility to focus on research participants' narratives, concentrate on collecting data and nurture the ties with my informants because I did not need to worry about other trivialities which would restrict my time. These aspects would not have come across as multi-faceted via a face-to-face approach.

Consequently, the forced reconsideration of my methods increased my data collection efficiency so that I did not have to travel between possible fields, curtailed the time needed for my data collecting from months to a couple of interview sessions and flexibility in conducting the research in general. However, it must be acknowledged that the new online method does not replace the importance of a real fieldwork experience and the density of data it provides. In contrast, participant observation would have provided me with the opportunity to perceive them in the context of Japanese work life and all the social hierarchies and small nuances in behaviour which is now lost to me due to the change of method. There are numerous limitations in this new method, and it will not provide me with complete data which I would have acquired through utilizing both the participant observation and the semi-structured

[14] One way trip from the nearest big city to the tourist location where the *ryokan* is situated is around 1000¥ which is around 10€.

interviews. Collecting richer data and materials through fieldwork in hospitality industry is an opportunity for a future endeavour.

4.1.3 The Researcher's Own Experiences of Working at a Traditional *Ryokan*

Despite being unable to conduct the second fieldwork due to the effects of corona pandemic, I was surprised by how much my previous internship experience from the summer of 2019 helped me to understand my informants. In retrospect, because I had gone through similar types of work, I could effortlessly parallel their thoughts with my own experiences. For example, many of the interviewed persons who worked in the hospitality sector put emphasis on the elegance or high-classness of their workplace. I must agree with this notion as I noticed the same things at the time I was working at the *ryokan*. Furthermore, many of the co-workers I had a chance to chat with underlined that the service must be perfect to satisfy the guests' experience. One of the permanent Japanese staff members who was referred to be the expert in *omotenashi*—who I later learned is the *okami* who manages *omotenashi* of the *ryokan*—even took time from her shift to teach me clearer Japanese articulation when welcoming the guests to the hotel and to teach me how to walk, kneel or bow in the right angle while standing or on my knees. She showed me details such as how to fold umbrella correctly (which I never seemed to do correctly despite many tries) or to properly set things so they would be at peak beauty. She instructed me that had to be mindful of my posture and keep your left hand on top of my right hand while bowing as right as the dominant hand is also used in fights, so it is "an act of submission" to show your unthreatening posture to welcome customers in. I was also coached to kneel delicately and show respect when caring for the shoes the customers took off at the entrance, or if I was carrying guests' luggage to their rooms, I had to set the luggage down carefully. Every time a guest arrived, we had to go wait for their car to arrive and bow and wish them welcome; we also had to reprise it when guests left by bowing while their car drove away, and we were only allowed to return inside when the car passengers couldn't see us anymore. Also, I was told that you cannot run at work or look that you are in a hurry, so if a guest is walking by you need to stop everything you are doing and greet them with a bow.

I also remember how many of these meticulously conducted tasks resembled household chores; together with a Korean girl I had to sweep the entrance of any leaves; I had to use a sticker roll to clean the onsen area of any strings of hair; and to clean and serve the dishes and

carry meals to the guest rooms. As discussed in Chapter 3, much of the work conducted at the service sector reminds me of the work women are expected to provide in the household domain as they are associated as caregivers. One of the foreign workers whom I did not manage to interview for my thesis but with whom I spent a lot of time and shifts together commented many times about this aspect of meticulousness. She said that she feels that the work is meaningless or pointless and too repetitive and meticulous. As an example, she cited that the customer will not notice if their slippers are one centimetre off or the fold on the curtains is not perfectly folded to a symmetrical position. She was ethnically Chinese and had previously worked in Europe where the service was done "laxer", so she did not understand the Japanese mindset to overdo it. This experience helped her to make up her mind to quit working at the *ryokan* and move back home. She told me about her decision in secret and made me to promise that I would not tell others of her decision before she had settled the official procedures with the company's CEO. She also mentioned another reason for leaving Japan being that the salary is too low compared to the effort she had to put up at work. This resulted in a lot of frustration on her part as she wasn't satisfied with her work and wanted a change in atmosphere.

During the internship, I lived in a two-story dorm house which was located within walking distance from the *ryokan*. Three of my interviewed persons have lived in the same dorm and it was reserved solely for the female workers of the *ryokan*. By the time of the interview, two of the research subjects had already moved away. The *ryokan* also had at least one dormitory reserved for the male workers, but I never got to know its location. This kind of strict split between genders was also common in the exchange universities I attended which I found fascinating. As discussed in Chapter 3, the gendered domains show in all layers of Japanese society, even in the labor market, so it isn't particularly unusual. I shared a room with another trainee, but the other rooms accommodated one worker each. At the time I lived there the dorm only hosted foreign workers; the Japanese workers lived in their own apartment. The dormitory residents shared information related to the housing via a group chat which was managed by a Japanese contact person. This contact person, Hanako (pseudonym), was responsible for the property and housing, so she informed the residents of any relevant information like coming maintenance or the cleaning days for the joint areas. I remember Hanako living nearby as I had to message her one time to ask someone to come to fix my room's stove. Living at the dorm was a very communal experience; sometimes my neighbours knocked on my door to ask if I wanted to eat dinner together or go sightseeing on our free

day. The communality between *ryokan* workers was also imminent in the custom to wish your colleagues thank you for hard work, "*otsukaresama desu*" (お疲れ様です), every time you walked past them or left work.

4.2 The Technicalities: Conducting Research in the Hospitality Industry

4.2.1 Accessing the Field and Study Concerns

The informant group, the female foreign workers in Japan's service industry, was chosen after carefully considering its relevance to this study, and the informants were narrowed down after pinpointing the research focus. Ali (2014) points out that even a single woman's empirical reality can unveil deep and complex understanding of changes and power dynamics occurring at society's micro levels. Following this logic, in this research I aim for quality instead of quantity and concentrate on fewer informants in order to collect comprehensive data. The informant group was chosen for two reasons. First, it was partly decided based on the ease of data acquisition through my previously established relations in the field. I was interested in including informants from diverse backgrounds and perspectives which I deemed that was possible only while having informants whose age, occupation, nationality, experiences et cetera varied. Also, I expected them to potentially be able to answer the research questions and thus give me access to valuable data. Including informants from various backgrounds gives me a broader and in-depth perspective on my focus group (foreign women), but by any means I do not want to generalize them to present all of the foreign female workers in Japan.

At first, I was worried about conducting interviews among service industry workers as Japan has a history of exploiting and abuse of foreign workers which has also drawn immense media attention. Following this logic, some of the foreign female workers at the hospitality industry I interviewed could have experienced this delicate and vulnerable situation. In addition, as some of the interview questions were very private, I worried that they would put my interviewees in an unpleasant situation where they would be hesitant to answer them for fear of the information spreading and affecting their situation. As for the research subjects, my first goal was to access at least four informants, though I acknowledged that five would be the most ideal number for a qualitative study. I contacted four of my ex-co-workers of which two readily resumed contact with me. I was concerned whether my two work colleagues who served as my first informants would provide me with enough information or forward me to

new contacts. In the end, my fears were uncalled for, and I could reach six informants which was more than I had anticipated or planned to have. I was very surprised that they were all of different nationalities, but around the same age and legal status. Four of the interviewees previously knew me, but with the rest of them I created lasting connections so that we can still stay in touch; we even promised to meet after the pandemic receded.

However, as my requirements for informants were female foreign workers in Japan, I feel like the pandemic situation had resulted in fewer people working in Japan, which in turn reduced the sample size. In addition, my informants themselves might have known more foreigners who have worked in Japan, but I was under the impression that they themselves were making some combing out to choose the acquaintances who would most likely agree to take part in my research. If I used more time and effort, I predict that I could have gotten even more contacts. In the end, I decided against it due to time restrictions and the vast amount of data that I had already received. I had trouble including the current gathered data in my thesis to give it justice, and with an even larger sample, it would be nigh impossible to achieve.

Overall, of the six foreign female workers, two had already left Japan and one returned home briefly after the interviews. All had experience in female-dominated service sector work. Two of the informants came from Europe and four of them were Asian by ethnicity. Five of them had worked in the *Kansai* region and one in Tokyo metropolitan area. I was positively surprised by how reciprocal our exchange was and how openly my informants wanted to share information with me about their work; they also spoke their minds on issues they had had while living and working in Japan. I sometimes had to press for more detailed answers, but all in all, I was very delighted with how readily they provided detailed information and honest opinions to me or showed me the way forward for further study subjects. It was also surprising that most of the interviewees thanked me for the possibility to share their own stories with me. One of the most important aspects is the trust between the researcher and the research participants. This includes that the data will be handled accordingly and that I value their confidentiality and willingness to provide me with rich data. Ensuring the confidentiality of the informants in this study, pseudonyms for the informants will be used.

Table 1: Participant Information

Enkhtuya	29	Mongolian	*Ryokan*	Full-time	Five years working visa	Yes
Minjun	27	South Korean	*Ryokan*	Full-time	Three years working visa	No
Meiling	22	Taiwanese	*Ryokan*	Full-time	Working visa	No
Lina	31	Lithuanian	Hotel	Full-time	Working visa (Humanities)	Yes
Amy	21	Malaysian	Museum	Part-time	Student visa with working permission	Yes
Maria	25	Finnish	Retail store	Part-time	Student visa with working permission	No

4.2.2 The Data Collection Method

As stated earlier, I approached the data collecting method via semi-structured interviews and prepared a couple of discussion themes beforehand; it would be left to my study subjects' own judgement how much they wanted to share or if they wanted to refrain from answering to certain themes. I decided that my research sample is the foreign female workers because of my own previous experience of working at Japan's service sector. I did not delimit the age, marital status, or other similar factors of the research subjects as I wanted to acquire multiple perspectives and as rich data as possible. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, sampling is defined to be "the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample".[15] Following this trail of thought, it can be partly argued that the initial sampling was achieved by utilizing purposive sampling. Suen, Huang and Lee (2014) explain that this technique is

[15] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Sample."

utilized by researchers to "carefully select subjects based on study purpose with the expectation that each participant will provide unique and rich information of value to the study". However, it is important to highlight that this method is extremely vulnerable to creating biases because the researcher tries to artificially interfere with the process. Because my subjects share common traits, such as being foreigners in Japan and having work experience in the service sector, it could be argued that I have on some parts employed this method. However, my sampling also includes aspects of convenience sampling. According to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016, 2), the researcher may also choose subjects who are conveniently accessible and thus the most likely to be included in the study. Due to the pandemic situation and lockdowns, conducting online interviews was most convenient for me because of the geographic distance separating me from my potential research participants. Additionally, the fact that I had previous beneficial connections to the field served not only as a prerequisite for my study, but arguably suited me methodologically the best in light of convenience sampling as I had existing accessible entry points to my field. Additionally, I had intended to employ the snowball sampling method. This snowball sampling relies on the current informants who among their social circles will introduce the researcher to new potential research subjects (Emerson 2015, 166). This method is deemed to help a researcher gather the desired number of research participants (Emerson 2015, 166). It is noteworthy that both the convenience and snowball sampling might end up targeting participants from the same geographical area, similar ethnic background or socioeconomical status (Emerson 2015, 166). This might serve as a shortcoming for specific type of research; however, as I specifically wanted to reach female foreign workers in Japan's hospitality sector, luckily this aspect did not hinder my acquisition of extensive data.

Considering the previously mentioned points, I relied on my existing contacts with the staff of the *ryokan* to access my informants. An informant I have no personal ties with might be more inclined to refuse attending an interview with an unknown "prying" researcher. In this regard I considered myself privileged to already have ties to the field. To gather the necessary information, I messaged my ex-co-workers through a social media messaging app called LINE and began collecting the contact details, some of which I had lost. Once I was able to connect with two of my foreign colleagues via the *ryokan*'s Japanese HR specialist, then I proceeded to strike up mundane conversations with them for several months. The reason for such conversations revolved around my concern that my sudden request would make my contacts feel awkward or that I would exploit our relationship to gain sensitive knowledge;

thus, I deemed it necessary to rekindle the relations before approaching them with an idea of interview. My next step was to request their consent as my informants and to schedule appointments for multiple interviews. All the important documents were passed through email with additional information sent over LINE or other preferred messenger applications. After the interviews, I decided to use snowball sampling method and ask these two initial informants whether they know anyone else who has worked in Japan and whether they would be willing to participate in this study. With this method, I could access two new informants. The rest of the study subjects whom I decided to include in my study were my friends. Our status as friends made it easier to ask their cooperation directly. The interview participants were asked to sign the "Consent form for Interview and Research Cooperation" before the interviews.

During the time of the pandemic, I assumed that it is easier to schedule longer online appointments because people stay at home if they have free time. My deduction was somewhat accurate, and informants were mostly forced to stay at home because of restrictions. If the pandemic situation allowed physical working, I had to wait for some of the informants to schedule time for the interviews as they had busy work schedules and few days off. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six persons via ZOOM from September 2021 until November 2022. Adams (2015) points out that ideally the maximum length of a semi-structured interview is one hour as it would keep both interviewee and interviewer's fatigues at minimum. However, despite trying to keep the interview sessions around 30 minutes, the length of my interviews strongly depended on how long each participant wanted to talk about the interview topics. All of the participants were interviewed twice, and the length of the interviews varied from half an hour to almost two-hour. The interview participants could choose freely whether they would like to conduct the interviews in Japanese or English. Because most of the interviewed persons were not confident in the English language, most of the interviews were done in Japanese.

As I am not a native Japanese speaker, I asked permission to record the interview sessions as I was afraid that I might miss important details or misinterpret the data if there came up any terms I was unfamiliar with. This method proved very helpful as some of the interview topics had very specialized vocabulary and the discussions roamed quite freely, sometimes going in unexpected directions. Also, as the informants weren't native speakers either, it was a helpful way to cross-check the information and understand the discussions and context. I transcribed the interviews and translated the ones which were in Japanese into English by myself with

occasional help from my thesis supervisor. Gibson (in Gibson and Brown 2009) stresses that employing recording is decided based on the deemed analytical usefulness but without forgetting the ethical and practical issues involved. He adds that audio and video as data are inherently intrusive as they thoroughly record the practices or performances of research subjects (Gibson and Brown 2009). Generally, video data is harder to anonymize than audio data (Gibson and Brown 2009). To ensure confidentially, it is highly recommended to anonymize, store, and handle the data with utmost care.

4.2.3 The Data Coding and Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (in Gibson and Brown 2009) characterize analysis as involving generating generalized themes from which point of view researchers scrutinize the relationships between components of data. Gibbs (2007) notes that a more generic definition of analysis can be conceptualized as a structure implicating an interest with a reference to relationships and themes. I analyzed my data through thematic analysis, which involves searching for repeated patterns or themes within a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, 86). Thematic analysis is argued to be a foundational method for qualitative research as it categorizes and explains data sets in rich descriptions, but frequently also interprets aspects of the research topic itself (Braun and Clarke 2006, 78¬79).

The next step after the interviews was to transform the audio recordings into transcripts. The interviews conducted in Japanese had to be transcribed subsequently into English. Gibson (in Gibson and Brown 2009) reminds us that as a form of representation, transcripts must be examined as such. He continues that transcribing is not just writing down what participants said or how they acted but it also involves shaping analytic judgements about what to represent and how to do it. By this he means that scholars make judgements on which features such as action, interaction, or talk they focus on, thus deciding to put emphasis on a certain part in the analysis. To put it simply, data is the material gathered during the research when the transcript can be summarized as a representation of the research data (Gibson and Brown 2009). As warned by Adams (2015), making a transcript of multiple semi-structured interviews was an arduous task and required many hours of work. Nevertheless, despite its tediousness, it is also a brilliant way for a researcher to familiarize himself or herself with the collected data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87).

