FOREIGN COWORKER NATIONALITY, CULTURAL DISTANCE, AND PERCEPTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Abstract

Purpose

As Japan has been slowly opening up to foreign workers to supplement its shrinking workforce, local employees have had to deal with increased diversity at work, owing to the presence of foreign coworkers. This paper investigates the relationship between foreign coworkers' nationality (specifically Chinese, Korean and those from Western countries) and the perception of the benefits and threats of cultural diversity in the workplace by Japanese employees.

Design/methodology/approach

A sample of Japanese employees working in Japan, half of which working with foreigners, was used, focusing on those Japanese employees who reported working with foreign coworkers of a single nationality.

Findings

We found that Japanese workers' perceived benefits of cultural diversity at work, but not perceived threats, are significantly impacted by the unique nationality of their foreign coworkers. Specifically, the effect of coworker nationality is most apparent for the two benefits of 'understanding of diverse groups in society' and 'social environment', whereby cultural distance is significantly and positively related to these perceived benefits. And more benefits from cultural diversity at work are perceived by Japanese employees in the presence of Western or Chinese, rather than South Korean coworkers.

Originality

Very little research in Japan has examined perception biases among native employees based on the nationality of their foreign coworkers, which is critical as globally minded Japanese firms are trying to increase their level of internal internationalization.

Practical implications

In the Japanese context, hiring employees from certain distant and heterogeneous cultures and nationalities could increase the positive perception of multiculturalism at work, therefore facilitating diversity management and fostering inclusion in the culture of the firm.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, foreigners, nationality, distance, Japan

1. Introduction

Japanese employees have a deep feeling of group membership (Caudill, 1973), a belonging they associate with what they see as the 'right' attitudes and values (Nakane, 1972). This perception fosters a clear distinction between in-groups, here the Japanese, and out-groups, the foreigners of different nationalities (Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001). These characteristics contrast with the context of most (Western) countries that have been at the core of research on workplace cultural diversity and inclusion. As such, Japan's significance as a research context could lie in either challenging the generalization of previous findings, or more interestingly, in shedding light on local context characteristics that explain paradoxical findings. With its very low unemployment, safe and clean society, technological advancement, and chronic labor shortage, Japan has become

a popular destination for some foreign workers, especially from neighboring China and South Korea who make up half of the foreign population (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2019). Japan was the destination for one-third of South Korean graduates who found jobs overseas in 2018. However, recurring political tensions between the two countries are regularly forcing both South Korean job seekers and Japanese employers to rethink Japan as a workplace (Roh, 2019). These political tensions also affect Japanese employees' perception of actual or potential South Korean coworkers. The success of South Korean popular culture in Japan and of Japanese popular culture in South Korea are also factors drawing the two countries closer, and Japanese companies eager to do business in South Korea are willing to hire South Korean students (Chunichi Shimbun, 2019). In China, Chinese employees often point out that Japanese companies are the foreign companies they would least want to work for. Chinese working for them describe Japanese management as ethnocentric and complain about many of its aspects, ranging from seating arrangements to incentives (Yu and Meyer-Ohle, 2008).

Likewise, Japanese employees may resent the working style of Chinese workers or their number in the workplace. When the Japanese convenience-store chain Lawson announced that it would ramp up the number of its Chinese recruits, "most Japanese bloggers were enraged, condemning Lawson's decision and vowing to boycott the chain" (Liu-Farrer, 2011: 785). However, Japan's secure and orderly social environment is now attracting Chinese candidates (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Southeast Asian workers are often associated with the trainee system put in place by the Japanese government in 1982 (Shipper, 2002; Hugo, 2012). Since then, the Japanese government has concluded agreements with Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines in 2006 and Indonesia in 2007 including provisions to attract caregiving workers for its aging population. Ohno (2012) asserts that such an influx of foreign workers who need to communicate in Japanese (visa candidates need to pass a linguistic exam) and attend to Japanese elders' emotions and feelings will be challenging for Japanese society and that numerous problems must be anticipated. Ohno adds that most Filipino nurses prefer to work in the United States because they can earn a higher income and because they have relatives living there. Ogawa (2012) highlights that care facilities in Japan welcomed Southeast Asian care workers; however, she also mentions the worries of a care facility director, afraid that elder Japanese may hold racial prejudice against Asians. In general, foreigners feel that their Japanese coworkers socialize within vertical hierarchies built on collectivism, age, and gender and adopt strict, conformist, and rigid behaviors in the workplace (Nakane, 1972).

But contrasts have been noted based on nationality and race, whereby the Japanese perceive Caucasian Americans and Europeans favorably (Russell, 2009), thus Westerners benefiting from what has been dubbed 'white privilege' in Japan. At the same time, the Japanese hold negative stereotypes against other Asians, often believing them to be of lesser intelligence (Ohtsuki, 2009). Lastly, their more visible foreignness, combined with Japanese preference for in-group membership, encourages them to nevertheless feel discriminated against (Napier and Taylor, 1995).

Based on this evidence, Japanese employees may experience cultural diversity differently based on the nationality of their colleagues. This is crucial for international human resource management and workforce diversity management (Davis et al., 2016) at Japanese firms, which must pay attention to the management of relationships between local employees and expatriates (Wang and Varma, 2018). While diversity management has gained in popularity and acceptance among international firms (Stoermer et al., 2016), Japan is lagging and has so far mainly focused on gender diversity (Assmann, 2016). Froese et al. (2020) have successfully shown that most Japanese companies have been struggling with 'internal internationalization' at home because human resource management practices in Japanese firms are particular (Pudelko, 2006) and often conflicting with the expectation of most foreign employees (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2019).

