

Abstract

The main purpose of this dissertation is to clarify the mechanism of creating customer value in *omotenashi*, that is the Japanese counterpart to hospitality. Here, the term “*omotenashi*” is not limited to the hospitality service or industry. Instead, I use the term in a broad sense. To make it more concrete, I start the first chapter with two everyday examples in Japan. First, at a *karaoke* party, even though there are no clearly specified rules, members all innately obey the unwritten rules, acting as if there are roles allocated to each individual participant based on their age and standing. When selecting a song, rather than a song one can sing well or wants to sing, participants choose songs that will fit the mood and flow of the occasion and venue. Though participants prepare for the occasion, they do not show off their ability. All the participants always “read the air,” and act properly. This is the core of *omotenashi*, based on sympathy and consideration. Everyone puts the whole value before his/her own interest. In addition, they feel pleasure for making contributions to enhancing the whole value. Indeed, as the party succeeds on the whole, in other words, the values of the occasion (“*ba*”) increase, each participant can get more value for him/herself. Then, why do they act in that way?

The other example shown to describe the spirit and behavior of *omotenashi* is a comfortable relationship between employee and customer at a long-established department store. The employees (irrespective of their department) are ready to do anything for the customer (irrespective of the purchase). It is not because they want to sell more or make a good impression on the customer. Rather, the employees regard *omotenashi* as a spiritual discipline. And the customers appreciate the consideration. In the department store, employees and customers co-create the value of the department. Again, why do they act in that way?

These questions are important because the spirit of *omotenashi* links contemporary business practice with ancient tradition handed down carefully to the present. In other words, Japanese business practice has inherited the spirit (and behavior) of *omotenashi*, not superficially but in a profound sense.

In this dissertation, I go back to the typical scenes of *omotenashi* in the 7th century, to clarify the core and nature of *omotenashi*. The unique value creation of *renga* (chain poems) gathering is also discussed, as the literary genre played a great role to diffuse the spirit (and education) of *omotenashi* throughout the country. While I deal with historical documents and classical literary works for analysis, this dissertation pursues how the concept of *omotenashi* has had influence on contemporary business practice. Research

of the origin and development of omotenashi give us the key or viewpoint to approach some contemporary misunderstandings that may arise between service providers and customers.

This dissertation deals with three research questions. (1) What, how and why are customer values created in omotenashi? (2) How does the level of education on the part of participants have effects on the individual value in omotenashi? (3) How has the omotenashi spirit or mechanism been inherited by contemporary business practice? An additional question appeared as a result of the research: (4) What is the difference between omotenashi of a high context culture and hospitality of a low context culture?

First, as to the characteristics of customer value created in omotenashi, and the mechanism of creating customer value, analysis of the value of participation in the banquets in the 7th century leads to the findings as follows: in the banquet, the participants prioritized the value of the whole place, or “ba” rather than their own (selfish) purposes related to exhibiting their skill and getting acquainted with influential persons. They voluntarily attempted to enliven the atmosphere and enhance the whole values of “ba.” Participants were required to do these things:(a) to read the consideration of the host, including the intention of omotenashi which was implied in things or decoration, (b) to play their roles (according to implicit rules), make their poems suitable for the occasion, and behave properly. They should make efforts to boost the mood based on “kata” (or a formalized set of behaviors) to respond to the host’s concerns, and (c) to read the air with each other. Participants felt satisfied and pleased when they recognized the enhancement of the value of “ba,” and when the participants thought that they themselves were engaged in, or contributed to, the enhancement of the value of “ba.” Peoples in the *Manyo* era share the spirit and behavior with us today.

Regarding the second research question, the individual values of participation depend on whether the customer has a high level of education or not. Omotenashi behavior of the provider is often conveyed indirectly and implicitly. In addition, omotenashi is usually carried out by following the “kata”, but the meaning lies in breaking the “kata” a little. The guest is expected to have a certain education to recognize where and why the “kata” has been broken, which is important to understand the host’s feelings.

As to the third question, I introduce the example of Mitsukoshi Department Store, which has the roots of their customer service in the spirit of omotenashi, in the sense that the employees put the value of the whole store (Mitsukoshi) before their own sales. At Mitsukoshi Department Store, customers who experience the omotenashi behavior from the employees often treat other customer in a similar way;

Here the omotenashi behavior from the employee to the customer develops into the omotenashi behavior between customers. In this section, Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) is applied to analyze the letters of gratitude from their customers.

Regarding the fourth question which arose as a result of the research, on the difference between omotenashi of high context cultures and the hospitality of low context cultures, I conducted a comparative analysis between the Imperial Hotel, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and Kagaya, a traditional, high class Japanese *ryokan* or inn. On a superficial level, they have much in common between the Japanese style of omotenashi and the western style of hospitality. However, there is a difference. Hospitality behavior in a low context culture is easy to understand while omotenashi behavior in high context culture is not. In hospitality of a low-context culture, the customer is not expected to have knowledge of the kata or consideration, and thus, the hospitality behavior is understandable for anyone. In contrast, omotenashi depends on the customer's comprehension, as it is based on the assumption that host and guest share the context. When the behavior is understood properly, it will bring deep emotion. When customers decipher the implied omotenashi and express their feelings (for example, gratitude, joy, etc.), the employees will get a deep pleasure beyond financial rewards. And it will lead to further motivation for the employee, and to further engagement on the part of the customers in turn.

The main practical implications of this research are as follows. It is important for every participant to feel that he/she is contributing to the whole value of "ba." Thus, it is advisable for the staff and managers that they should introduce some systems in which every participant can make a contribution and feel satisfaction. Regarding rewards, people with an omotenashi spirit are intrinsically motivated to provide excellent service for customers. On this point, it is not preferable that managers put too much emphasis on the financial rewards for the employees. Instead, they should attempt to make effective systems for employees to improve their intrinsic motivation.

As to limitations and future directions, I did not discuss *shitsurae*, or the space where omotenashi activity is conducted. In this dissertation, it was necessary to focus purely on the relationship between the customer and the provider.

I believe the spirit of omotenashi connects to the very concept of the Japanese language in essence. In the future, I would like to pursue this research on omotenashi together with other scholars of Japanese linguistics and comparative linguistics and compare approaches and findings, especially with a view to improving cross-cultural communication.