However, what was even more time-consuming was the coding and analyzing the transcript. As previously mentioned, I employed thematic analysis to search for themes related to my research questions. Fortunately, because I had already sorted the interview questions into themes, it was easier to tackle forming smaller categories, sub-categories, or codes. Coding is a method used to recognize certain patterns in research data (Saldaña 2009, 3). I performed the initial coding manually, meaning that I coded my data on hard-copy printouts which are the recommended platform for first-time or small-scale studies (Saldaña 2009, 22), and later moved the findings to an Excel file for further analysis. Coding requires the scholar to identify and document passages of transcript text or other types of data to form a theoretical or descriptive theory (Gibbs 2007; Saldaña 2009, 8). In short, coding is method of categorizing or indexing research findings to create a framework of ideas about the topic (Gibbs 2007). It is crucial to consider that when a researcher categorizes the found patterns, they must be mindful of the fact that they might group patterns together not just based on the likeness, but because a shared common aspect, even though dissimilarities also belong to commonality (Saldaña 2009, 6). During the coding process, I opted to emphasize aspects linked with gender roles, care work, hospitality (*omotenashi*) and uniqueness. From the invented categories or codes, I started to create a hypothesis and eventually a solid theory (Saldaña 2009, 12).

4.3 Methodological Discussion: The Researcher's Positionality

The researcher needs to be mindful of his or her own positionality while conducting research. I perceive it to be one of the most important aspects of research and closely tied to the ethics of research. For example, researchers should always give voice to their chosen informant group and objectively present the findings. Thus, the researcher cannot abuse the innate power-relations stemming from the researcher-researched dichotomy. Ali (2014) explains that empowering informants is neither defiance of coercion or standard norms but instead it is about making the informants feel safe and secure within the specific situation. Furthermore, a non-exploitative researcher can produce empowering, objective, and useful research about their informant group (Pillow 2003 in Ali 2015). In this light I wanted to strive to create an atmosphere in my interviews in which my informants feel safe to share information with me so that I am not using my power to coerce information out of them. However, there are also occurrences where this traditional top-down power relations model where a powerful

researcher who exploits a powerless observation group is turned upside down. In Ali's example, one of her informants used power over her by continuously rescheduling interview appointments and thus withholding precious information needed for the research. Therefore, power relations consist of numerous factors, and it is suggested to "look beyond the binary constructions of researched/powerless and researcher/powerful model (Ali 2015). This paper tries to contribute to the discussion of the researcher's positionality in a way in which the research subjects and researcher were both outsiders of mainland culture and customs and the cross-cultural narrative was conducted online which is a context not used too often. However, the COVID-19 pandemic gave researchers push to experience this type of cross-cultural online research which might be used more in the future.

Philosopher Edmund Husserl defined the term "intersubjectivity" to refer to both conscious and unconscious feelings or thoughts between two subjects (Cooper-White 2014). Intersubjectivity is widely used in social sciences because its diverse utility such as "a cognitive agreement between individuals or groups" (Cooper-White 2014). Objectivity is ideal for the research, but it is nearly impossible to achieve because humans tend to have since what we understand, observe, and determine are always affected by our own life experiences and "that is necessary to maintain an attachment between the researcher and the study" (McKingley 2017, 37). For a non-native researcher it might be challenging to comprehend a culturally different field which they are not part of. To achieve objectivity and not hastily interpret data based on the researcher's own predetermined agenda, attitude or conception, the researcher can attempt to create objectivity by removing the prior knowledge and possible prejudices (McKingley 2017, 37). In order to be objective and not influence the researched social group, the researcher might opt for "invisibleness" (Moore 2012). Participating as an invisible individual in research seems tempting, but it rarely succeeds. For instance, a researcher entering the setting without prior introduction or consultation itself is an act of inducing authority, and people are never oblivious to the presence of an observer (Moore 2012). Moreover, in an interview as well as while observing, the researcher might accidentally enforce his or her stronger position by sitting behind the observed group where they cannot see their observer (Moore 2012). Also, in my opinion not taking any contact or not participating in the data gathering situation even in the simple way of asking questions can undermine the researcher's more powerful authority and status by ignoring those in a weaker position. Applying Ali's (2014) perspective of the researcher's positionality to my study, I would like to gain a better understanding of the particular power hierarchies that are

at play between foreigners and Japanese nationals as well as the context and micro-level changes that the foreign presence brings to the communities. She points out that even "a single woman's story" can give a more intricated and deeper understanding of "the power dynamics and the related changes at micro levels of the society" (Groot, Hodgetts and Leggat-Cook 2011 in Ali 2014). According to this logic, by interviewing even one female service industry worker I would already acquire some details about the community, implications of challenges experienced by female foreign workers, the reality of the foreign workers and the changes occurring at society's micro level.

In addition, it is also important to consider the power relations that occur in the field between the researcher and research participants. By this I mean researcher's "insiderness" or "outsiderness" in relation to the group he or she is researching. There are various methods to categorize an insider or outsider, but one common way is to classify an insider as "native" and an outsider as "non-native" or "foreigner" to the society he or she is researching. In the field of anthropology, this polarizing paradigm has been considered "disciplinary wisdom" (Narayan 2003, 285). According to this logic, the "regular" (outsider) researchers study others whose "alien cultural words" must be precisely known (Narayan 2003, 285). In addition, as an outsider a non-native researcher might have a harder time gaining entry to the field. As an insider, gaining entry to the field might be easier due to shared cultural and ethnic background, and previously especially in the field of anthropology those researchers who were deemed "native" were believed to provide an "insider's perspective" from the position of intimate affinity which was authentic and unproblematic (Narayan 2003, 286). However, lately these kinds of views have been challenged, with people proposing that native and non-native polarization should be abandoned (Narayan 2003, 287; Lu and Hodge 2019). In addition, in the field of anthropological ethnography and traditional sociology, separating researcher into insider-outsider categories are declared to be too shallow and inadequate to truly give insight into the "multi-dimensional interactions in which field researchers engage" (e.g., Lincoln and Cannella 2009; Mullings 1999; Subreenduths and Rhee 2010 in Lu and Hidge 2019). As Narayan (2003, 285) argues, "culture is not homogenous, a society differentiated, and a professional identity that involves problematizing lived reality inevitably creates a distance". Because of the diverse society, the most professional native researcher cannot understand his or her native culture and society wholly (Aguilar 1981 in Narayan 2003, 295). Therefore, it cannot be assumed "nativeness" automatically deems research objective or unproblematic, and even a non-native researcher's narrative (perspective) can be

as valid and authentic. Nevertheless, even though the native-non-native dichotomy is outdated, in this chapter I will succinctly utilize the native-non-native dichotomy to discuss how my entry and methods to access the field differed from that of a native researcher and what kind of challenges or advantages my background gave me. Furthermore, I will also utilize the concept of positionality to "emphasize that the production and understanding of knowledge in research are shaped by and also shaping the way researchers see themselves and are seen by others, and the agentive role researchers play within varied social contexts and structures" (Lu and Hodge 2019).

The issues of researcher's positivity are unveiled most notably when researchers must rethink their approach or readjust their methodology while confronting tensions in the interactions with researched people (Lu and Hodge 2019). Ali (2014) encountered tension in the field and points out that even though as a researcher she shared cultural and ethnic aspects with her informants like language and ethnic background, thus considered native in the society, the small differences in background and opinions eventually transformed her to an outsider of the group. Furthermore, because of her indigenous background, the informants worried that their personal information would leak whereas if the researcher were considered a foreigner to the society, he or she would leave the country with the information (Ali 2014). According to this logic, I as a non-native researcher have an advantage compared to native researchers in the sense that I might be perceived trustworthy by my informants as I have fewer ties with society and will leave the field with my acquired knowledge and not abuse them by using the information against them. In addition, when I first acquainted myself with my informants during my internship period, I shared the aspect of "foreignness" with my informants because we all did not belong to mainstream Japanese society. However, while my informants shared cultural and ethnical foreignness in Japan, they also seemed to belong to their work community because of their job contracts and ties. In retrospect, I as an internship trainee felt like an outsider to the work community because of my different background (entering the workplace due to my university's social connections) and because I was not a permanent employee but left the community quite soon. Thus, I was an insider and outsider to the work community at the same time. However, it must be acknowledged that through continuous engagement within a relationship of reciprocity, relationships, and ties between a stranger (outsider) and the observed can develop and may differentiate from the initial status/position (Narayan 2003, 300). Taking these points into consideration, cross-cultural studies, which my research also represents, are a fortuitous and productive method for discussions about

positionality as participants from various diverging cultural and language backgrounds come into contact (Lu and Hodge 2019).

Another advantage or asset I bring to the field is my position as a woman. My informants and I were all female, which enabled easier interactions and nurturing ties due to shared (features in) womanhood. The informants seemed less hesitant and suspicious of my intentions, and they felt more comfortable with helping and sharing information with a younger woman. Nonetheless, even though in some cases the "insider" or the "native" status is a significant way to enter the field, it is noteworthy to realize that a researcher's positionality is not set in stone and the identity must be debated throughout the process (Ali 2015). Narayan (2003, 285–286) acknowledges that certain factors such as class, gender, and race might overcome the associated cultural identity related to insider or outsider position. She also asserts that the research's focus should be in the "quality of relations" with the people represented in the study, meaning that are they treated as means to an end to acquire information and underlying researcher's own opinion or are they perceived and accepted as individuals who have opinions, dilemmas, and potential criticism towards researcher's "professional enterprise" (Narayan 2003, 286). Furthermore, Narayan emphasizes that a non-native anthropologist can bring in different textures by nurturing the already-formed ties and can even become bicultural through years of continuous fieldwork (2003, 293–294). McKinley (2017, 44) confirms that being a Western (outsider) researcher in Japan is not an advantage, but also is not a disadvantage or limitation. Rather, he argues that by abandoning positivism and embracing constructionist theory – in other words, "to discover the ways that individuals and groups create their perceived reality" – supported by recognizing definable perspective gives Western researchers the much-needed objectivity (McKinley 2017, 44).

It is important to point out that in some cases of qualitative research, the researcher is already a member of the researched social group and thus a "native" or "insider" even before the study has begun (Moore, 2012). Consequently, it is argued that as qualitative research blurs the borders of the insider-outsider categories', so it would be better to study less by "paradigmatic positions" and more from "the physical and psychological distance from the phenomenon" (Moore 2012). In qualitative research, some common power imbalances which create ethical issues might stem from the exploitation of relationships while trying to pass own agenda and the abuse of the power imbalance incurring from the entry into the field (Moore 2012). These points need to be meticulously scrutinized to avoid them.

5 An Analysis of "Unique" Japaneseness—Through National-Nostalgia-Tinted Glasses

This chapter will discuss the research data and findings. This chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, Japan's soft power and the "Cool Japan" strategy and its utilization in attracting foreign workers to Japan will be considered. Secondly, the "theories of Japaneseness" (日本人論 *Nihonjinron*); in spite of *Nihonjinron* having been proven obsolete (Befu 2001; Lie 2001), the innate contradictory nature (Burgess 2007; Sugimoto 1999) and nationalist connotations (Befu 2001; Burgess 2007; Lie 2001) of the theory, it has discreetly integrated itself to be a part of the modern Japanese society and still hold significant relevance in Japanese policymaking (e.g., Burgess 2007; Shani 2019, 1119; Sugimoto 1999; Taira 2019). Therefore, it is important to discuss *Nihonjinron* from the viewpoint of creating obstacles for integration and the realization of *tabunka kyōsei* society (多文化共生社会). Thirdly, the societal obstacles and reasons for lacking integration of foreigners in Japan are studied via the data obtained from the interviews.

5.1 Japan's Soft Power and "Cool Japan"

National politics and power are separate. However, contemporary power revolves around money and following this change the power has shifted to the global market (Valaskivi 2013). No country is an exception if they want to benefit from foreign opportunities (e.g., Ferrarini 2012, 127; Ozturk, Joiner and Cavusgil 2015, 120). During Japan's first labor shortages in the 1970s, Japan rejected the possibility to import foreign workers to counterweight the shortage, but contemporary Japanese society does not have that option anymore should the world's third largest economy want to meet its economic needs and counter the demographic crisis (Graburn, Ertl, and Tierney 2008; Morita 2018). In 1984, Japan joined the trend of globalization when Prime Minister Nakasone pledged in his speech that Japan would become an international country and introduce new *kokusaika* policies (e.g., Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006; Flowers 2012). *Kokusaika*, often simply translated as "internationalization", is a complex term, which has little to do with producing more international Japan and letting Japanese companies enter international markets. Rather it was launched to improve international comprehension of Japan abroad and to expose Japanese people to foreign cultures (Flowers 2012; Ishiwata 2011, 1609). This desire was intended to be achieved

through programs which would recruit more foreign graduates and exchange students to Japan and encourage Japanese nationals to travel abroad (Flowers 2012).

However, Japan's image and reputation were tarnished after the Second World War and Japan's identity had to be reconstructed to suit the new international order and make Japan more enticing (Iwabuchi 2015; Kowner and Demel 2015, 408; Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169). The Japanese government and its institutions have gone to great lengths in trying to influence Japan's image abroad (Sugimoto 1999, 87). To achieve this goal, the Japanese government needed to alleviate the country's suffering image which had turned unfavorably hostile after the second World War (Iwabuchi 2015). Instead of "hard power" i.e., influencing other countries via forceful means, globalization offered Japan an option to turn to "soft power", i.e., a governmental strategy to influence others through cultural diplomacy (Agyeiwaah, Suntikul and Shan 2019; Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013). The term soft power was coined by Joseph S. Nye, and it focuses on cultural exchange and promotion of preferred national image by exportation of various cultural commodities (Iwabuchi 2015). The prevailing cultural tools employed are listed as traditional culture, language education, intellectual exchange and people-to-people exchange programs. These tools act as medium to coerce other countries to be more sympathetic towards Japan through circulation of Japanese culture and values (Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013). Japan is observed to have transformed into "a soft power superpower" with the ability to attract others with cultural resources as a medium (Bukh 2014, 462).

In order to transform into the so-called soft power superpower, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外務省 *Gaimushō*) has engaged in two cultural diplomatic strategies: public diplomacy and soft power (Iwabuchi 2015). Public diplomacy is defined to increase the international understanding of Japan's disposition on issues and act directly on the international stage through effective publicity (Iwabuchi 2015). The Japanese government established numerous institutions to advertise Japanese media and culture, e.g., the Committee for Tourism Nation (2003) and the Council for the Promotion of International Exchange (2006) to name a few (Iwabuchi 2015). Following these events, the "Cool Japan" policy was formed to cover Japan's aim to shape perceptions of Japan in their specified areas of interest (Nye 1990 in Agyeiwaah, Suntikul and Shan 2019; Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013). Even though none of the Japanese ministries have a systematic cultural policy, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (経済産業省 *Keizaisangyōshō*) proceeded to establish the "Cool Japan" promotion office in 2010, followed by the Cabinet Secretariat's

"the Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan" in 2013 which was assigned to spread international awareness of not only Japanese media content but also items such as cuisine, fashion and traditional Japanese culture (Agyeiwaah, Suntikul and Shan 2019; Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013).