Moreover, very little research in Japan has examined perception biases among native employees based on the nationality of their foreign coworkers (Shiraki, 2013; Ota, 2016). Globally minded Japanese firms are trying to shake off the inflated self-perception of its national culture (Soeya et al., 2011). Therefore, we explore the effect of coworker nationality on how Japanese employees perceive the benefits and threats of cultural diversity at work. We start by reviewing the relevant key concepts and theories from the existing literature. We then develop hypotheses highlighting divergent perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity in the workplace based on coworker nationality. After testing our hypotheses, we present the results of our study. A discussion and conclusion contextualize our findings and clarify implications and contributions from this research.

2. Literature Review

Since our goal is to examine the relationship between coworker nationality and the perception of cultural diversity in the Japanese workplace, we review the extant literature pertaining to cultural diversity, especially in Japanese companies, and pertaining to how researchers have clustered countries along cultural dimensions and measured cultural distances between these countries.

2.1. Cultural Diversity

Diversity has been defined as a combination of attributes making an individual different from others. These attributes include gender (e.g., women), race, ethnicity or culture (e.g., foreigners), age (e.g. older people), education, knowledge, religion, civil status, or disability (Klarsfeld et al., 2012). In a widely cited paper, Huselid (1995) showed the impact of human resource management practices on both employee outcomes (turnover and productivity) and corporate financial performance. Hajro et al. (2017) found evidence that work processes are improved when organizations resort to diversity to generate alternative views. Other studies have recognized several benefits of diversity in the workplace and shown how they improve company profitability (Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). Cox and Blake (1991) reviewed the links between diversity (gender and ethnic) and organizational competitiveness, and offered suggestions to manage this diversity. Richard (2000) confirmed that cultural (racial) diversity adds value and contributes to organizational competitive advantage within a proper context (Stoermer et al., 2016). Cultural diversity management is particularly important for multinational companies whose expatriates, a subgroup of foreign employees, need to understand the antecedents of the support they receive from local employees (Varma et al., 2020). However, Davis et al. (2016) have shown that workforce diversity is not automatically well understood nor appreciated and generates widely diverging opinions among employees.

Multiple frameworks have subsequently been proffered to determine attitudes towards cultural diversity at work. Hostager and De Meuse (2008)'s Reaction-to-Diversity (R-T-D) model classifies perceived diversity into three groups: optimistic, realistic and pessimistic. Nakui et al. (2011)'s Attitudes Toward Diverse Workgroups Scale (ADWS) scores diversity outcomes on two dimensions, both in terms of task performance and affective component. Finally, the Benefits and Threats of Diversity Scale (BTDS) (Hofhuis et al., 2015) independently distinguishes the positive perceptions and the negative perceptions of cultural diversity in the workplace. The positive perceptions, called "benefits" are broken down into five dimensions: understanding of various groups in society defined as "the ability to gain insight about, and access to different groups within society, thus being able to better understand stakeholders and markets"; creative potential as "the notion that cultural diversity leads to more effective idea generation, increasing learning opportunities and problem solving potential of teams"; image of social responsibility as "the notion that cultural diversity in the workplace leads to a positive image of the organization regarding its social responsibility and attention to equal opportunities"; job market as "the benefits of cultural diversity for an organization's position regarding recruitment and retention of employees, enabling them to choose from a larger pool of potential talents, a necessity for filling

all vacancies with qualified personnel"; and social environment as "the presence of different cultural groups in a department is 'fun' and leads to a more inspiring and comfortable work environment" (Hofhuis et al., 2015, pp. 195-197). The negative perceptions of cultural diversity in the workplace, called "threats", are: realistic threats defined as "an individual's potential loss of career perspectives, power or status within the organization"; symbolic threats as "the notion that established beliefs, values and symbols within the organization are threatened as a result of incorporating different cultures in the workplace"; intergroup anxiety as "a sense of fear or insecurity resulting from (anticipated) interaction with members of different cultures, potentially leading to miscommunication, embarrassment or conflict"; and productivity loss as "a threat to the quality of the work of a team or department, e.g. due to language problems, possible tension between colleagues, or the sense that culturally diverse teams are more difficult to manage" (Hofhuis et al., 2015, pp. 195-197).

In this paper, we have selected the BTDS framework because it has two advantages over the first two models (Orsini, 2020). First, following Hofhuis et al. (2015) and Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007), we reckon that cultural diversity is not perceived along a single dimension but along several independent dimensions. Second, the BTDS allows for the measurement of detailed dimensions, making it more usable for both academics and practitioners. Lastly, majority and minority group members do not perceive cultural diversity in the same way (Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver, 2003) and the BTDS was designed to survey the majority group members, our focus in this paper.