Lina from Lithuania, who works in a big hotel chain company in the *Kansai* area shares her first impression of Japan and Japanese people and why she feels attached to Japan, describing them in amendable terms which is in significant contrast to Japan's wartime military aggression:

> Attached to home and living, it is (the feeling) not from people, it is from a place. It's like warm shrines, temples, it is really like another world, mythological land of the gods, so it is an interesting country. (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

It seems that the Japanese government has been successfully utilizing soft power to turn Japan's image to one of a more peace loving and harmonious society (Kowner and Demel 2015, 407–408). In Lina's mind Japan has transformed into a warm and mysterious land of supernatural entities and traditional culture. My informant Enkhtuya, who has worked in Japan's service sector for nine years by the time of the interview, recounts her own initial perceptions of Japan as a country:

> I thought Japan is respectful and clean country. I think so even now but what else… There is a lot of manga and ninjas, and… There are izakaya, you can watch anime from television (…) (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Without any doubt, one of the most popular aspects in the "Cool Japan" strategy is Japanese popular culture as Japanese anime and manga have enthralled international audiences. Joseph S. Nye theorizes popular culture divulging conceptions about a country's values and regards it to be exceptionally influential in shaping people's perceptions on norms, values and the understanding of a culture's different facets (Nye 1990 in Agyeiwaah, Suntikul and Shan 2019). Nye claims that Japan has the greatest soft power potential compared to any other Asian country (Akaha 2005, 67). Goldstein-Gidoni, who studied the consumption and production of Japanese culture on international markets, perceives that despite the fact that "Japanese culture" is principally manufactured in Japan for a local audience, the cultural products later travel abroad (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005, 174). It is noted, that despite Japanese cultural soft power like anime playing a crucial part in motivating tourists to visit Japan, the actual extent to which Japan's soft power influences the decision to travel to Japan has not had a lot of attention in research (Agyeiwaah, Suntikul and Shan 2019). However, in contrast

to the limitations of lacking empirical studies, at least two of my informants revealed that the image of Japan conveyed through Japanese pop culture was an important factor in deciding whether to come to Japan. Lina from Lithuania feels nostalgic about her first encounter with Japanese culture and how it influenced her decision:

> In my case, during my childhood days (sic), my brother and I watched "Dragon Ball" and became interested in Japanese culture. After my studies at (sic) Lithuania and exchange year in [University One], I really felt nostalgic towards Japan. I badly wanted to come back so I chose to study again at [University Two] about (sic) Japanese culture (…) I was thinking "how can I come back, I miss that, I miss onsen and karaoke". (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Lina's opinion is shared by Maria who worked in a big chain retail shop complex during her student exchange. Her motivation to apply to Japan was also her love for Japanese culture and ambition to become a Japanese popular culture specialist:

> Yes, so I have been a fan of Japanese culture ever since the middle school times, like the gateway was pretty much Japanese manga, anime and video games. I have been a very intense fan, one of the reasons why I… in general, I applied to my current degree because I want to be a Japan popular culture researcher (laughs). So, ever since I started my studies at the university, my dream was to be able to go to Japan for student exchange. (Maria, 25, Finland)

Valaskivi points out that nation branding intends to recognize something essentially unique in a nation compared to others, but at the same time it cannot be too distinguishable of an unfamiliar feature for the audience not to perceive it as positive and "cool" (Valaskivi 2013). The familiar aspects of the Japanese environment and culture seemed to inspire my informants and what they did in their free time. Many of them also highlighted that some things they can only do in Japan. Minjun, a South Korean woman, said that in her opinion, because it is Japan, it is natural to read manga in Japan: "Because it was Japan, I read Japanese manga." (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

Lina continues:

> Back in Lithuania they don't have karaoke (laughs) and onsen and some stuff which Japan has, so it's… some things I can only do in Japan. So now I am starting to appreciate this stuff even more. (…) (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Maria:

> I actually went to this Nightmare before Christmas [anniversary] concert thing, (…) it was a very, very special experience. (…) But also, the fact that such worldwide huge events were just being held in the city I was in, and I could

> relatively easily get there, was really big because you don't get those kinds of things in Finland. (Maria, 25, Finland)

As presented above, Japan seems to have successfully influenced foreign perceptions of itself through cultural diplomacy (see Valaskivi 2013). Various Japanese ministries and institutions have made efforts to entice foreign tourists and labor through the interest which Japanese culture has raised abroad. In reality, these internationalization aims were not a proof of Japan's opening up but observed as a temporary movement and means to protect Japan's cultural borders through promoting Japanese culture and values abroad (Liddicoat 2007, 36–37). This is in line with the fact that national nostalgia is related to protecting the cultural transmission of heritage during times of change like the new global world order (Grainge 1999, 621, 627). However, Japan's soft power vantage position to attract foreign labor is negated by the nation's restrictive immigration policy and cultural bigotry (Akaha 2005, 69). On a transnational level, battling low national self-esteem and the incapability to communicate the strengths of a nation branding are closely linked (Valaskivi 2013). The promotion of "unique Japan" seems to have somewhat been successful as several interview subjects recited that their free time and work was affected by the notion that "these are the things I can only do in Japan". Iwabuchi (2007, in Valaskivi 2013) notes that "brand nationalist" attempts to portray a pre-determined image to the international audience inevitably leads to hiding undesired and uncomfortable features that do not fit the envisioned picture.[16] Moreover, this is a prime example of the self-essentializing Japan has pursued; by highlighting the exceptionality of Japanese culture and creating a visible brand, at the same time national government is setting clear boundaries between insiders (Japanese) and outsiders (foreigners) and deepening the already existing deep binary (Befu 2001, 127; Burgess 2007; Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006; Ishiwata 2011; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 135). The Japanese government's systematic attempts at promoting and propagating its "unique" and unordinary culture internationally brought forth the genre of debates of "Japaneseness" called *Nihonjinron* (Befu 2001, 82). *Nihonjinron*, Japanese "uniqueness" and their relation to contemporary othering and marginalization of the foreigners residing in Japan will be detailed explored in the next part.

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[16] In Japan's case, one could argue it has developed national amnesia to its own multiculturalism during the Imperialist past and continuously avoiding addressing the "foreign presence" in Japan and the problems that government's monoethnic narrative brings (e.g., Demelius 2021; Lie 2001; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020, 118).

5.2 *Nihonjinron* and "Unique" Society

Postwar Japan has drawn a lot of criticism from the West on its economic policies and political issues, the common accusations ranging from hoarding economic benefits to ethnocentrism and parochialism (Befu 2001, 1). Japan has accommodated some of the foreign demands but in turn also turned to cultural exceptionalism, arguing that the Western world does not recognize the Japanese uniqueness stemming from its distinctive history and culture (Befu 2001, 1). Much like national nostalgia's tendency to protect group identity via dividing nation to native and non-native groups (Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; Smeekes and Jetten 2019), this defense mechanism categorizes the West as a collective entity in response to Western allegations, building up a theory of national uniqueness surrounding Japan (Befu 2001; Liddicoat 2007, 37). Born from this convergence of cultures, Japanese mainstream agencies participated in debates on the so-called *Nihonjinron*, translated as "theories of Japaneseness" (Burgess 2007; Morris-Suzuki 2015a; Sugimoto 1999). As previously established, national nostalgia might emerge in a situation where realistic or symbolic threats for ingroup continuity posed by outgroups threaten the individual or group identity (e.g., Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; Smeekes and Jetten 2019), and Japan utilizing *Nihonjinron* to counter Western pressure is no exception (Lie 2001). Despite the name "theories of Japaneseness", *Nihonjinron* is often misunderstood as a scientific theory of scholarly origin even though it is created mainly for popular consumption and for the purpose of controlling the narrative of what Japanese culture includes on behalf of the Japanese institutions (Befu 2001, 3; Burgess 2012; Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012). *Nihonjinron* is demonstrated to be a long obsolete and non-scholarly ideology (Befu 2001; Sugimoto 1999). However, these debates have etched themselves into Japanese society and paved a path to resurgence of cultural nationalism among ordinary citizens due to growing immigration (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). Furthermore, even now the remnants of *Nihonjinron* beliefs contribute to the othering of the foreign presence in Japan, painting a strict binary of native and foreigner which still influences Japanese society's interactions with foreign people and cultures (Demelius 2020; 2021). For this reason, I deem it necessary to discuss *Nihonjinron* in the light of the cultural boundaries it constructs to divide Japan from the reality of its own multiculturalism.

It is difficult to define which components make a nation truly a nation. Political Scientist Benedict Anderson claims in his book Imagined Communities that nation and nationalism are not constructed around a particular identity, but a nation is a consciously constructed

community created through the perception of people who envisions belonging to the same group despite not ever having a chance to know most of their fellow group members (Anderson 1991, 6–7). Anderson's theory focuses especially on the role of different media[17] which he perceived having had a vital role in creating nationalist pull to imagine a common nation together as a group (Anderson 1991, 6). Continuing with the same logic, Jeong theorizes a nation being an undefined polity with cultural representations that constantly need to ensure its binding force via self-narrating and creating cultural boundaries (Jeong 2022). Sometimes culture can act as this kind of cultural boundary and binding force. In Japan, the ideas of its own culture have developed together with debates on race which are fused seamlessly with the perception of culture (Morris-Suzuki 2015b, 78). Morris-Suzuki (2015b, 78) observes that not only the idea of race, but the perception of culture is still very influential in modern Japan and long-standing effects on the contemporary Japanese sense of identity. She continues that the word 'Japanese culture' (日本文化 *Nihon bunka*) has transformed in the 1900s to become a key concept in underlying Japanese uniqueness (Morris-Suzuki 2015b, 65). The concept of *Nihon bunka* as its non-reflection state has also been utilized by the Japanese government and mainstream Japanese when debating about "theories of Japaneseness" (Demelius 2020; Morris-Suzuki 2015b, 77).

Nihonjinron incorporates three almost interchangeably intertwined concepts: nationality, ethnicity and culture (Chapman 2006; Lie 2001; Sugimoto 1999, 82). In Japan, the race (ethnicity) and citizenship are so closely bound that they are hard for common Japanese to distinguish from each other (Chapman 2006; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 266).[18] Lie supports the view and adds that citizenship (市民権 *shiminken*) is more unfamiliar concept whereas nationality (国籍 *kokuseki*) is envisioned as an extension of household registry (戸籍 *koseki*), thus a more familiar concept to the public. (Lie 2001). In addition, *Nihonjinron* embodies two main theories: that of Japan being ethnically homogenous nation (単一民族 tan'itsu minzoku) and the unique society possessing dominant group orientation pattern influencing nationals' behavior (e.g., Befu 2001; Burgess 2010; Liddicoat 2007; Lie 2001). *Nihonjinron* is presented to the public in the shape of ideologies, shared sentiments, media or

[17] Many scholars have pointed out how the elite has produced the *Nihonjinron* genre for public consumption which has built the image of "Japaneseness" among the public.
[18] Recently the city of Kumamoto received 2400 complaints after it planned to change the definition of the term "city resident" (*shimin*) to include foreigners because denizens thought it would allow foreigners to vote; this in turn is indicative of the general public's lack of awareness of what rights foreigners have in Japan, and which rights are tied to citizenship (*Kumamoto Nichinichi Shinbun*, 20 Jan. 2023).

even by commodities which are sponsored by corporations and the government (Jeong 2022). *Nihonjinron* is recognized to maintain the secondary nationalism and enable the re-enhancement of Japanese national identity (Jeong 2022). Nonetheless, it cannot be dismissed that both ethnic identity and nationalism are not autonomous but deliberately constructed identities (Lie 2001; Befu 2001).

From the very beginning *Nihonjinron* has been a controversial ideology. Many scholars such as Harumi Befu have criticized *Nihonjinron* and delegitimized its claims as they simplify and create stereotypes of the Japanese nation (Befu 2001; Jeong 2022; Lie 2001). In the wake of *Nihonjinron*, many academics have published studies which try to counter *Nihonjinron* by representing Japan as a multicultural nation (Kowner and Demel 2015 404). As a consequence of rapid globalization, *Nihonjinron* and Japan's isolationist mindset have been somewhat weakened in order to pave way for Japan's ventures in transnational affairs (Sugimoto 1999, 87). Nevertheless, the Japanese government and official institutions utilize *Nihonjinron* as a major tenet to maintain the societal structures and to enhance the interests of conservative leadership (Burgess 2012; Jeong 2022; Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169). These interests include the aim to influence the image of Japanese culture and society both domestically and internationally (Sugimoto 1999, 87).

In Japan, *Nihonjinron* has functioned as a part of the cultural system that governs representations of the Japanese people and society. Preservation or creation of unique cultural features might be influenced by the aspect of isolation. The Japanese exclusive and isolationist attitude is argued to stem from the mix of its geographical isolation as an island nation and a previous self-imposed isolationist policy which has resulted in Japan's unique homogeneous culture and habits (Itoh 1996; Lie 2001). This assertion is reasonable as Japan is not only a geographically isolated island country that has also experienced a historically relevant insular mindset but has also been blamed of a cultural closure (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005, 173). This view is supported by dominant Japanese historiography of Japan being isolated from all foreign contact (鎖国 *sakoku*) until Commodore Perry forced entry to Japan in 1853 (Lie 2001). In addition, this Japanese narrative sponsored by the Japanese government is evident in the official website of the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (July 2022) as it employs the same narrative of isolation creating uniqueness:

> Japan is quite isolated in geographical terms and, as is often the case with island countries, many of Japan's cultural traits and its differences from overseas neighbors are attributed to this geographic isolation. In the case of Japan, the

> country's cultural evolution is further explained by factors such as cultural homogeneity, overcrowding brought about by limited inhabitable land and intensive rice production. Anthropologists and other observers, both Japanese and foreign, often invoke its geographical conditions to explain Japan's uniqueness.

Despite Japan not ever being fully closed to cultural interactions and foreign cultural influences, the government institutions' mainstream narrative seems to lean towards the theory of cultural isolationism (Itoh 1996; Lie 2001). This isolation mentality or "island mentality" (島国根性 *shimaguni konjō*) has persisted as a myth in Japanese society and still affects Japanese public and private sectors (Itoh 1996). Interestingly, this logic is completely opposite to the multiethnicity embraced by the Japanese empire during Japanese imperial period (Oguma 1995; Kowner and Demel 2015, 408; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020). Especially during the post-war period, the government's rhetoric shifted to underline a "peaceful and harmonious island nation without foreign other", a rhetoric which gathered support among Japanese citizens (Oguma 1995; Kowner and Demel 2015, 408). In reality, this argument is deliberately used to justify the government's conscious objectives to build barriers to preserve traditional attitudes and customs and not a result of Japan's unique group-oriented mentality (Itoh 1996). The reasoning which was exploited to justify Japan's multiethnic aspirations during Japan's imperial period was shaped to promote an opposing logic during contemporary times. For Enkhtuya, this perception of preserved unique culture due to geographical isolation is an obvious fact. She argues that because Japan is an island country, its culture and manners have remained distinct from other countries, making it a unique and one-of-a-kind society:

> I think it is good to know Japanese manners and understand what kind of land Japan is. Japan is—do you know the word "island country" (島国 shimaguni)? Well, because everything around is surrounded by sea, there are unique characteristics to culture. (…) In trains you cannot speak in loud voice, inside bus you cannot speak in phone, these manners are basic manners but because I am Chinese, in China we talk in trains, call on bus, that is common but in Japan there are that kind of rules and manners. (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

According to *Nihonjinron*, Japanese spirit and customs are so unique that foreign residents are unable to comprehend because they are inherently ethnic attributes (Shani 2019, 1120; Sugimoto 1999). Approaching from that viewpoint, Enkhtuya's comment above highlights this claim as she is referring to the need of understanding and educating oneself of these aspects before coming to Japan. Cultural homogeneity and monolingualism are claimed to enable effective non-verbal communication and cooperation among Japanese citizens (Befu 2001, 25). Furthermore, Japaneseness is listed to include a unique thought process reflected in

language structures and patterns of non-verbal communication (Jeong 2022; Shani 2019, 1119). Japanese is portrayed as a uniquely difficult language, one that is hard even for the Japanese to understand (Gottlieb 2005, 4; Kowner and Demel 2015, 405). This arguably creates a cultural language barrier that complicates the full integration of the ethnic other or even disrupts Japanese collectivist-based harmony according to *Nihonjinron* apologists (Kowner and Demel 2015, 405). Enkhtuya agrees and stresses that without knowing the national language of the country, one cannot truly comprehend the Japanese mindset and culture:

> Talking about coming to Japan, people around you only speak Japanese. I am happy that I studied Japanese after all before coming here. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be able to have conversations and, deep down, you can't understand the culture of the country, right? (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Additionally, the most drastic *Nihonjinron* dogmas claim that because the language is hard for even native Japanese, then the non-native people are unable to grasp the true meaning of Japanese language and are incapable of ever mastering it (Gottlieb 2005, 5; Kowner and Demel 2015, 405). Lina recognizes the underlying still relevant stereotype among Japanese nationals that foreigners are not good at speaking Japanese due to these emic obstacles: "(…) foreign people can't speak Japanese so well maybe in that case I do not like that stereotype, so I want to talk as much as possible." (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

As many researchers agree, *Nihonjinron* is premised upon the assumption that the Japanese people are uniform in their thoughts and actions (Befu 2001; Iwabuchi 1998 in Jeong 2022). In turn, the uniform thought and actions, such as group-orientation, loyalty and harmony, has been deployed to the needs of conservative ruling elite by managing the society and how it is organized by desired appropriate values (Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169). These values affect societal expectations, customs, and rules. Lina also talks about the impact of group-orientation, thoughtfulness towards others (思いやり *omoiyari*) and the strict rules which the Japanese are expected to follow in order not to disturb the harmony:

> In Japan they have lot of rules, but in a way, I like these rules. Even on train (sic) you won't speak on phone (sic) because it is common knowledge that you cannot do that. (…) And I don't think that in Lithuania we have those kinds of rules, that for example on the escalator we would stand one side. (…) But it's sometimes double-sided rules what makes your life harder but at some time, these rules make simple because you just need to follow them (…). So, these kind of steps from Japanese people makes our life easier in a way. (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Because of lingering Confucian values, Japanese society still values courtesy, thoughtfulness, and respect (Yamanaka 1986 in Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). Lina views that Japanese are very respectful towards everyone which is something she personally likes:

> I do not think that in Lithuania they have the respect, the deep respect the Japanese have for people. (…) [So, because of the respect] I learned to thank my colleagues for hard work. It was new for me because you don't see that in Lithuania. It is nice cultural thing (…). (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Respect and thoughtfulness towards others were not only mentioned by Enkhtuya (included in the quote about "island country" earlier in this segment) or Lina, but the stereotype of good mannered and kind Japanese was a perception shared by almost every one of my informants. Meiling narrates her insights about unique Japanese mannerisms and customs as follows:

> Whenever you are, in train, eating at restaurant (sic), their manners are really good. They really try not to cause any inconvenience; Japan is that kind of country. … [The] Japanese also speak really silently, that's why… you can hear each other [clearly], that cannot be done in my country. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

Lina is in Japan for the second time during the interview. She reveals that her perception about Japanese politeness and respect has shifted a little bit towards a more realistic mindset after her return. She talks about expectations and peer pressure, which force Japanese to act in a collective custom, even if they are unwilling:

> All these people are very polite, and polite in every situation. But then I came for second time (sic), I saw that they are forced to be polite. Even if they don't want to, they are polite. (…) Last time when I went to Japan, one girl just told me that it's the way of Japanese people communicating. They need to put face and be polite person (sic). (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Other manifestations of Japanese uniqueness narrated by *Nihonjinron* is the habit to distinguish Japanese "self" (内 *uchi*) from the foreign "other" (外 *soto*) (Burgess 2007; Jeong 2022; Shani 2019, 1119). Amy has experienced "othering" while living is Japan, as she narrates that she feels Japanese nationals keeping their distance from her and other foreigners: "Maybe after coming to Japan, my image about very kind Japan has changed. Now they are still kind, but I also get a little bit cold vibe, I mean from the Japanese." (Amy, 21, Malaysia)

There is no denying that *Nihonjinron*'s downside is the construction of generalized and exaggerated stereotypical representations of the Japanese and foreign dissimilarities which are proclaimed to influence how Japanese identify themselves. They also produce psychological stress, discomfort, and nervousness before encounters between native Japanese and

foreigners. This causes obstacles to communication and affects how the Japanese communicate with the ethnic other (Kowner and Demel 2015, 407). Amy further explains her stance:

> Comparing Japanese friends to Malaysian friends, Japanese friends have a certain sense of distance. If it's a Malaysian friend, we can be super close and intimate, but if it's a Japanese friend, it doesn't matter how close you are, you cannot say you are that close. I don't understand a lot about practical and concrete things, [but] I think that maybe because our nationality is different it's like that. (Amy, 21, Malaysia)

Amy mentions once more the aspect of nationality, which is a central view in Japanese nationalism and *Nihonjinron* discourse. She views that nationality divides them and the gap between the different cultures cannot be overcome. This is very similar to the narrative of cultural borders *Nihonjinron* tries to paint about a "unique" Japan.

Moreover, Nederveen Pieterse and Kim point out that the concept of Japaneseness is fluid and fluctuating, as the Japanese identity has been perceived to change in a positive-negative binary stratum following historical and geopolitical changes in the economy (Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169). In other words, during economic prosperity, the Japanese national identity and self-confidence have been speculated to be bolstered and cultural nationalism is thriving, whereas, during economically harder periods, perceptions about the foreign other are more lenient during economic downturns (Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169; Kowner and Demel 2015, 408). *Nihonjinron* is allegedly the latest phase of attempts to form modern Japanese identity (Kowner and Demel 2015, 408). In this section it was evident that despite the nationalistic connotations and abstract conceptualization, remnants of *Nihonjinron* narrative are found in evolved form in contemporary society, which still affects how Japanese society dictates the binary of "us" and "them" (Burgess 2007; Ishiwata 2011), much like national nostalgia affects the same perception of a native ingroup and a foreign outgroup (e.g., Behler et al. 2021; Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021). Befu also argues that, as women are absent from the official *Nihonjinron* debates, in this light, especially the presence of female migrants might help to challenge the "hegemonic" ideology of Japanese identity (Befu 2001, 44).

5.3 Obstacles for the Realization of *Tabunka Kyōsei*

Japan is simultaneously wrestling with two contradictory directions: the need to open up in order to achieve multiculturalism and the desire to stay an isolated and homogenous society (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 31). As discussed in Chapter 2, the Japanese government's realization of a *tabunka kyōsei* society in Japan is still a faraway reality, due to the ambiguity and the reluctance to clearly define *tabunka kyōsei* related policies (e.g., Burgess 2007; Chapman 2006; Chung 2010). Regardless of the acute demand of foreign nationals to maintain the world's third largest economy and to counter demographic changes, the efforts made by the Japanese government to lure more foreigners into Japan and integrate them to become part of the society are artificial and half-hearted attempts (Itoh 1996; Morris-Suzuki 2015a; Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 93). At the same time, the Japanese national government insists on Japan not being "an immigration country",[19] the Japanese nationals experience on a local level the reality of a more multiculturalizing society, meaning that the multiculturalizing Japan needs to be addressed on the local level and not the national policy level (Green 2021; Flowers 2012). The Japanese government continues to refrain from explicitly defining the frames of "multicultural coexistence" and pushes the responsibility of implementing the vague guidelines falls onto local governments and municipalities (Burgess 2007; Flowers 2012; Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 93). Some of the local municipalities have stepped up to implement multicultural programs to address the obstacles foreign residents face in their lives but, without clear guidelines, some local governments are unable to effectively implement lasting integration policies, or the policies remain limited (Chung 2010; Green 2021). In this section, I argue that, even though my informants were from more privileged backgrounds and did not seem to require official assistance from the national or local governments, the data still portrays major obstacles encountered in their everyday lives. Furthermore, based on my data, I perceive that, despite the increasing foreign presence in Japan, the local municipalities where my informants lived are not yet desperate enough to accommodate, advertise or organize local programs to alleviate the problems born from the clash of different cultures.

[19] See Chapter 2.

Japan considers itself to be new to facing immigration as a country, excusing their slow progress in integrating foreign immigrants[20] with arguments of historic isolation and national homogeneity (Green 2021). Despite Japan's interest in achieving *kokusaika* to counter demographic changes, the internationalization is implied to be slowed by the *sakoku* mentality, as government implemented immigration restrictions and strict requirements to block integration and assimilation (Itoh 1996). Together with weak governmental leadership, the island mentality delays decision making structures, especially bureaucracy, and discourages decision making, tending to encourage problem avoidance and build obstacles for Japan's internationalization (Itoh 1996). Because of the vague *tabunka kyōsei* policy guidelines, only a slim majority of the biggest cities have adopted any kind of multicultural plan (Green 2021). It is hinted that especially municipalities which are facing economic and demographic concerns, such as a large elderly proportion among residents, are more likely to adopt *tabunka kyōsei* plans (Green 2021). In this notion, Japanese are speculated to suffer from "racial privilege", meaning that, unless the size of foreign population is notable enough, the dominant Japanese majority can live their lives without needing to dwell deeper on the issues of ethnic minorities or foreigners residing in Japan (Hammine and Rudolph 2022, 97). Together with the previously presented fact that *kokusaika* made Japan define Japaneseness and protect Japan's uniqueness by othering the foreign presence, arguments about racial privilege can be generalized to mean that policymakers are unwilling or even disinterested in furthering multiculturalism and foreign integration in Japan. In addition, these imagined perceptions shape national immigration policies that determine whether people are worthy of inclusion or not according to the desired image and qualities they bring to the nation and community. As such, imagined national identity relates directly to inclusion and exclusion (Bauder 2011, 9; Shiobara, Kawabata and Matthews 2020). *Tabunka kyōsei* aims for people with different nationalities to live harmoniously among each other, so it is often argued that, as a spiritual successor for kokusaika, the policy is othering foreigners by inclusion through superficial and stereotypical interactions and international events between different cultures (Burgess 2007; Chapman 2006).

The programs the government has promoted to enhance Japan's internationalization are defined to aim to increase foreigners' understanding of Japan, its culture and society as well

[20] The Japanese government avoids using term "immigrant" and opts to use other terms as immigration is seen permanent and they wish foreign workers to leave after their usefulness have vaned (e.g., Flowers 2012; Morris-Suzuki 2015a).

as expose Japanese citizens to foreign cultures at the same time (Flowers 2012). These aims consist of three distinctive sections; launching programs to recruit foreign graduates to Japan; luring in more exchange students to Japan; and getting Japanese to travel more abroad (Flowers 2012). Another measure is to promote multicultural interactions via different community events and to build a certain multicultural coexistent spirit through joint events (Demelius 2020; 2021; Flowers 2012). Five out of my six informants admitted to not knowing exactly whether their neighborhood had any special community activities including multicultural exchange programs or had never taken part in such events: "I have not taken part in those. (…) In the area I am living, there are no activities. (…) I haven't heard much of those." (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Because of the lack of clear policy guidelines for multicultural coexistence, public services and governmental support offered to foreigners, the citizens of Japan have organized assistance groups for immigrants in need of public services from 1990s onwards (Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 92–93). Local governments hosting large immigrant populations also executed their own policies whose goal was to alleviate foreign residents' disadvantaged positions in fields such as education, language, health, and housing (Demelius 2020; Haines, Yamanaka and Yamashita 2012, 92–93). Some regional governments have addressed these issues and have started to offer various programs for foreigners, including radio programs in their native language, festivals and education but also providing opportunities for interaction between natives and foreigners (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008). Social rights, such as public housing and social security, have also been guaranteed (Morris-Suzuki 2015a). In addition, local governments also provide multilingual brochures, magazines, and newsletters (Burgess 2007). Despite not having had to relied on these types of help, Minjun recounts the services she has heard local governments are offering to foreigners:

> There are leaflets and those things, there seems to be Japanese classes for foreigners, people who are suffering and have a hard time are given counselling. When foreigners want to find a workplace, they also help then. They also have help for legal problems, those kinds of things. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

Enkhtuya has heard about the possibility of getting social aid: "(…) for example, if you quit a job, if you lose job, you go to non-governmental office, they give you consulting, in addition (…) you can receive subsidiary aid. If you don't have a job, you are given unemployment allowance." (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Tabunka kyōsei has also been criticized for being too superficial and idealistic, and for not depicting the actual realities foreigners encounter in Japanese society (Shiobara 2020). For example, numerous foreign residents in Japan are reported to experience discrimination in communities and from governmental institutions, notably in the areas such as education, employment, housing, and medical services (Burgess 2007; Demelius 2020; Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu and Befu 2006, 102–103). Blatant housing discrimination against foreigners is especially common in Japan (Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu and Befu 2006, 3). My informants did not mention ever experiencing housing discrimination, but many voiced their stress about the need for a Japanese guarantor:

> That (Japanese guarantor) is important for Japanese (…) you ask a Japanese person as a guarantor. I think that is a little inconvenient. Foreigners must search among the Japanese they know and ask them to become one, it is no good if you have not got a guarantor. (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Liu-Farrer argues that the importance of forming and maintaining social relations with Japanese nationals is essential for non-Japanese to progress in Japanese society (Liu-Farrer, 2011). Enkhtuya's above comment raises the valuable question about the importance of social connections with native, ethnically Japanese citizens. As previously explored, *tabunka kyōsei* ideology builds a binary opposition between Japanese and foreign residents and strengthens the notion of homogeneity already lingering from the *Nihonjinron* debate (Burgess 2007; Chapman 2006; Shiobara 2020), ending up excluding the foreign other (e.g., Befu 2001; Burgess 2012; Demelius 2020). *Tabunka kyōsei* divides the Japanese to *uchi* (内 inside a group) and foreigners to *soto* (外 outside a group) peripheries, underlying foreign residents' position as not being a part of the society because Japanese society is believed to consist of only Monoethnic Japanese (Lie 2001; Morris-Suzuki 2015a). Shiobara joins other academic critics and argues that *tabunka kyōsei* policies in Japan pledge, instead of ensuing human rights to the foreign sojourners, guarantees their self-reliance and support so that they can "live in Japan like Japanese" (Shiobara 2020). However, if you have not integrated, it is a stressful task to find a guarantor and, in a country that stresses the difference of native and foreign, it creates a lot of pressure, especially for those who do not plan to stay permanently. Not even one of my informants voiced definite plans of staying in Japan and did not address the notion of assimilation because of their temporary status. In addition, none of them had needed to rely on any governmental help while staying in Japan; they could live normal life among the Japanese like *tabunka kyōsei* policies dictated and thus could be considered relevantly privileged. However, I argue that, despite my informants' seemingly privileged

position, it does not mean they were integrated into society. When asked to describe what kind of relationships they had formed in Japan, Minjun said that, despite forming many friendships, they were mostly from company circles:

> After I did jobhunting and came to Japan, in the end, my own relations were with my company's people. There were people of various ages, with people younger than me, people older than me, I could make friends with people of various ages. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

Enkhtuya concurs that she has made friends with various nationalities mainly from her work circles: I have formed relationships which became friendship – well, almost all are workplace relationships, but also the restaurant I went to eat, that restaurant's owner became my acquaintance. (…) (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

The concepts of *uchi* and *soto* are still relevant in modern Japanese society (Lie 2001). As pointed out above, my informants avowed that they did not interact with persons outside of their own friend circles, and pointed out that Japanese nationals living close by did not press for interactions either. This trend was only interrupted by the occasional occurrences of receiving vegetables from landlords. Lina lived at communal housing which houses tighter community spirit, but, when she moved from *Kyūshū* to the *Kansai* area, she acknowledged that the atmosphere changed, and the smallest interactions between native Japanese disappeared:

> I had one Japanese elderly lady near my apartment who was always coming, asking how we are doing, bringing some snacks and vegetables, so she was a nice lady. And I heard another student got some kind of cake hanged on his door. (…) Back in *Kyūshū*, I was living in prefectural housing (…). So, I think maybe it is even prefecture's idea to bring community together, in a way. Here (*Kansai*) I cannot say a lot about my recent apartment because I did not interact with them that much. (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

Another manifestation that divides Japanese society and prevents multicultural coexistence and full integration is the problem of official language. Language is invoked to have the power to unite and exclude (Linton 2009). Language is power, as it is tied to politics (Joseph 2006, 1–3) and the role in forming and maintaining national identity (Joseph 2006, 147). As mentioned earlier, *Nihonjinron* concerns itself very much with the notion of language, as it claims Japan to be a culturally homogenous society with only purely ethnically Japanese persons who speak Japanese (Befu 2001; Lie 2001). If one cannot comprehend or speak Japanese, according to *Nihonjinron* principles they are not considered a part of Japanese society, because foreigners without Japanese blood are unable to ever understand Japanese

language or culture (Liddicoat 2007, 35). Furthermore, Amy, who studies at a local university in the *Kansai* area, points out how it is impossible to live in Japan without mastering the official language: “Japanese language is important (laughs). English or other languages are almost never used inside Japan.” (Amy, 21, Malaysia)

In support of Amy’s quote, the biggest limitation of the Japanese language is its marginal use on a worldwide scale, which restricts and complicates Japanese nationals’ means of communication with other nationals remarkably (Akaha 2005, 69). Japan is noted to be a country with very low English proficiency; it is estimated that only 30% of Japanese speak any English at all, despite the positive image English language carries (Margolis, 26 May 2020). This highlights the need for Japanese language skill on every facet of Japanese society and puts pressure on non-Japanese residents to learn the language in order to lead their lives in Japan.