2.2. Diversity in Japanese Companies

Because cultural diversity has long been a feature of many Asian countries' workplaces (Richardson et al., 2018), their employees are accustomed to intercultural relations (Tung, 2014). However, Japan and Japanese workplaces are highly homogeneous from a cultural viewpoint. The country has a long history of voluntary isolation from the rest of the world, which has led to a unique culture. The uniqueness of this culture has induced some soul-searching (Soeya et al., 2011) and sometimes to inflated self-perception and a feeling of being different from the rest of the world (Rear, 2017). This phenomenon is not unique to the country, as a comparable case could be made for neighboring South Korea, or islands such as Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily in Europe for instance (Blackwood and Tufi, 2015). This perceived uniqueness, combined with a workforce that is both homogeneous (in terms of talents and capabilities) and collectivistic (harmony and consensus driven) (Pudelko, 2006), provides a context inauspicious to the embracing of diversity. This may explain why, despite the weight of Japan's economy, its companies have been struggling to attract and retain foreign employees (Froese et al., 2020). Previous research has found that foreign workers, including highly skilled professionals, want to feel more socially integrated (Nagy, 2012) and perceive themselves as segregated in their quest for integration (Komisarof, 2012). It is therefore crucial to investigate which factors are contributing to the quality of intercultural relations in the Japanese workplace (Komisarof, 2009). While an already popular human resource management tool in the 1990s, diversity management was still in its infancy at the beginning of this century (Subeliani and Tsogas, 2005), and according to Assmann (2016), Japan is still new to diversity management and has so far mainly focused on gender diversity.

Immigration policies are ways to provide countries with valuable human resources in the global war for talent (Chiavacci, 2012). The former Abe administration had been pushing for diversity, especially the advancement of women and the employment of skilled foreigners. However, despite young Japanese women being on average better educated than young men (OECD, 2015), Japan is lagging with regard to gender equality in career opportunities (Yamaguchi, 2019; Muroga and Crabtree, 2020), and Shiraki (2013) stresses that the attention given to other diversity attributes such as race, ethnicity and nationality is even slimmer. Ota (2016) affirms that it is only recently that Japanese companies have started to show interest in cultural diversity management.

Froese et al. (2020) argue that most Japanese companies have trouble with 'internal internationalization' at home, as opposed to 'external internationalization' in foreign subsidiaries (Sekiguchi et al., 2016), because traditional Japanese human resource management practices are too often not compatible with the expectation of most foreign employees (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2019; Sekiguchi et al., 2016; Yoshihara, 2011). At the intersection of 'external' and 'internal internalization', lessening the 'liability of foreignness' of inpatriates assigned to domestic headquarters (Harvey et al., 2005) is also an issue for Japanese international human resources management.

2.3. Cultural Dimensions, Distance, and Clusters

Research on national culture has included the development of dimensions to help to make comparisons across countries and measure cultural distance between countries. The importance of distance in cultural diversity is echoed by Ota (2016)'s CDE (Context, Distance, and Embeddedness), a framework he suggested to structure the management of cultural diversity. In the international management field, the most established research on national cultures, their similarities and differences, is arguably that pioneered by Geert Hofstede (1980, 1997, and 2001). The six dimensions of national culture developed by Hofstede are as follows (Hofstede, 2011:8): 1. Power Distance: "related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality". 2. Individualism versus Collectivism: "related to the integration of individuals into primary groups". 3. Masculinity versus Femininity: "related to the division of emotional roles between women and men". 4. Uncertainty Avoidance: "related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future". 5. Long Term versus Short Term Orientation: "related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present and past". 6. Indulgence versus Restraint: "related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life". Through surveys, Hofstede and his colleagues have attributed scores to numerous national cultures.

Distance between two countries is conceptualized in terms of psychic distance, defined as "the perceived distance that individuals or groups hold regarding a particular country" (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018, p. 1114) or "collective differences between countries" (Zaheer et al., 2012, p. 20). Psychic distance, more than geographic distance, then became the basis for assessing institutional and cultural distance between countries. Kogut and Singh (1988) have proposed a measurement of cultural distance using 4 cultural dimensions from Hofstede (2001).

Claiming that cultural differences are the most powerful forces dividing people, Huntington (1993, 1997) has grouped countries and cultures along similarities in religion and history. This classification resulted in eight civilizations: Western (including West Europe and North America), Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African. Huntington's classification deems Japan as a civilization in itself, a civilization of which it is the unique representative country. Huntington even asserted that this cultural uniqueness impedes Japan's economic relations with its Asian neighbors. On the other hand, Huntington considers the connection of Southeast Asian countries with China to be strong.

Ronen and Shenkar (1985, 2013) have grouped 96 countries into cultural clusters, rooting their choice in similarities and dissimilarities in work-related attitudes. They have bundled together China, Japan and South Korea in a Confucian Asia cluster (which also includes Nepal). Japan only entered this cluster in Ronen and Shenkar's 2013 paper but was a cultural singleton at the time of their previous clustering, that is in their 1985 paper. In 2013, however, Japan remained somehow separate, at the very periphery of the Confucian Asia cluster, reflecting high distinctiveness. This cluster is separate but adjacent to two clusters labeled Far East (including Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand or the Philippines) and Anglo (including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada). The Anglo cluster itself is adjacent to the Nordic-Germanic cluster, itself adjacent to the Latin Europe cluster.

Finally, Nisbett (2004) has argued that against the backdrop of very different histories, Asians and Westerners have developed very different ways of thinking. Moreover, in their perception of foreigners, Japanese often make a clear distinction between the two. They even sometimes associate the word 'gaikokujin' to the sole Americans or Caucasians, while identifying foreigners from South and Eastern Asia as 'ajiajin' (Russell, 2017; Mackie, 2005).

3. Development of Research Model

In this section, we develop an analytical model including hypotheses predicting the relationships between coworkers' nationalities and the perceptions of the benefits and threats in the workplace by Japanese employees. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001), we split coworkers into progressively distant cultural clusters. Our clusters derive from the main two reference works introduced in our literature review, namely Huntington (1993, 1997), and Ronen and Shenkar (1985, 2013. Our clusters are two countries (China and South Korea) and two groups of countries (Southeast Asian countries and Western countries). Cultural distance between these clusters and Japan is measured using score differences along Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, complemented by Ghemawat (2007)'s CAGE framework. We base our hypotheses development on the interplay between these score differences and the perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity at work (Hofhuis et al., 2015).

3.1. Clustering of Foreign Coworkers

The Japanese government statistics' breakdown of foreigners by nationality shows two countries with a disproportionate number of nationals residing in Japan: China and South Korea. With 730,890 and 450,663 legal residents in Japan, respectively, these two countries account for almost half of the foreigners residing in the country (respectively 30% and 18%) (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2019). Even if many South Koreans and Chinese are self-employed in Japan (Shipper, 2002; Higuchi, 2016), their overrepresentation extends most certainly to firms where they work as employees, and we keep these two countries as standalone clusters in our analysis. This is all the more relevant as proximity of the two countries to their own country allows Japanese to easily distinguish between the two cultures.

The clustering of the remaining countries results from our above review of cultural clusters. In the selection of countries to include in our analysis, we chose a cutoff number of 10,000 residents in Japan in order to discuss national cultures large enough for the Japanese employees to perceive them as a constituted minority group, rather than individual exceptions. We rounded this threshold, hence including Malaysia with its 9,638 residents in Japan. The resulting clusters are as follows: Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Malaysia), Indian subcontinent countries (Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh), Western countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, and Canada), and Latin American countries (Brazil and Peru).

We dropped several countries or territories from our analysis for the following reasons. We dropped Taiwan from our analysis because it may be difficult for Japanese employees to discern between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese. We dropped the Latin American cluster from our analysis due to the heavily biased composition of Brazilian and Peruvians working in Japan, and to the overall image of Latin Americans in the country (Forero-Montoya, 2020). Their presence is due to the Japanese government's decision in the 1990s to deliver visas not to just any Brazilian or Peruvian, but only to those able to demonstrate Japanese ancestry. We dropped countries from the Indian Subcontinent from our analysis because of the small number of respondents working with people from these countries. Myanmar having no scores available, the country was dropped from our cluster of Southeast Asian countries.

Figure 1 shows Hofstede's scores for the six cultural dimensions of Japan and each of the countries constituting our four nationality clusters: South Korea, China, Southeast Asian countries, and Western countries.

We calculated a modified version of the Kogut and Singh Index (KSI) using the 6 cultural dimensions from Hofstede (2001), rather than the original 4 dimensions, thus taking into account the broader multi-dimensionality of the culture construct (Kogut and Singh, 1988). The original KSI was proposed in 1988 and it is the most widely used composite cultural index of distance in international business and management research (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018). The higher the KSI between 2 countries, the higher the cultural distance between these 2 countries; the KSI with the 6 cultural dimensions with Japan as the base ranges from 0 (comparing a country to itself) to 8.3 with 61 listed countries. Figure 1 shows the KSI for Japan to be 2.42 with South Korea, 2.77 with China, 3.91 with Southeast Asian countries, and 4.13 with Western countries. Not only do these clustered countries share cultural commonalities, but also, and more importantly, they represent meta-categories from the Japanese perspective (Prieler, 2006; Terashima and Honda, 2009). Nationality is here construed from the viewpoint of Japanese employees, as a country or more broadly as a regional provenance highlighting a cultural distance with Japan.

Ghemawat (2007)'s CAGE framework of cultural distance can help complement Hofstede's dimensions in several ways. While Hofstede's framework focuses on how culture affects national values, Ghemawat's CAGE framework goes beyond to include cultural (including values related), administrative, geographic and economic distances. For instance, physical distance (one of the components of geographic distance), reinforces our model, since South Korea and China are physically closest to Japan, followed by Southeast Asian countries, then by Western countries. Another example of physical (but also administrative) proximity between Japan and South Korea is their belonging to the same time zone. Colonial ties are an illustration of close administrative distance, since both South Korea and part of China used to be Japanese colonies.

Figure 1. Cultural distances between Japan and South Korea, China, Southeast Asian countries and Western countries along Hofstede cultural dimensions.

	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long Term Orientation	Indulgence	KSI (6)
Japan	54	46	95	92	88	42	
South Korea	60	18	39	85	100	29	2.42
China	80	20	66	30	87	24	2.77
Southeast Asian countries (average)							3.91
Philippines	94	32	64	44	27	42	3.49
Vietnam	70	20	40	30	57	35	4.41
Thailand	64	20	34	64	32	45	4.44
Indonesia	78	14	46	48	62	38	3.15
Malaysia	100	26	50	36	41	57	4.05
Western countries (average)							4.13
USA	40	91	62	46	26	68	4.75
United Kingdom	35	89	66	35	51	69	3.88
France	68	71	43	86	63	48	2.24
Australia	38	90	61	51	21	71	4.92
Canada	39	80	52	48	36	68	4.87

Based on data from Hofstede, 2020; KSI (6): Kogut and Singh Index of cultural distance

3.2. Cultural Distance and Perceived Diversity

In this section, we build hypotheses on the relationship between cultural distance on the 9 dimensions of the BTDS scale: the 5 perceived benefits of cultural diversity, then the 4 perceived threats of cultural diversity.