> Japan is not really a country where people have a high proficiency in English, so it really matters whether you can speak Japanese or not. (…) It is not really a question where it has been useful. I think it would be pretty impossible to just live in Japan without knowing at least basic Japanese. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

As Japan is the only spoken language in Japan, this might cause unequal and hierarchical power relations, which are employed through certain economic, political, and social practices and can be utilized as forces of discrimination and marginalization (Mohanty 2010, 132). For example, some languages entitle people by granting them access to resources which speakers of other languages are unable to attain, leading to a disadvantaged position or even marginalization (Mohanty 2010, 150). Also, Japan’s insistence on a high level of Japanese language skill is narrated to hinder recruitment efforts for recruitment of caregivers (Kingston 2019; Morita 2018). On account of the fact that it would be in Japan’s interest to maintain global competitiveness with foreign labor while its own population is shrinking, if the local governments want to build more international and accessible communities based on the harmonious coexistence, they need to address the linguistic needs of the growing number of foreign residents (Carroll 2010; Morita 2018).

However, academics note that outreach activities, like mentioned above, remain on low levels despite the heightened presence of foreign immigrants (Green 2021). In addition, the offered local integration initiatives are observed to be mainly information providing and service-based and only addresses issues as they occur, thus not being integrative or inclusive in nature (Green 2021). The efforts fail to transform foreign residents into active participants in local

communities, which the government's *Tabunka Kyōsei* Plan visions as its final goal (Green 2021). All of these points are visible from the data I received; besides the brief listing of provided services, none of my informants knew in depth what kind of services they were eligible to receive nor were they active participants in their respective communities. Instead of designing schemes on top of new schemes which have no lasting effect due to the expectation of assimilation, it is suggested that the Japanese government needs to contemplate how to build a welcoming atmosphere to make foreigners feel welcome to join (Kim and Streich 2020). Moreover, different types of foreign residents require different types of assistance from municipalities and local governments, and in the future, their special needs must be addressed better (Kim and Streich 2020). In addition, Japan's immigration policy emphasizes only specific economic aspects such as impending labor shortage or the immigrants' presence breaking the harmonious society (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 233–234). Policies that are drafted without the consideration that foreign migrants are also participants in society and likely future Japanese citizens widen the already deep gap between reality and policymaking (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 234). Furthermore, Ishiwata (2011) stresses that, despite endeavors to introduce more multicultural policies locally as well as on national level, the attempts remain limited, as they are based and framed by the exclusivity and exceptionality based on the *Nihonjinron* which shape Japanese identity, and—paradoxically—the presence of the foreign minority does not reduce the ethno-cultural hierarchies, rather the foreign other highlights hierarchized distinctions between Japanese and foreigners, thus building persistence for the dichotomy.

6 An Analysis of the Gendered Hospitality Industry—"*Ryokan* Is the Embodiment of Japanese Culture"

In this second empirical chapter, the data related to Japan's hospitality sector and conservative gender roles will be analyzed. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, it will explore the traditional Japanese hospitality culture (おもてなし *omotenashi*) as the embodied proxy of "authentic Japaneseness" and how the national nostalgia-imbued views of *omotenashi* reinforce the persistent narrative of Japan's uniqueness left by the *Nihonjinron* discourse while at the same time examining how *omotenashi* is used as a conscious strategy for branding "authentic Japanese culture". This section will also discuss how foreign women in Japan's service sector are forced into a peculiar position to represent the "authentic Japanese culture" to guests despite being "othered" as foreigners by the society (See Befu 2001, 82; Burgess 2012; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 6). Next, the service sector and especially the traditional Japanese inn (旅館 *ryokan*) as a gendered domain representing and enhancing traditional gender roles will be contemplated. To be specific, this section will look at the hospitality sector, women's precarious positions are affected by the underlying rigid gender role expectations which dictate what type of work is suitable for them and what fields they choose to work in, unknowingly strengthening the deep gender gap and binary that exists in Japanese society.

6.1 *Omotenashi* as the embodiment of Japanese culture

As previously noted, nostalgia is related to values such as authenticity and tradition (Grainge 1999, 621). In addition, national nostalgia is deployed as a preserving factor during major changes perceived as threats to the nation (e.g., Behler et al. 2021; Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Grainge 1999, 621). Japan's modernization set the foundation for abundant economic growth, but also became associated with a sense of loss of tradition and surging nostalgia for the past (Yoshida 2001, 363). *Nihonjinron* is closely related to the nationalistic argument on "nativeness" and attempts to define and reclaim authentic and traditional Japanese culture. Discourses of *Nihonjinron* were also present during Japan's rapid internationalization in the 1980s when Japan's former Prime Minister Nakasone gave his proposal for "*Furusato* Japan" plan which was launched to re-vitalize and reshape the traditional and native aspects of local and regional cultures and enable the Japanese to appreciate and learn positive qualities of their

own culture (Graburn, Ertl and Tierney 2008; Valaskivi 2013). Goldstein-Gidoni affirms that Japanese official authorities have relentlessly entangled themselves in protecting and reproducing "'traditional' Japanese cultural properties" such as traditional artisanal techniques, locations or even people and gone to great lengths ensuring that "traditional and authentic Japan" is accessible to the foreigners (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005, 159). More recently, "Cool Japan" has been employed as a measure to brand these cultural properties and revitalize the local lifestyles of dying regions (Valaskivi 2013).

Following the above logic, traditional and "unique Japanese culture" is preserved and found at grassroot level events, locations or even customs. According to interview data and my own fieldwork experience, I perceive that *ryokan* represents this type of establishment: one that upholds traditional Japanese customs, values, and spirit. Some scholars concur with the government's undisputed narrative that *ryokan*s advocate the "authentic Japanese culture and mindset" (Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 153, Karakawa 2019, 10). The services of *ryokan*s are derived from *omotenashi*, usually translated as "Japanese-style hospitality", which originates from Japanese tea ceremony practices but has evolved to cover the hospitality provided in the whole service sector (Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 123). *Omotenashi* became a media buzzword after a biracial newscaster and announcer Takigawa Christel[21] held her Olympic bid speech at the International Olympic Committee's General Assembly in Buenos Aires. She presented *omotenashi* as an integral part of Japanese culture and even claims it to be an "embodiment of Japaneseness" since time immemorial:

> We will offer you a unique welcome. In Japanese, I can describe it in one unique word: "*omotenashi*". It means a spirit of selfless hospitality... One that dates back to our ancestors... Yet it is ingrained in Japan's ultra-modern culture. "*Omotenashi*" explains why Japanese people take care of each other... and our guests (ANNnewsCH, 7 Sept. 2023).

Takigawa's speech created the "*omotenashi* boom" in the media and even the Japanese government started to advertise and promote *omotenashi* more widely in their campaigns to attract foreign tourists to Japan to experience the world-class hospitality (Yamada, March 2012; Schreiber, 3 Feb. 2018). According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index by The World Economic Forum, Japan ranked 1st in 2021 (The World Economic Forum 2022b).

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[21] Takigawa Christel is the current wife of former prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō's eldest son Koizumi Shinjirō. Despite Japan's insistence on the notion of monoethnicity inside the nation itself as seen in the *Nihonjinron* discourses, choosing a biracial newscaster as Tokyo Olympic bid speech presenter signifies to present a more "multicultural and multiethnic" society outwards.

Omotenashi is reported to include high-quality service, which is influenced by Japanese culture, history, lifestyle as well as nature (Morishita 2015, 157). *Ryokan* is noted to be one of the principal and major providers of *omotenashi* (Japan National Tourism Organization). The term "*omotenashi*" is hard to define and better understood if experienced in person (Morishita 2015, 157), highlighting its unique qualities and "only in Japan" experience.[22] My informant Enkhtuya seems to share her opinion with above notions, going as far as to declare that traditional Japanese-style inn is the embodiment of Japanese culture because of the hospitality served there and to truly understand Japan one has to experience *ryokan*:

> *Ryokan* is a unique thing of Japan, in other countries there is no such thing as *ryokan*. (…) Also, while working at the front, [I need to present] Japanese hospitality (*omontenashi*). (…) *Ryokan* is Japanese culture's embodiment (塊 *katamari*). If you think about a country like Japan and want to understand it, its history and so on, I think they are all inside the term "*ryokan*". (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Omotenashi is perceived to physically manifest in the form of extremely respectful language (敬語 *keigo*), bowing, and attentiveness in anticipating customer's needs before they personally realize them (White, 5 Nov. 2018). Fundamentally *omotenashi* presented at *ryokan* consists of four distinct characteristics: treating guests, offering feasts or receptions, understanding the behavior or attitude of people, and the treatment or procedure of certain activities (Morishita 2016, 157). These practices are also embodied in the etymology of the term *omotenashi* as it means to "truthfully connect with others" or "to establish better human relations" (Morishita 2016, 157). This mindset is present when we compare Western style hotel facilities with Japanese inns. Compared with the materialistic hospitality provided by modern Western style hotel facilities, *ryokan*s with hot springs have employed *omotenashi* to entice customers to experience the traditional Japanese atmosphere and culture, thus going for more spiritual and emotional approach (Alalsheikh 2016, 62; Morishita 2015, 157). *Omotenashi* is regarded as the dominant service concept in Japan because it invites visitors to undergo spiritually enriching experience while separating themselves from mundane pressures and worries (Alalsheikh 2016, 62; Morishita 2015, 157). This theory echoes the government's employed rhetoric of inviting guests to experience *omotenashi* in person. However, it is noted that foreign customers usually do not demand impossibly extensive service to feel content whereas Japanese customers who are familiar with *omotenashi* treatment expect fancy service

[22] This narrative is similar to the "Cool Japan" cultural policy and *Nihonjinron*, check Chapter 5 for more.

and are quick to write one-star reviews (Shinchi, 26 Feb. 2023). Lina feels this struggle as she tries to balance giving her best service and dealing with angry complaints:

> Yes, it must be perfect. When I see complaints on the [information] board, even though [the service] is not always perfect, [in the end] it comes to the guest how tolerating they are, whether they accept that mistake or will just complain about it. (Lina, 31, Lithuania)

The main concept of *ryokan* is to let customers immerse themselves in unique atmosphere while experiencing ritualized and traditional services which follow the old set of traditions. The beauty is perceived to be found in little things that usually go unnoticed in the fast-paced consumerist modern society (Alalsheikh 2016, 62). Services differ from *ryokan* to *ryokan*, but common traditional experiences include sleeping on *futon* (布団 mattress) on the floor of a *tatami* room (畳 traditional bamboo mat), soaking in *onsen* (温泉 mineral hot spring) and enjoying traditional local cuisine in traditional Japanese garments (Choi, Meng, and Lee 2018). These services create a unique and exotic experience for foreign customers unfamiliar with Japanese culture (Choi, Meng, and Lee 2018). Other traditional attributes are listed as removing shoes indoors (Choi, Meng, and Lee 2018). However, as the staff might not share common language or share cultural expectations with their guests, guessing customer's needs becomes challenging (Shinchi, 26 Feb. 2023). Enkthuya shares this experience and narrates how the host must carefully consider the interaction because despite the goal to present Japanese authentic culture and hospitality, *omotenashi* also includes the aim to make the customer feel at ease:

> Guests do not understand a lot of Japanese things, [and then] come to a *ryokan*. Because they are foreigners, things that are taken for granted inside Japan aren't obvious to them. (…) "Do like this, don't do like that", they don't come to the *ryokan* to be preached. They come to have a good time, and if that is not allowed, it makes them feel bad. In situations like that you need to be careful how you speak (to customers). (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Japanese language is regarded to have one of the most developed honorific systems (Brown 2008, 1). Honorific speech is stressed as an integral immutable part of Japanese language and culture (O'Neill 2015). Japanese respectful language (*keigo)* is also distinguished as the core feature of service culture in Japan. Respectful speech is established as means to show respect to the other party, usually higher in the hierarchy (O'Neill 2015). In the context of a *ryokan* and the service sector, the respectful language shows the host's reverence towards the customer. As this kind of respectful language is commonly used in the service sector, non-native workers need to make extra efforts to meet the traditional hospitality expectations

imbued in the expected use of language. Meiling recalled how she had no choice but to learn Japanese as she had to instruct the customers in Japanese: “Also, because I work in a *ryokan*, I use pretty much Japanese [always], so it is very important. That’s why I gradually became good at speaking Japanese.” (Meiling, 22, Taiwan).