The first type of perceived benefit is the understanding of various groups in society. Countries that are culturally - and physically - closer to Japan (South Korea and China) are also more

familiar to Japanese employees because their histories and cultures are interwoven with Japan's own history and culture and because their citizens have been and remain the most numerous foreigners in Japan. Since Japanese employees are already relatively well acquainted with these two countries, there are fewer insights to be gained from coworking with their nationals. As shown by Nisbett (2004), Westerners have developed ways of thinking that are very dissimilar to Asians in general (i.e., our three other cultural clusters). For Japanese employees, working with culturally distant Westerners entails a discovery process through which they become cognizant of an acumen and practices peculiar to occidental heritage. More generally, we propose that working with foreign coworkers, whose culture is distant along any of Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, is a multifaceted opportunity to discover and better understand various stakeholders and markets. Concerning the second perceived benefit, creative potential, Japan and South Korea have very close scores on the uncertainty avoidance dimension, a dimension pertaining to the unknown, the unfamiliar, the unprecedented, and hence fundamentally related to creativity (Zhang and Zhou, 2014). Therefore, we can expect that Japanese and South Koreans employees have similar approaches to creativity. Conversely, Adair and Xiong (2018) have described the role of uncertainty avoidance on the difference in conceptualization of creativity by Chinese and Caucasian Canadians. Yuan and Zhou (2015) have theorized causality in the relationship between power distance and creativity, and Rinne et al. (2013) have described the interplay between Hofstede's cultural values and creativity at the national level. These findings suggest that large cultural distances act as magnifiers of benefits in cultural diversity. Regarding the perceived benefit in cultural diversity for the organization's image in terms of social responsibility, Japan and China have almost the same (high) score on the long-term orientation dimension, and this cultural dimension has been associated with activities in corporate social responsibility (Wang and Bansal, 2012; Graafland and Noordehaven, 2020). The fourth positive dimension in the BTDS scale is the benefit found in cultural diversity for enabling organizations to choose from a larger pool of talents. If local employees perceive their foreign coworkers as not very different from themselves, on any of Hofstede's dimensions, they are unlikely to see them as benefiting the organization by connecting it with human resource networks which the organization would otherwise not be in a position to draw on. Japan and China have almost the same (high) scores on the long-term orientation dimension, and we can expect their citizens to share similar views on, for instance, the benefits of choosing from a culturally more diverse pool of talent. Chinese and South Korean employees, because they are more numerous but also because they have many more shared physical characteristics with the Japanese, are less perceived as contributing in terms of image or access to rare talent. Finally, their cultural proximity along Hofstede's six dimensions facilitates comfort in routine and rapport-building around shared affinities (the BTDS's social environment benefit), but at the same time it breeds familiarity which is less stimulating and inspirational (Papatsiba, 2006).

Regarding the relationships between cultural distance and perceived threats of cultural diversity, we propose that Japanese employees may feel less of a realistic threat in culturally close foreign coworkers as these coworkers would be less likely to contribute original and rare competences. Conversely, Japanese curiosity towards Western cultures has been amply documented (Nishiyama, 2000). However, concerning the symbolic threat dimension, Duignan and Yoshida (2007) showed that Japanese employees highly value key elements of the Japanese management model and fear the westernization of their workplace (Creighton, 1997). This westernization of the workplace is perceived as incompatible with and even jeopardizing the Japanese form of capitalism (Koll, 2020). For instance, the rise of performance-pay metrics is blamed as threatening the harmony of the Japanese workplace (Macpherson, 2017). For the third type of threat, intergroup anxiety, we propose that Japanese employees anticipate less stress in their interactions with culturally close foreign coworkers because they share similar values on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, common historical or linguistic references, and even a sense of solidarity (Kobayashi, 2010). Conversely, cultural distance increases the uneasiness of Japanese in their communication

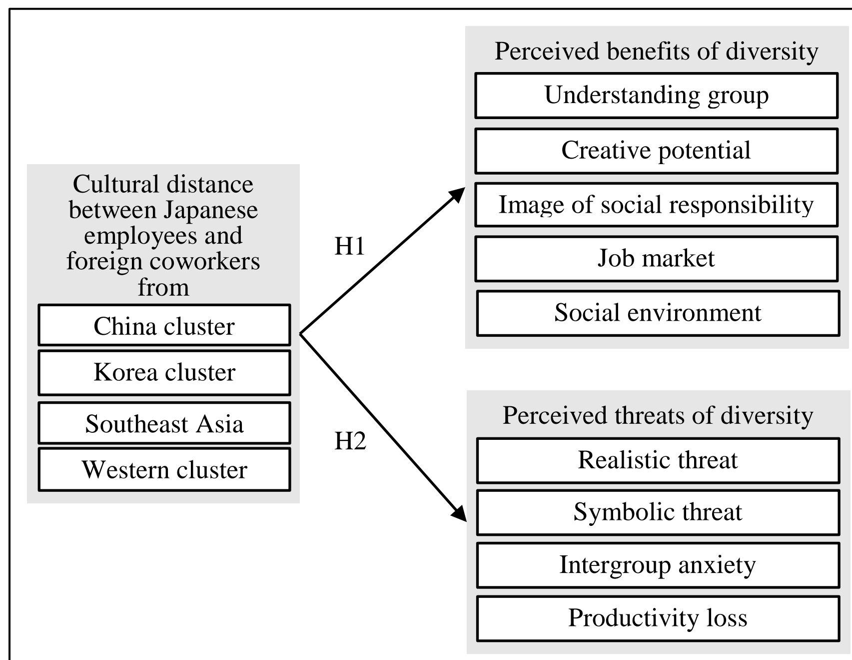
with foreigners (Kowner, 2002). Last, perceived productivity is bound to decrease when organizational members must constantly confirm and agree upon norms with colleagues from distant cultures, having to renegotiate the rules by which they understand and complete their work (Hofstede, 2011). The impact of differences in long-term vs. short-term orientation on work quality (Gong, 2003), or in uncertainty avoidance on work procedures (Stoermer et al., 2016) and disruptive behaviors challenging dominant models (Griffith et al., 2008).