The use of *keigo* reinforced how the customer takes top priority (Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 140). There is a proverb in Japan that states “Customer is a God” (お客様は神様です *okyakusama wa kamisama desu*), underlining the importance of showing respect and hospitality (EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation). It is narrated that even the word “*okyakusama*” (お客様 honored customer) in Japanese includes the meaning of veneration and extreme respect. Sometimes *ryokan* go beyond the hotel setting with their hospitality. As an example, guests might be offered services which originally did not belong to their accommodation plan (Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 160). When I was working at the *ryokan*, my sister who came to visit me received this kind of utmost service as she was offered a breakfast which wasn’t originally included in her accommodation plan. Maria also noticed this detail while staying in Japan:

> [They are] pretty much treating the customer as a supreme human being (laughs). You get respectful language and lot of bowing and the body language is very… not restricted, but, you know, very meaningful, predetermined gestures. (…) And there is also a heavy atmosphere of professionalism to it, customer service people in Finland can talk to customers very casually whereas in Japan it’s very important to remember to speak in respectful language. (Maria, 25, Finland)

Amy agrees and shares a view that Japan has a unique customer service culture and mentality which cannot be found in other countries. However, she also shares how putting customer on a pedestal is at odds with her own values:

> Japan has a unique customer service attitude and unique way of doing service. If it was Malaysia, it wouldn't be that polite. That kind of polite dealing with customers is decreasing everywhere else than in Japan. (…) But I’m not going that far and use respectful language myself (尊敬語 *sonkeigo*) while serving customers (laughs). (…) I think customers and staff should have an equal relationship. That's why if there is a customer with a really bad attitude, my attitude also worsens (laughs). (Amy, 21, Malaysia)

It should be noted that *omotenashi* is distinct from western hotel chains, where the hierarchical gap between staff and customer is immediately noticeable. In addition, despite the earlier statement that respectful speech in Japanese hospitality creates hierarchy, it is argued that the face-to-face hospitality presented at *ryokan* does not reveal top-down

hierarchies as the host and the guest are engaged in more intimate face-to-face service, thus putting them on equal ground (Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 155; Morishita 2015, 157). *Omotenashi* is reckoned to be the embodiment of high-quality service based on Japanese customs achieved via interaction between service providers and customers (Morishita 2015, 157). Enkhtuya agrees and shares her motivation, at the same time illustrating what kind of interactions she shares with guests:

> There are often foreign visitors who want to learn [characteristics of Japanese culture]. I am in contact with these guests, and it is important to present [Japanese culture to them]. "This is how you eat *sashimi*; this is how you wear a *kimono*; this is how you wear a *yukata*". When I explain things like that to customers, I like to do it to customers who don't speak Japanese (and do not understand Japanese culture well). (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Moreover, *omotenashi* is not always standardized ritualized service based on the traditional values but oftentimes the hosts are required to have a keen eye to spot any problems the guests might encounter. The host's responsibility is to keep the guest relaxed and provide them an unforgettable and pleasant stay. To achieve this goal, staff members are required to develop communication skills and be adept in realizing guests' needs and comfort levels through joint conversations (Morishita 2015, 158). Joint conversations are not only related to the presentation of authentic Japanese culture, but they also involve small talk with guests. For example, during my *ryokan* internship, my co-workers also instructed me and taught me to talk with our customers, asking whether the food is delicious amongst other things. It is also worth mentioning that while *ryokan*s embody traditional values and some of them are designed to be minimalistic, they are not modest accommodations like the description "traditional inn" might suggest; some famous *ryokan*s are distinctly high-class facilities with luxurious interiors surrounded by nature and located picturesque locations (Alalsheikh 2016, 62). The promise of a luxurious and memorable experience, as Meiling's comment implies, seems to put a lot of pressure on foreign workers:

> [The work] is not complicated, but it's pretty tough. Our *ryokan* is quite expensive, so rich people come to our *ryokan* with the desire to receive top-level service. That's why I have to do my best to make people feel top-levelness, whether it's the way I speak, explain the dishes, or the way I serve. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

Miura (2012, 93) argues that an essential part of the competitiveness of Japanese companies is the fact that their competition is focused on quality rather than to the price of the commodity itself. Regardless of the international or domestic market, the striving for perfectness in

quality is also visible in the Japanese hospitality industry. Meiling (22 years, Taiwan) ponders on this issue while contrasting it with her home country: “Japanese way of working, right. Compared to Taiwan it is different. Taiwan’s way of working is speed, whereas the Japanese way of working relies on small and detailed things, so the way of thinking is a little bit different.” In a similar manner, other ethnically Chinese immigrants associate Japanese economic success with strict and serious work culture (Liu-Farrer 2011, 1). Similar to the constant scolding detailed in Sociologist Liu-Farrer's study of labor migration from China to Japan, my informant Meiling shared her own experience of discipline in the service industry:

> Even [though I can speak] in Japanese, I don't know everything about Japan. People [at work] always say: “This is Japanese culture, you have to know it, this is (Japanese) tradition, you have to know it”, but everything is a new thing [for me]. (…) I cannot understand everything, I feel confused, [I feel that I am] not really good at the job because you [are] always scolding me, that [it] is my fault, it makes me unconfident. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

She is expected to know Japanese culture thoroughly despite coming from a different cultural background, and the penalty for lack of knowledge is heavy because there is no room for mistakes. The unconditional aim for perfectness and quality service at *ryokan* caused Meiling to quit and want to change to another industry:

> I want to go back to my [home] country. I do not like what they did to me… I try my best in this company but they [are] always scolding me, no compromises for me so I quit. (…) [I am] not running away, I just changed my mind. I want to work in another industry, not the service industry. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

This is also a direct manifestation of the situation where much like how pop cultural commodities and cultural policies such as “Cool Japan” are used to define Japan’s special cultural traits and the borders of Japanese culture to “outsiders”, advertising and worldwide promotion of *omotenashi* and traditional Japanese culture are likewise methods for the same kind of identity fortification and preservation against occurring internationalization. However, at the same time this highlights how foreign female workers are pushed into a peculiar situation when they are expected to promote and preserve Japanese culture, forcing them to present “authentic, homogenous and unique Japaneseness” while not sharing the nostalgic past. This attribute becomes even more prominent in the multiculturalizing hospitality industry which increasingly needs to draw on the labor of foreign workers due to Japan’s tourist boom (Nguyen 2020; Sugiura, 17 2019) and Japan’s self-essentialization emphasizes the borders between different ethnicities and cultures.

In the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, it is especially the selfless treatment of customers, one of the unique qualities of Japanese hospitality referred to above, that puts Japan to first place in the "Treatment of customers" category (Consulate General of Japan in New York 2015). Treatment of customers is based on anticipating an exceeding customer's wishes (Shinchi, 26 Feb. 2023), which creates pressure on service workers, especially ones like Meiling who feel that they do not understand Japanese culture as a non-native and thus do not possess the ability to anticipate customer's needs the same way native Japanese can. However, the reverse is also true; foreign customers might not understand or recognize the specialties of Japanese-style hospitality. Even though Japan's economic recovery puts a high value on tourism, there has not been much indication of *omotenashi* being a major point of attraction for foreign guests. When the respect for and expectations of *omotenashi* are lacking, this high-class service cannot be reflected in the accommodation price. As hinted earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic, tight border controls and restrictions on tourism hit the hospitality industry hardest and made many lose their jobs. In order to halt the infections and with the reduced workforce, companies have had to readjust their service strategies. It is reported that despite one *ryokan* discontinuing the carrying of customers' luggage due to the risk of infection, customer satisfaction did not decrease. Despite the government's attempts to frame *omotenashi* as a unique defining factor of Japaneseness and Japanese culture, in the face of the reality of a shrinking population and a four-decade-high ratio of new jobs to applicants, companies are forced to ponder whether excessive *omotenashi* practices are worth to uphold (White, 5 Nov. 2018).

6.2 Service Sector as a Gendered Domain

Before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan's employment rates steadily rose between 2013 and 2019 due to the women and elderly people based upward trend in labor force participation (Kotera and Schmittmann 2022, 5). Women's presence and agency in the workforce were especially supported by the leading Liberal Democratic Party to make up for the looming threat of an aging society, shrinking population and the future reduction in the volume of the workforce (e.g., Demelius 2020; Kingston 2019; Nakamatsu 2014). According to the Statistics Bureau, the total labor force amounted to 67.10 million in 2022 which is around 60.3% of all people over 15 years (Statistics Bureau 2022, 126). Japan's biggest industry was the tertiary industry which employed a whopping 73.4% of all eligible workers

and provided 1.8% of Japan's GDP (Statistics Bureau 2022, 30–32). In comparison to the statistics from before the pandemic, accommodation and food services currently account for 50.9 % of the volume of the tertiary industry despite the decrease in GDP and employment rate (Statistics Bureau 2022, 128). Of all the workers working in the accommodation and food services sector, 62% are women (Statistics Bureau 2022, 128). Thus, it can be deduced from governmental data that female workers are overrepresented in the hospitality sector.

In light of the Japanese government's data, the current biggest occupational category for women is reported to be service work, which is around 68.5% of all occupations they are holding (Statistics Bureau 2022, 128–130). As for the occupations women are employed as service workers, women tend to work predominantly in female-dominated occupations like elderly care, nursing, and teaching. Department stores and retail also employ a substantial number of female workers (Yoshida 2011, 219). Moreover, these aforementioned fields and occupations are considered low-wage employment without strong financial security (Cook 2018, 130; Gottfried in Vosko, MacDonald and Campbell 2009, 79; Osawa, Kim and Kingston 2013). Minjun who worked for three years for a *ryokan* in the *Kansai* area raised the issue of low salary during our interviews in autumn 2021: "The working hours were really long but the salary was very low." (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

I have kept in contact with Minjun, and I was surprised when, in early 2023, she wanted to have a sudden in-depth discussion about the very low salaries and the exploitation of the service sector. Out of the blue, the owner of the *ryokan* (社長 *shachō*) where she used to work contacted her to ask her to come back to work now that the pandemic had calmed down. She told me that she declined the offer as she had already stopped considering working in Japan. In the previous interview in fall 2021 she had mentioned on multiple occasions her dissatisfaction with low wages. In 2023, she asked me "But the salary was too low, right, you thought the same?" to which I had to answer "No, I do not know the amount of the salary as my internship at the *ryokan* was an unpaid internship". I proceeded to ask her about their monthly salary and at that time she told me:

> "Salaries at the *ryokan*s are already low, but it was 190.000 yen per month in that *ryokan*.[23] It is the same for everyone, not just for foreign workers. That's why many people have to work in two jobs, a full-time job at a *ryokan* and a part-time job elsewhere. It is very exploitative.[24] That's also why many workers quit

[23] About 1400 USD as of May 4th, 2023.
[24] She felt it is very exploitative and used word "black business" (すごくブラック企業 *sugoku burakku kigyou*) to describe the relation of long working hours and low salary.

> working at the *ryokan* quite fast, you cannot live with that salary." (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

She added that only she and Enkhtuya received higher salaries (250.000 yen)[25] due to their special type of work (marketing and translation to foreign customers and travel agencies). She also mentioned that at the time of her departure, the boss was even willing to do salary negotiations because "if [she] quits it will be very troublesome for [the *ryokan*]".

As discussed earlier, longing for a past that individuals have not experienced personally has been employed in the form of collective national nostalgia by conservative political actors as a way to unify the nation during uncertain times among societal changes (e.g., Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Grainge 1999, 621; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). To preserve Japanese identity, the Japanese government has also given into national nostalgia rhetoric and utilized Japan's culture as a medium to brand-nationalize the aspects of "authentic" Japanese culture to attract visitors to Japan. One of the employed concepts, *omotenashi*, is closely related to the notion of care, and the care itself in Japan is heavily reliant on women's gender roles and uncompensated care in the public (labor market) and private (household) spheres as explored in Chapter 3. Up until now, the breadwinner husband model together with the lingering effects of ideologies such as *ryōsai kenbo* ("Good Wife, Wise Mother") and the government's insistence on safekeeping the patriarchally constructed societal structures still reproduce and influence perceptions of suitable domains for men and women. The way the labor market is structured, and the gendered expectations of society not only affect a person's choice of the field of employment but also the type of work. In Japan, due to the needs of social institutions, nurturant work which involves care is understood as innately feminine (Morris-Suzuki 2015b). In the case of service work, the reproductive work performed there is often seen as the female domain because of the connected "feminine nature and qualities" (Morris-Suzuki 2015b; Parreñas 2012). Minjun admits that during her career, she has experienced the gender expectation-based discrimination in the labor market:

> Because I am a woman myself, I think women have fewer working opportunities than men. (…) There's work that needs power which women can't do, so if we talk about that kind of heavy work, women can't choose those jobs. When I am searching for a job, machines, automobiles, those industries (cannot apply to those fields) … Because I experienced first-hand that men are more desired [there] than women, I think job hunting chances are worse. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

[25] About 1900 USD as of May 4th, 2023.

Parreñas explains that men take part in institutional service work as janitors, teachers, or chefs (Parreñas 2012, 272). However, in the rare cases where men's produced work is also nurturant (perceived as feminine), the work of men is perceived instead as a breach of constructed gender order (Parreñas 2012, 272). For example, men who work in nurturant jobs like kindergarten teachers are shunned (Osaki, "Japan's male babysitters."). Nevertheless, the evidence shows that men predominantly perform "non-nurturant reproductive work" in the service sector like janitor, gardener, and food preparation (Parreñas 2012, 272). The same applies to hospitality which is seen as an innately nurturing job requiring feminine capabilities. Minjun talks about gender stereotypes and prejudice:

> There is prejudice. If you are a man, you need to be strong. If you are a woman, you must be delicate. Because you are a man, you must be able to carry this much or if you are a woman, you should be able to do it more beautifully and so on – in Japan it is the same. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

Alongside with the fact that nurturing work is seen as feminine, females are principally identified as preservers of traditional culture (Mosedale 2011, 128). In the context of *ryokan* and hospitality, women situated in the old-fashioned atmosphere serving others are argued to embody and reproduce something the contemporary society lacks (Yoshida 2001, 363), creating a connection to feel nostalgic to times gone by. Opposed to the men who are also allowed to work at hotels, most of the staff members at *ryokan* are women (Yoshida 2001, 362). Most of the service is done face-to-face is led by the *ryokan*'s *omotenashi* manager, *okami*, who together with female workers are perceived to be an "epitome of politeness" promoting the authentic traditional culture in the rapidly changing Japanese society (Yoshida 2001, 361). In addition to women's role as preserver of culture, this indicates that there is an underlying stereotype of women as excellent servers, making women superior to men in polite customer service because of their innate caring skills. Meiling agrees and speculates about the roots of these kinds of stereotypes:

> [Because of] the old traditional thinking, they think girls and women have to serve and men to do some heavy work. (…) Men can do other type of work (at *ryokan*), but not onee-san (serve customers personally). (…). (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

The aforementioned qualities have been influenced by the "Good Wife, Wise Mother" ideology that has been popular among male politicians who have supported the definition of women responsible for household management and child nurturing (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). Even though the characterization has its roots in the Western model of ideal Christian woman, the concept has seized a considerable hold on the official discourses about women in Japan

(Ueno 1993 in Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). Parreñas argues that the majority of work done by foreign (migrant) women is non-relational and thus not fitting the definition of traditional care work (Parreñas 2012, 272). Foreign workers conduct reproductive work which involves a broader set of activities like washing clothes, sweeping floors, socializing, and preparing food (Parreñas 2012, 272). Furthermore, the care presented at *ryokan* very much resembles the household chores women are expected to provide at home, thus *ryokan* can be viewed as an extension of women's household domain. To support this fact, the domestic services of *ryokan* like serving food and cleaning are argued to establish a home-like atmosphere (Alalsheikh 2016, 62; Alalsheikh and Sato 2015, 126). It is often claimed that women have more caring skills and a natural aptitude for caring, hence they are declared to be superior in work which requires face-to-face interactions like those demanded in the hospitality industry (Mosedale 2011, 128). This creates a very gendered division of labor revolving around the government advocated gender roles. Minjun provides more insight into that stereotype by pointing out how people feel that women are easier to approach:

> (…) if something is different (in the service sector), it's that work that requires power is done by men, for example carrying customers' luggage. And if a customer has a problem, if they have to ask in person, customers feel more relieved if it's a woman, so they end up going to a woman. (…) If it's small children, it is not a rare case either, but if it's a woman, they feel safer. (Minjun, 27, South Korea)

Meiling similarly voices her opinion:

> They need girls to serve you dinner, lunch, breakfast, it is more comfortable like that. If you come to a hotel and you see a lot of men, it is not a good feeling, right? You see a lot of women; you feel more relaxed and comfortable. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

In many cases, in these fields that are seen as "feminine jobs", female workers are surrounded by mostly female colleagues (Yoshida 2011, 219). The hospitality industry belongs to the tertiary industry and is a prime example of service work dominated by women. In the case of my fieldwork and interviews, the same trend was indicated by the results. Enkhtuya who has worked nine years at a *ryokan* admits after discussion that despite the work itself not being easier for a man or woman, it is a fact that there are more female workers at service sector and at their *ryokan* compared to men: "Men are also working at the *ryokan* (…) But maybe there are a little bit more women, I also think that too. (…) Fundamentally more women working at hotel industry, at service sector." (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

The above statistical numbers prove that there is a clear tendency for women to be driven in certain fields due to their combability with traditional gender roles. As noted earlier, Japanese labor markets are conservatively built upon lifetime employment and the male breadwinner model (Kotera and Schmittmann 2022, 4–5; Ueno, 2021). The statistics seem to be supporting the fact that the Japanese labor market's gender segregation is blatantly apparent as many companies have separate employment tracks for male and female workers (Assmann 2014, 8; Ueno 2021, 13; Yoshida 2011, 219). Men follow the career track and receive the benefits of lifetime employment while women are forced into the clerical track with fewer options for promotion and are expected to quit work after having children (Cook 2013, 130; Ueno 2021, 13; Yoshida 2011, 219). Numerous other aspects like insufficient childcare support arrangements, long working hours, and dual-track system make many married women find it easier to return to work life as part-time workers or take up non-career track positions rather than a full-time position because of the obstacles based on the artificially constructed gendered labor system (Kotera and Schmittmann 2022, 4–5). Around 70 percent of non-regular workers are women (Kotera and Schmittmann 2022, 4–5; see also Broadbent, 2003). The life course of many women is still ruled by the constraints of labor markets built upon the traditional expectations and gender roles that the Japanese government tirelessly promotes (e.g., Marshall 2017; Miura 2012; Ueno 2021). My informant Amy who studies international law and equality issues in Japan is rather conscious of the labor market issues and the prevailing constructions of a breadwinner salaryman husband. She proposes reasons that force women to choose the service sector and part-time employment over their careers:

> I think there are more women [in the service sector]. And if we ask why, to be honest, it's because women are almost always housewives, they work [part-time] as married housewives. If they marry, birth to children, full-time work is quite impossible for them. They have to raise children, in Japan men still (…) work full-time and housewives only go to work from two to three times a week. (…) Childrearing (子育て *kosodate*) is the cause of why there are more women in the service sector... and why they work in hospitality industry. (Amy, 21, Malaysia)

Omotenashi, which acts as the base of serving customers in the hospitality sector is closely connected to traditional Japanese tea ceremony practices (Takeda et al. 2016). During the tea ceremony, *omotenashi* is applied to show care and attend to the guests with utmost hospitality (Takeda et al. 2016). It is emphasized how the tea ceremony host must attend to the ceremony attendant thoroughly and ensure through and through an enjoyable experience (Takeda et al. 2016) which can also be applied to the case of a *ryokan*. In Japan, women are also often presented as bearers of tradition while men are seen as agents of the public sphere (Morris-

Suzuki 2015b). The gendered, nurturant and gentle stereotype associated with women was evident in many of my informants' answers. Meiling talks about the gendered nature of servicing and how women are perceived to innately be more careful, thus conducting their service top-notch:

> In the service industry, there [are] a lot of women do[ing] this [type of] job because this job needs a careful person to do it. If you do not care about that, you don't notice small things. If [you] need to serve a plate, a girl thinks "how can I make the customer [feel] more relaxed", so they do it more carefully. So, girls [are] more suitable to do this job. If boys do it, maybe they (customers) think boys [are] disgusting if they do it, they think that man is not a man, [that it is] women's job. (Meiling, 22, Taiwan)

Traditional *ryokan*s usually create a classy atmosphere not only through professional serving and traditional crafts, but also clothing their workers in traditional attires like kimono and hakama. According to *kokusaika* principle, the Japanese government has appealed to companies to make Japanese culture and for example souvenirs more exotic and appealing to tourists, and one way to achieve this is argued to be wearing an ethnic dress (Flowers 2012). Similarly, in a *ryokan*'s context, this ethnic dress can be perceived to be the kimono. This Japanese desire is speculated to deny the ethnic other at the expense of boosting tourism and profit (Flowers 2012). Goldstein-Gidoni emphasizes that in modern Japan, women clad in kimonos have been transformed into symbols of Japaneseness (Goldstein-Godoni 1999; see also Ashikari 2003, 72; Assmann, 2008, 360). The agenda has been deliberate as the kimono itself has been framed as a feature of Japanese uniqueness (Assmann 2008, 362; Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). Kimono is endorsed as a cultural distinction dividing the Japanese and Western (Goldstein-Godoni 1999). Furthermore, it is argued that the modern Japanese identity is built on the clear distinction between Western and Japanese culture (Assmann 2008, 370; Befu 2001), it is also recognized to be intimately related to reproducing traditional cultural roles and distinction for genders (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). One representation of this is how during university graduation men are allowed to wear Western attire whereas young women are seen as proper models of femininity only while wearing a kimono (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999; see also Valk 2018; Foreman 2011 in Bardsley and Miller 2011). This kind of mindset is also observed in the traditional *ryokan* setting as during my internship, I saw that women working in face-to-face interaction at the front were clad in kimonos while serving the customers. Foreign workers clad in kimonos brought customers food or sometimes if cleaning was required, the kimono was mixed with hakama pants to give more mobility but not remove from the "authentic Japanese atmosphere". In short, the household sphere-based gendered

division of labor and utilization of traditional Japanese items like kimono not only serve as a distinguishing force dividing Japanese from foreigners (as kimono is "unique" to Japan) but seem to also indicate that the government attempts to negotiate and frame Japanese culture by means of authenticity and uniquity. In their opinion authentic Japaneseness is found "in the past traditions", and this nostalgia is triggered in response to the threat to the continuation of "Japanese national identity due to the foreign cultural contact at home and abroad.

In addition, the conventional gendered division of labor also made women more vulnerable to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic (Fukai, Ichimura and Kawata 2021; Kobayashi et al. 2021; Kotera and Schmittmann 2022). Japanese economy and labor force participation rates shrank for the first time since the steady growth of 2013, and accommodations, drinking and eating services especially bore the brunt of the impact due to the restrictions on non-essential and non-urgent long-distance travel, domestic commuting, and the push for social distancing (Fukai, Ichimura and Kawata 2021; Takahashi 2021, 13). Overall, around 870.000 people became unemployed (Ishibashi, 17 Sept. 2020), and as a result of these government imbued pandemic restrictions, it was recorded that workers in accommodation and food services declined by 250.000 (Takahashi 2021, 13). Women whose presence in the accommodation and food services are prominent are regarded to be the most vulnerable to unemployment because of the pandemic as they usually are employed in very contact-intensive sectors with no option for remote work, unlike the option full-time company salarymen have (Fukai, Ichimura and Kawata 2021; Kobayashi et al. 2021; Kotera and Schmittmann 2022, 2).

> The numbers of infected persons are still rising, so it's a little scary all the same. (…) when I am going to work, I use the train, not every train but many of them are crowded with people returning home (…) There are also many people at the workplace, it's the scariest because you do not know who the carrier is (…). There are also the matter of families and people who live together, you might get infected, and you might infect others, I worry about that. (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

Many scholars have proclaimed that COVID-19 pandemic has affected men and women differently; while men suffered job-related worries like work-style changes or economic insecurity, women were reported to suffer from stress factors unrelated to work such as increased living costs and limited social interactions (Kobayashi et al. 2021). The case of the coronavirus pandemic is also special as previous economic recessions have caused impact in suicide among men, however, for the first time female suicide rates rose (Kobayashi et al. 2021). Women, young people, and non-regular workers are also vulnerable to economic

hardships due to lower average salary (Kobayashi et al. 2021). They also experience the increasing demand for household support as they are responsible for taking care of children and elderly relatives (Kobayashi et al. 2021). Minjun had just quit her *ryokan* job and was in the middle of job hunting in Japan when the pandemic hit Japan. She felt stressed and the situation eventually made her return to South Korea a little bit earlier than she had first intended:[26]

> I wasn't in the country for that long when the pandemic started (…) but similarly to other places in the world there were lots of effects to life. I had just quit working at *ryokan* and was searching for a job (…). It caused worries, of course; I had to change jobs fast, because if you cannot earn money, you cannot live… There can be circumstances where you have to return to your home country [because you don't have enough money]. (Minjun, 27, South Korea).

Enkhtuya recalls feeling a little bit depressed and lonely because she was unable to meet her family during the pandemic: "Sad feelings… Well, this year (because of corona), I haven't been able to meet my family, so that is lonely." (Enkhtuya, 29, Mongolia)

In addition to women, foreign residents (who are much more vulnerable because of their status as outsiders) seem to share enhanced stressors and vulnerability. Japan's immigration policy is described as a "no-immigration policy" (Burgess 2022; Chung 2010; Flowers 2012). Japanese policymakers have vehemently denied Japan being an immigration country, opting to avoid the term "migrant" and instead referring to "entrant" or "foreign worker" (Burgess, 2022). The whole immigration system is based on the assumption that foreigners won't stay long or settle down, rather it is expected that after their usefulness they will be discarded (Burgess, 2022). Based on the wide support for the government's hardline on border controls in response to the coronavirus pandemic, it cannot be denied that the "island-nation mentality" hasn't disappeared; there is an indication of stable support for isolationism and protectionism (Burgess 2022). Chris Burgess examined that numerous foreign sojourners have experienced discriminative behavior in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic (Burgess, 2022). For example, they were vulnerable to reduced wages or unemployment as well as inadequate access to support (Burgess, 2022). It was pointed out that Japanese-style multiculturalism had a significant role in worsening the pandemic's impacts because Japanese-style multiculturalism itself is a non-integrative policy that does not support empowering foreigners nor aid them in obtaining social capital and becoming responsible and

[26] Initially Minjun had thought that she would return home before she turned 30.

independent members of Japanese society (Burgess, 2022). Pre-pandemic Japan made advancements towards opening up from its isolationist island nation mindset which has complicated their handling with foreign migrants, but all the progress seems to have halted or regressed (Burgess, 2022). Burgess also hypothesizes that these struggles of providing support and the weakening yen may have cost Japan its attractiveness as a destination to work and live among non-Japanese (Burgess, 2022).

In the interviews, none of my informants addressed the gender disparities found in the Japanese labor market directly. Therefore, it is safe to argue that different gender expectations – like men need to be strong and for that reason women as less strong individuals cannot apply to certain type of work – is a representation of gender disparity. The pandemic countermeasures and tight border control issued by the Japanese government have been proven to have had a negative impact on foreign labor (Fukai, Ichimura and Kawata 2021; Kobayashi et al. 2021; Kotera and Schmittmann 2022). None of the informants had not needed official help, thus indicating that the municipality's efforts to alleviate problems among residents were insufficient and many did not seem to know what kind of support they could request, making municipal services seem unapproachable. The majority of the study subjects cited worries about salaries and infecting others which are common findings on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. However, as established earlier, these kinds of problems among foreigners are not an uncommon occurrence, rather COVID-19 just heightened the persistent struggles foreigners share in their everyday life.

7 Conclusion—"Women and Men Do Not Have the Same Expectations"

In this master's thesis, I have demonstrated how Japan's national nostalgia based political narrative manifests in the country's hospitality industry by constructing an extremely gendered domain, affecting foreign female workers via enhanced traditional gender roles and how these same narratives about "uniqueness" and "homogeneity" serve as a major obstacle hindering Japan's aspirations from realizing *tabunka kyōsei* society. As a data collection method, I conducted semi-structured online interviews among foreign female workers who were working in Japan's service sector together with my own internship-turned-fieldwork experience at a traditional *ryokan* in *Kansai* area. As for data analysis, I utilized the thematic analysis method based on the interview materials to interpret my data. I applied the lens of "national nostalgia" (Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021) as this study's framework together with the researcher's positionality (Ali 2014; Ali 2015; Narayan 2003) to evaluate the data, and special emphasis was put on the concepts of uniqueness, hospitality, and care work. While analyzing the results, I found a correlation between Japan's collective identity building in response to the threat of change, the strict gender binary and the low integration of foreign workers. These findings show that despite nationalistic narratives underlying Japan as a monoethnic, homogenous and unique society similar to *Nihonjinron* have transformed into new forms of nationalism since their peak years, remnants of those ideologies are still relevant to contemporary Japanese society via collective national nostalgia. Furthermore, the ideologies are constantly reproducing and enhancing Japan's own self-image as a "unique country and culture" which obstructs multicultural society building by reinforcing the ingroup and outgroup borders based on ethnicity.

This research was able to provide several contributions. Firstly, there is an abundance of previous research focusing on foreign female workers on entertainment and sex industry such as hostess clubs (e.g., Aoyama 2009; Kamise 2013) and of foreign nurses (e.g., Efendi et al. 2022; Świtek 2016), but very little research is done from the point of view of the Japanese hospitality sector. My study managed to fill this gap in the existing body of literature and provides an opportunity to build upon this topic in the future. Moreover, even though these women share some common realities and problems while residing in Japan, the employees in the hospitality industry have different contexts from those of entertainment workers. For example, they do not bear the same stigmas, but struggle with strict work expectations,

responsibilities, and societal inclusion on other fronts. As Ali (2014) affirms, compared to men, women must balance various expectations related to home and work. This aspect makes women's experiences, especially foreign ones, a fruitful group to study in a multicultural setting. In addition, Japanese *ryokan* and *omotenashi* culture as an extremely gendered domain reproducing traditional values and nation-branding is not much researched in the West.

Secondly, there are few existing studies conducted on the influence of national nostalgia narrative in an East Asian context. The preponderance of existing studies present the national nostalgia narrative that the populist radical right-wing political employ in an American and European context (e.g., Behler et al. 2021; Elgenius and Rydgren 2017; Elgenius and Rydgren 2022; Smeekes, Wildschut and Sedikides 2021; Smeekes and Jetten 2019). My findings suggest that Japan's right-wing leaning leading Liberal Democratic Party's political rhetoric has affinity to a same kind of narrative of "homogeneity" and "monoethnicity" of the past to defend the ethnic and cultural borders of Japan. Hence, I contributed to the national nostalgia scholarship by offering a glimpse of how this same narrative is utilized in a Japanese context to define "Japanese collective identity" and the characteristics that belong to it, and at the same time resulting in augmented and reinforced borders between the Japanese ingroup and the foreign outgroup.

Thirdly, despite *Nihonjinron* ideology being obsolete and debunked by several academics, there seems to be a research gap in presenting how *Nihonjinron* still significantly impacts Japanese society by setting boundaries between Japanese and foreigners, making it still relevant to discuss in a contemporary context. As Befu (2001, 44) noted, the absence of women in *Nihonjinron* serves as a way to challenge the "hegemonic" Japanese identity and turn the scope to the matter of multiculturalizing Japan which the national government has been turning a blind eye to. *Nihonjinron* ideology has transformed several times and is so embedded in the contemporary Japanese narrative advocated by the Japanese government that various fragments of the ideology about homogenous and "racially monoethnic" society with unique culture and customs are found in many facets of the society. Even the *tabunka kyōsei* policies aimed at the inclusion of foreign residents highlight the cultural borders of Japanese and non-Japanese, resulting in the exclusion by inclusion (Burgess 2007; Burgess 2012; Chapman 2006). The close affinity of *Nihonjinron*, national nostalgia narrative and *tabunka kyōsei* prove that they are just the newest manifestation of *Nihonjinron*. Therefore, I have provided the female perspective to *Nihonjinron* which has been lacking previously and

presented how the ideology still manifests in different contexts to strengthen Japanese identity and othering the foreign presence, obstructing Japan's transformation to a multicultural society.