Accordingly, we predict that:

> H1: Cultural distance with foreign coworkers is positively related to perceived benefits of cultural diversity at work.
>
> H2: Cultural distance with foreign coworkers is positively related to perceived threats of cultural diversity at work.

Since cultural distance is gradually greater between Japan and South Korea, China, Southeast Asian countries, and Western countries, respectively, then we expect the perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity at work to increase accordingly. Figure 2 illustrates our model and hypotheses.

Figure 2. Research model



4. Methodology

4.1. Sample

The sample used to test our hypotheses consists of 572 adults (288 males and 284 females) aged 18 and over, drawn from a random sample of Japanese employees working in Japan. We gathered the data in February 2019 using a Japanese Internet Survey service. The company has a large database of more than 30,000 potential respondents throughout Japan and has been used in multiple and various academic research projects (e.g., Kosako et al., 2018; Hosaka et al., 2017; Mukai et al., 2017). Using conditional filtering offered by the company, we designed our sample to have roughly half of the respondents interacting with foreign coworkers and half not interacting with foreigners in their workplaces. Moreover, to ensure statistically relevant sizes, we asked the

survey company to split the sample in roughly equal groups of men and women for each of the four 10-year age brackets of 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s and above (Figure 3).

In addition to basic demographic questions (gender, age, marital status, income), the questionnaire included the items listed in the previous section about the questionnaire, pertaining to the respondent individually, and to the characteristics of his or her company. The sample was made up of roughly equal numbers of men (50.3%) and women (49.7%) and consisted of more young groups than the currently aging Japanese population. This over-representation allows the identification of underlying trends among those younger respondents who are the upcoming workforce of the country. A relative majority of respondents were in their 20s (21.7%), living in Tokyo (22.5%), and working as salaried employees in office positions (45.1%). Nearly nine in ten of our respondents were working for a Japanese company (89.8%).

4.2. Measures

The perception of cultural diversity in the workplace was assessed by considering both threats and benefits separately, following the recommendation of Hofhuis et al. (2015). Perceptions of benefits and threats of cultural diversity in the workplace were measured using BTDS developed by Hofhuis et al. (2015). In this paper, we use BTDS for two reasons. First, compared to R-T-D and ADWS, the BTDS recognizes the multiple dimensions of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is not oversimplified into a sole dimension but disaggregated into multiple independent subdimensions (Hofhuis et al., 2015; Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Second, BTDS, by breaking down cultural diversity perception into smaller dimensions, facilitates finer assessments.

Figure 3. Sample demographics

Indicator	N	%	Indicator	N	%
Gender			Job type		
Male	288	50.3	Office	258	45.1
Female	284	49.7	Technical	158	27.6
Age range			Other	156	27.3
20-24	19	3.3	Geographic area		
25-29	124	21.7	Hokkaido	12	2.1
30-34	70	12.2	Tohoku	21	3.7
35-39	73	12.8	Kanto	294	51.4
40-44	75	13.1	Chubu	78	13.6
45-49	68	11.9	Kinki	114	19.9
50-54	90	15.7	Chugoku	18	3.1
55-59	53	9.3	Shikoku	6	1.0
Marital status			Kyushu	29	5.1
Married	303	53.0	Working with foreigners		
Single	269	47.0	Yes	316	55.2
			No	256	44.8

The BTDS scale consists of 36 questions. Each of its nine dimensions (five for the benefits and four for the threats) is assessed by four questions. Since the BTDS presented in Hofhuis et al. (2015) is in English, we first had to translate it into Japanese. The authors made a first translation from English to Japanese; a native Japanese university professor then back translated this initial version. Discrepancies were then discussed and resolved. To ensure a smooth understanding of the questions by the respondents, a Japanese professional specialized in survey administration checked the ensuing Japanese version of the questionnaire. We worded the other questions directly in Japanese, including those about the respondents' international experience.

In order to answer our research question of whether the nationality of foreign coworkers affects the perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity at work, we divided our sample into

subgroups based on the nationality of their foreign coworkers. Following the arguments of our hypothesis development, we divided our sample between Japanese employees depending on their answer to: "What are the nationalities of the foreigners you interact with at work?" We ascribed these coworkers to one of our four clusters: South Korea, China, Southeast Asia, and Western countries. Furthermore, in order to prevent confusion in the relationship between coworkers' nationality and perception of cultural diversity in the cases where a respondent was working with foreign coworkers of multiple nationalities, we only retained those Japanese employees who reported working with foreign coworkers of a single nationality. These respondents worked with either Western coworkers-only (n=31), South Korean coworkers-only (n=9), Chinese coworkers-only (n=36), or with coworkers from South-East Asian countries-only (n=20). Altogether, we obtained a total of 96 respondents.

A clear limitation of this selection is the reduced number of cases that we can process in our statistical analysis. However, it is by means of such a selection that we can measure perceptions of the benefits and threats of cultural diversity associated with the presence of specific nationalities because they are not biased by the presence at work of coworkers from other nationalities.

4.3. Validity and Reliability

Factor analyses were conducted with each subset of questions pertaining to each variable to ensure that the questions displayed highest loadings on the intended constructs and to assess convergent validity. Following the recommendations of Costello and Osborne (2005), we looked for question items with excessive cross-loadings, freestanding as one-item factors, or considerably reducing factor reliability. The last question item for productivity loss ("cultural diversity reduces the overall quality of employees") displayed similar loadings with the factor on realistic threats. This cross-loading can be explained by the fact that all those questions concern employees or members of the organization. We decided to keep that item since the question can logically be related to either factor. All factors were found to be reliable with Cronbach alpha scores well above 0.7 and with most above 0.8.

All questions on cultural diversity loaded on the intended nine constructs of Hofhuis et al. (2015). Realistic threat explained 32% of the total variance (the most), creative potential 19%, followed far behind by social responsibility (5%), understanding group diversity (3.6%), intergroup anxiety (3.3%), job market (3%), productivity loss (2.9%), social environment (2.6%), and symbolic threat (2.3%), for a total of 73% (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Rotated matrix of factor analysis of questions on perceived cultural diversity at work

	1 Realistic threat	2 Creative potential	3 Social responsibility	4 Understand-ing group diversity	5 Intergroup anxiety	6 Job market	7 Productivity loss	8 Social environment	9 Symbolic threat
Q13S1				.768					
Q13S2				.736					
Q13S3				.743					
Q13S4				.744					
Q14S1		.645							
Q14S2		.758							
Q14S3		.703							
Q14S4		.699							
Q15S1			.761						
Q15S2			.752						
Q15S3			.717						
Q15S4			.769						
Q16S1						.786			
Q16S2						.777			
Q16S3		.441				.595			
Q16S4						.704			
Q17S1								.652	
Q17S2								.715	
Q17S3								.663	
Q17S4								.638	
Q18S1	.835								
Q18S2	.849								
Q18S3	.795								
Q18S4	.820								
Q19S1					.409				.577
Q19S2									.755
Q19S3									.658

Q19S4									.761
Q20S1					.769				
Q20S2	.409				.704				
Q20S3					.727				
Q20S4					.764				
Q21S1							.808		
Q21S2							.721		
Q21S3							.727		
Q21S4	.437						.418		
% of Variance	31.868	18.895	4.908	3.588	3.344	3.051	2.877	2.634	2.308
Items	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Cronbach alpha	.883	.872	.897	.829	.893	.912	.783	.888	.815

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

Divergent validity is assessed by the level of collinearity between the constructs. However, the integrity of the focal constructs of this research, i.e., the perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity in the workplace, has been ascertained using Varimax rotation, a type of orthogonal rotation after extraction with a principal component analysis. This signifies by definition that the factors are uncorrelated among themselves, and hence divergent validity is guaranteed.

5. Results

5.1. Exploratory Statistics

Since factor analyses confirmed the underlying constructs under study, we then calculated mean scores for each dimension in order to better evaluate the respondents' levels of perceived threats and benefits, as well as aggregate mean scores for benefits and threats as a whole (Figure 5). The means of the respondents' answers on perceived benefits are all above 3, while those of perceived threats are consistently lower than 3, although all are centered around 3 on a 5-point Likert scale. This signifies that most Japanese employees perceive cultural diversity at work more as a benefit than a threat, albeit moderately. This is comparable to Hofhuis et al. (2015)'s results on a sample of Dutch civil servants.

Figure 5. Means and standard deviations of perceived cultural diversity at work (n=572)

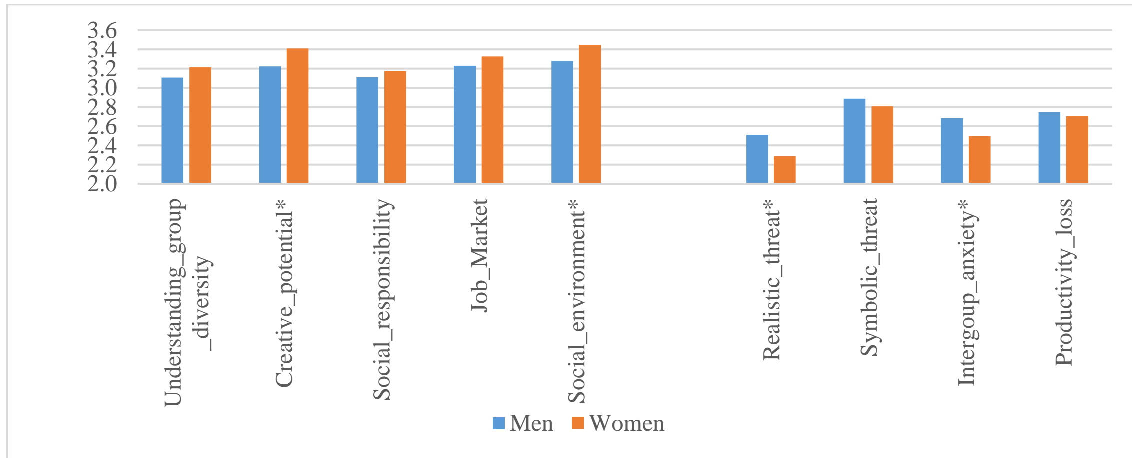
		Mean	Standard deviation
Benefits	Understanding group diversity	3.160	0.850
	Creative potential	3.316	0.831
	Image of social responsibility	3.143	0.860
	Job market	3.279	0.813
	Social environment	3.362	0.830
	All benefits	3.257	0.705
Threats	Realistic threat	2.401	0.847
	Symbolic threat	2.847	0.752
	Intergroup anxiety	2.590	0.863
	Productivity loss	2.726	0.814
	All threats	2.641	0.675

In line with previous studies, we ran analyses to control for gender, age and prefecture of the respondents, for industry, age, and company size, and for job function. These control variables have been shown as potentially having significant relationships with variables related to culture and adjustment to culture differences (Magoshi and Chang, 2009).