For the abovementioned reasons, my research data provides a nuanced picture of the foreign female workers, their experiences and how traditional gender roles are embodied in Japan's multiculturalizing hospitality sector. In addition, I was able to present some of the multifaceted causality relations between the Japanese national government's agenda, the gendered labor market, and how this narrative about society's "uniqueness" correlates with the resistance to society's multiculturalization and what impacts they have among Japan's increasing foreign population. The effects of national nostalgia rhetoric on Japanese national identity, traditional gender roles and foreign integration could be studied further in the future.

At a rhetorical level, the Japanese government harnesses Japan's national nostalgia to reimagine Japanese identity through shared features, a common homogenous past and by framing Japanese culture as "unique". This "uniqueness" is narrated to be the result of Japan being historically an island nation where foreign influences have not been reached due to its geopolitical isolation. However, this narrative contradicts Japan's multiculturalist past and the current reality of Japan fostering foreign immigrants and minorities, painting a picture of a homogenic society. In turn, this strengthens the strict borders between "ethnically Japanese" and the "foreign other", producing difficulties for immigration and implementation of a multicultural society. It is also noted that the multicultural policies sharing cultural distinctions highlight the differences between cultures, furthering the deep divide between the native and immigrant populations. Hence, a narrative similar to *Nihonjinron* continues to shape perceptions of the ethnic other and divide the society, blinding the Japanese government of its multiculturalist reality.

In regard to the extent to which Japan's national nostalgia towards the "homogenous and unique culture" affects Japanese society, I found it had a distinctive correlation with interactions and obstacles for multiculturalism in Japan. For instance, one finding indicated the importance of the Japanese language and networking with Japanese nationals, so one could argue that Japanese society is built on a power structure between foreigners and the ethnic Japanese. None of my informants had major troubles with the Japanese language nor considerable hardships. However, none of the members of my informant group had long-term plans to stay in Japan. Despite the need to network with Japanese nationals to acquire a

guarantor for housing, they tended to stay among people of similar backgrounds (i.e., other foreigners). Alas, despite being fairly privileged and not facing major troubles, my findings showed that my informants were not sufficiently integrated into society. All of my interlocutors underlined the need to know how to speak the Japanese language, and academic research supports this fact of the language barrier drawing distinctions between cultures (See Phillips 2007). The language was stressed to be the key to understanding Japanese "unique" culture and behavior. Another relevant point was that most of the informants did not know or had a superficial knowledge of the *tabunka kyōsei* policies and how they were implemented on a local level. When I asked them about what kinds of services municipalities provide to foreign residents, all of them voiced that they had not required assistance and listed briefly on a general level a couple of services they had heard of being provided for foreigners. This suggests that services which are fashioned after the *tabunka kyōsei* policies to make foreign residents integrate better into the host society are perhaps nonexistent, or at least hard to reach to the foreign population and inadequately advertised.

Furthermore, Japanese internal self-identity is found to be fluctuating between a positive–negative binary axis following the historical and geopolitical changes in the economy; during economically and politically prosperous times, these factors provided stronger national self-esteem, letting cultural nationalism to prevail and vice-versa (Befu 2001; Nederveen Pieterse and Kim 2012, 169). Postwar Japan set to mold its image into a more peace-loving and harmonious society through the employment of soft power (e.g., Befu 2001; Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013). With the aid of Japan's soft power, this attempt to improve the image of Japan via cultural mediums and commodities seems to have succeeded as the research participants had very positive images of Japan and Japanese culture. Recently Japan has utilized its immense amount of cultural capital in campaigns such as "Cool Japan", which promoted Japan's popular culture. Despite the scarcity of academic inquiries into Japan's success in attracting visitors due to its soft power campaigns, in my research there were strong indicators between Cool Japan and motivation to come and experience Japanese culture in person. Japan has also attempted to define "authentic Japanese culture", and this national nostalgia-based narrative had shaped foreigners' impressions of Japan in a way that "*ryokan* can only be found in Japan" or "Japan has the unique service culture (*omotenashi*) which is not found in other parts of the world".

In addition, this same nostalgia-based narrative impacts Japanese society itself by creating expectations for genders grounded on traditional gender roles. As Amy from Malaysia put it:

“[In Japan], women and men do not have the same expectations”. I examined this notion based on my own internship experience and the interview data I gathered, the results indicating a similar conclusion of a gendered society on the grounds of exceedingly prominent gender norms. In recent history, Japan’s leading elite have nudged society towards gendered labor by supporting societal constructs such as the breadwinner model which cemented perceptions of woman’s role in the household and advocated them as caregivers and providers of welfare through their uncompensated work. Since then, the notion of care has been inextricably linked with femininity and suitable gender roles, influencing women to contribute care work for society in the “feminine fields” both inside and outside the bounds of their domestic domain. As a consequence, the occupations related to care are perceived to befit women based on their feminine qualities. One of the questions I raised at the beginning of this study was how gender roles manifest in the hospitality sector. In the context of *ryokan* and hospitality, as Yoshida (2001, 363) pointed out, women are perceived to embody values that are absent in modern society, therefore especially the traditional *ryokan* is seen as an extension of the domestic domain due to the fact that the tasks there resemble household chores, reproducing the image of woman as feminine caretaker and household manager. The gendered labor is also visible in the roles of “*onee-san*” and “*okami*”: as the *ryokan* aims to make the customer feel at home, *ryokan* takes advantage of the image of females as homemakers serving guests in a home-like environment. Furthermore, this ideology of “women being superior at caring and servicing” was evident in the stories my informants told me as they narrated that “if you have a problem while staying at a *ryokan*, the customer feels more relieved to seek woman’s help and might feel disgusted if a man is serving them”. In short, the gender roles manifest through the perception that the household is a women’s sphere, caring is feminine duty and females are superior in giving service due to their innate qualities.

Another key question was how these reproduced gender roles and expectations affect foreign women. My informant group did not acknowledge gender disparities directly; however, society’s gender experiences were visible through expectations. As they were working on the field themselves, they did not seem to notice the preference for female labor in the *ryokan* nor the expectation of women being face-to-face care providers for the guests, but when asked they could point out that men always carried the heavy luggage due to their strength and women needed to be more delicate and thoughtful. In addition, foreign women were expected to understand and convey the “authentic” and “unique” Japanese culture which *ryokan*

embodies and preserves. However, this put foreign female workers into a peculiar situation where they have to present authentic Japanese culture to foreign and domestic customers despite the Japanese public narrative othering and not integrating them into members of society. Additionally, it was acknowledged that, as a woman, it was acknowledged that women could not work in every profession and that Japanese society innately holds societal constructions which force women to choose to work in flexible positions like the ones the hospitality sector provides. On top of the strict and demanding work due to top-level service, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the vulnerable positions of working women. The latest studies have found that female-dominated fields in Japan like the hospitality sector were hit the hardest, and the lack of tourists made several individuals lose their employment. Principally all the interviewed females were worried about the effects of the coronavirus, and one of them had experienced the stress of finding a good job during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking all these points into consideration, Japan's gendered hospitality sector and foreign women's experiences in the field reveal how Japanese hospitality is constructed on traditional gender norms. Furthermore, women are the ones expected to serve and provide care work, and this notion also affects foreign female workers through the perceived "feminine work", suitable gender roles and indirect expectations that foreign females must fulfill as women. What's more, these gendered societal norms and gendered expectations are constantly reproducing and enhancing conservative gender roles in Japan. My findings indicate that national nostalgia is indeed employed in the "narrative of Japaneseness" and influences it by shaping the definitions of "authentic" and "unique" Japanese culture. Likewise, this narrative of a "unique" and "monoethnic" Japan highlights the distinctions of ethnicities and cultures compared to Japanese culture, reinforcing the borders between Japanese and non-Japanese residents. From these findings, I conclude that these facts prevent foreigners' integration and realization of a truly multicultural Japan.

I acknowledge certain limitations in this study. The experience of conducting this research revealed several aspects which could have been executed differently; the interview questions could have covered fewer topics, concentrating only on hospitality workers, or alternatively, I could have included a wider age range or more diverse legal statuses, to mention a few. One prominent change in the execution of this research—which I briefly mentioned in Chapter 4—is the fact that I could have conducted a second fieldwork at the *ryokan* as a service employee together with my informants instead of simply utilizing interview materials, which would have offered a more comprehensive set of data. Secondly, as most of the data was gathered in

Japanese among non-native speakers of the Japanese language and translated by another non-native speaker (yours truly), this thesis might include some miscommunication and misconceptions which derive from the lacking language skills. Thirdly, this thesis touches upon only specified parts of both gendered labor and hospitality sector along with the national nostalgia rhetoric, further research is recommended to build an even more comprehensive and multifaceted picture of this reality in Japan. In particular, the female-dominant *ryokan* could have been compared to male dominant service spheres such as the professional culinary art domain (AP, 14Aug. 2015), which would have bestowed a richer comparative picture of the evident male–female binary in the hospitality sector. Lastly, as established in this study, women are associated as "domestic care workers" and their care work is taken for granted, making them and their work rather invisible whereas men's work input as, for example, full-time salarymen is visible to the general public. These visibility and invisibility dynamics could be tested in future studies to better understand the gendered work domains of Japan. However, despite these posed limitations, I firmly believe that this study has achieved its goal in shedding light on the extent Japan's national nostalgia imbued narrative of "authentic Japaneseness" prevents integration and increasing multiculturalization in Japan. In addition, it also presents how the gender roles manifest and affect the multiculturalizing hospitality sector, and the various realities and expectations the gendered domains induce on foreign female workers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Form for Interview and Research Cooperation

Consent Form for Interview and Research Cooperation

This interview will be conducted as follows. If you understand the purpose and content of the interview and are willing to participate to the interview, please sign the consent form below.

１． The Purpose of the interview

This research will be carried out as part of the thesis assignment for the master's degree in East Asian Studies at the University of Turku. The purpose of this study is to better understand the daily lives and experiences of foreign women working in Japan’s service sector. The interview includes questions about work, entering Japan, the hospitality business, daily life, etc., but mainly what kind of experience you had as a woman and as a foreigner in Japan. The insights gained from this study will benefit the conditions and rights of foreign workers in Japan in the future. For this reason, the contributions of the participants are highly valued. We apologize for any inconvenience and appreciate your cooperation.

２． Interview method

In this survey, we will conduct at least two 60-minute interviews. The content of the interview will be recorded with ZOOM, and the content will be transcribed and analyzed. Your permission to record is asked before the interview. The interview will be conducted online by ZOOM, but if it does not work for you, it is possible to use other methods. The link for the online meeting is sent to you before the interview via email. Interviews will be conducted in Japanese or English, depending on the wishes of the information provider. If the interview is conducted in Japanese, the interview is more likely to be recorded in consideration of the researcher's Japanese proficiency. The interview is a structured interview and contains open-ended questions. The informant can decline to answer any question and skip the answer at his or her own will.

We are planning to hold only one round of interviews, but there may be questions that the researcher would like to ask again during the analysis process. In that case, we may ask for additional interviews. The interview period is scheduled to end on December 31st, 2022.

３． Participation and withdrawal from interviews

Participation in this interview is voluntary. You may refuse the interview or withdraw your participation in the interview at any time. In addition, the collaborator (interviewed person) will not be treated disadvantageously in situations where they refuse to take part in the interview, withdraw participation or refuse to answer any question.

４． Data management

The collected data and personal information will be managed with due care and will not be used for purposes other than writing the master's thesis and related assignments. Pseudonyms will be used in the thesis and presentations so that the individuals who participated to this study cannot be identified. Everyone's rights are respected.

５． Publication of interview results

Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher writes a master's degree thesis and submit it to the person in charge of the degree. The thesis will be made available online with restrictions and all participants will be anonymized.

If you wish, you can check the transcript of the interview, or the recording of the interview at any point you wish.

Transcription of interview content and audio confirmation (preferred / not wished):

In addition, regarding the completed master's thesis, we will explain the contents of the it verbally if the participant wishes, so please let us know your wish.

b) Summary report of master's thesis (preferred / not wished)

How to send materials if you "prefer" any of the above a) – b)

☐ E-mail:

☐ Mail： 〒

６． Person in charge and contact information

The Researcher:

Email:

*****

I understand the above and agree to cooperate with the interview and agree to the handling of data.

Date:

Collaborator’s name:

Signature (can be waved):

Contact address (email or home address):

Research Conductor:

Affiliation:

Contact address:

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

Background information
- May I confirm your name?
- How old are you?
- What is your nationality?
- What is your education?
- What is your current profession?
- Are you married?
- How long have you stayed in Japan?
Immigration process
- Why did you decide to come to Japan?
- How did you enter the country? Was the procedure easy or difficult?
- Are there any memorable events regarding the immigration procedure?
- How long did it take to get a visa?
- Have you had to renew your visa?
- If you have had to renew the visa, how was your visit to the Immigration Bureau?
- Did anyone help you when you were trying to enter the country or get a visa?
Language
- Did you speak Japanese before coming to Japan? If so, were you already fluent?
- What did you think of your Japanese skills when you interacted with people?
- Where did you use Japanese language? How often?
- Do you think your language skills have helped you in Japan? In what ways did you find it useful?
-Are there any language-related stories you would like to share? Do you have any other good or difficult language-related experiences in Japan?
- Have someone commented on your Japanese ability in Japan?
Service sector, hospitality business and working life
-If I can ask you, what kind of work permit or contract do you have?
- How did you find the job?
- How was the application process/ job interview?
- What do you think of working at Japan's service sector?
- What were your usual tasks in your job?
- What did you like about your work?
- What was the most difficult aspect in your work? What was the thing you hated the most?
-How long did you work at your job?
- Did you acquire any new skills?
- What did you learn from your work experience in Japan?
- What do you think of Japanese working style or work culture?
- Would the job you did be different in your home country compared to Japan? How so?
- Did you think you were well paid for your work?
- Was it normal to overwork in your job? Did you overwork yourself in your work?
- Would you recommend this job to other foreign workers?
- Have you done any other kind of work in Japan in the past?
- Do you have any memorable memories to share when you worked in Japan?

Life in Japan
- How was your life in Japan?
- Before you came to Japan, what did you expect your life in Japan to be like?
- How have your opinions about life in Japan changed since you started living in Japan?
- Did you have any problems while living in Japan? If you had, how did you solve them?
- Were you facing problems on a regular or irregular basis?
- Was your life in Japan different from the life in your hometown?
- Are there any events that left an impression on you after you came to Japan?
Leisure time
-How did you spend your free time in Japan?
- Did you have any hobbies?
-How did you spend your time in your home country? Did your leisure time activities differ from those back at home?
Community
- What kind of relationships you formed while in Japan?
- What is the nationality of those people you have befriended?
- How often and how did you keep in contact with your family abroad?
- What did your family think of you coming to Japan?
- How was your neighbourhood? What kind of neighbourhood was it?
- Did there live other foreign residents in the neighbourhood?
- How did the neighbourhood interact with its residents? What about the foreign nationals?
- What kind of services the municipality/local governments provided to its residents?
- How does the municipality help the foreign residents? For example, do they provide information in English or other languages, some language courses etc.?
- Have you taken part in any community or neighbourhood activity in the past? If you have, what kind of activity or event you have participated in? (Cleaning day etc.)
About women
- Were there a lot of women working at your job?
- Were there more women working than men?
- Do you think service sector in Japan have more women than men working there?
- Do you think it is easier for woman to perform or do service jobs?
- What do you think of women's working opportunities in Japan?
- Do you think there are certain expectations for women and men?
Miscellaneous:
- What kind of perceptions you had about Japan (as a country) before coming to Japan?
- Did they change after living there?
- Did you have anyone you could rely on if you needed help?
- Did you ever feel lonely? Why or why not?
- Did you ever feel powerless in Japan?
Future:
- What do you want to do in the future?
- Do you plan to return to Japan to work?