There were only a few significant differences between how men and women perceived the benefits and threats of cultural diversity at work (Figure 6). Women, compared to men, report that cultural diversity at work is, on the one hand a higher source of both creative potential and social environment and, and on the other hand a lower source of threats both symbolic and pertaining to intergroup anxiety. Overall, female Japanese employees seem to view cultural diversity at work

more positively than their male colleagues do. There were no significant differences by industry, prefecture, company size, or job function. We also controlled for the firms' foreign sales intensity (i.e. the foreign sales-to-total sales ratio) as employees of firms with a global orientation may perceive the contribution of their foreign colleagues differently from the employees of domestic-oriented firms (Cooke and Saini, 2010). The results obtained, however, did not show any significant differences.

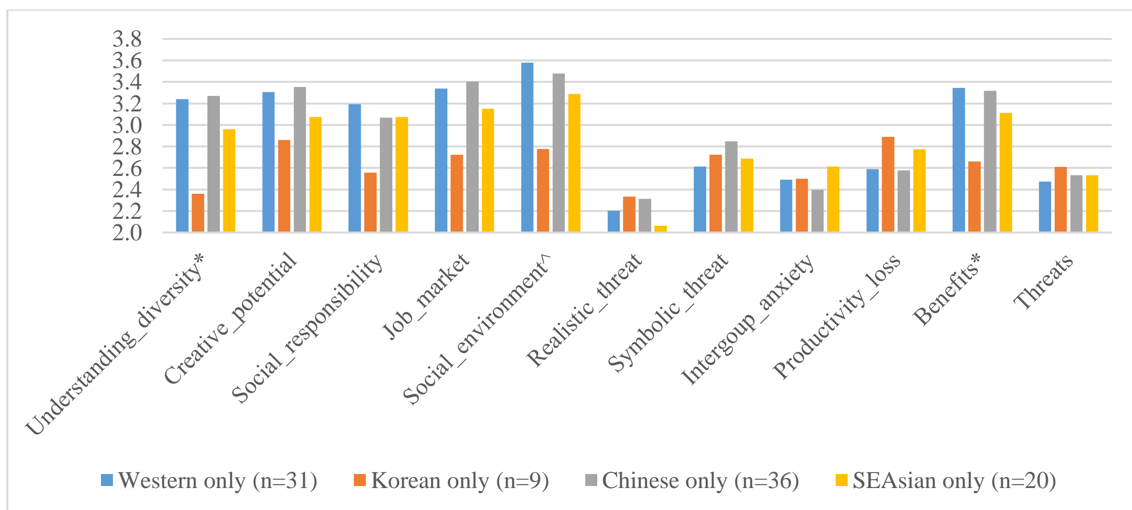
Figure 6. Means of perceived threats and benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace for men and women, showing statistically significant differences (*p<0.05)



5.2. Hypotheses Testing

Using analyses of variances (ANOVA) tests, we assessed differences in each perceived benefit and threat of cultural diversity at work based on foreign coworker nationality. We found statistically significant differences for the aggregated perceived benefits of cultural diversity (p=0.045), of understanding of group diversity (p=0.016), and of social environment (p=0.065) (Figure 7). Such levels of significance are acceptable with small sample sizes in the social sciences (Kim and Choi, 2021).

Figure 7. Coworker nationality and perceptions of cultural diversity (*p<0.05; ^p<0.1)



Further tests using Tukey's HSD revealed the pairs of nationalities between which statistically significant differences existed for these constructs (Figure 8). Japanese employees interacting

with Westerners-only or with Chinese-only reported higher understanding of group diversity (M=3.24, M=3.27, respectively) compared to those working with South Koreans-only (M=2.36, p=0.023, p=0.015, respectively). Likewise, Japanese working with Westerners-only stated much higher benefits from the social environment (M=3.58) compared to those working with South Koreans-only (M=2.78, p=0.052). Last, Japanese workers with Western colleagues-only or with Chinese coworkers-only reported higher benefits of cultural diversity in general (M=3.34, M=3.32, respectively) compared to those with South Korean partners-only (M=2.66, p=0.046, p=0.053, respectively).

There are other visible differences, but these are not statistically significant, probably due to the limited size of our sub-groups. Nevertheless, it is important to report them as they are consistent with the statistically significant differences found thus far. All dimensions related to perceived benefits from cultural diversity at work, as well as their aggregate constructs, appear lower when having South Koreans colleagues-only. Conversely, all dimensions about perceived threats from cultural diversity at work, as well as their aggregate constructs, do not exhibit any notable differences based on the nationality of foreign coworkers.

Figure 8. Significant differences for perceptions of cultural diversity among foreign workers subgroups by nationality (Tukey's HSD)

Dimension	Significant differences by coworker nationality
Understanding group diversity (p=0.016)	Western (M=3.24) > South Korean (M=2.36) (p=0.023) Chinese (M=3.27) > South Korean (M=2.36) (p=0.015)
Social environment (p=0.065)	Western (M=3.58) > South Korean (M=2.78) (p=0.052)
Benefits (p=0.045)	Western (M=3.34) > South Korean (M=2.66) (p=0.046) Chinese (M=3.32) > South Korean (M=2.66) (p=0.053)

6. Discussion

Consistent with our first hypothesis (H1) regarding perceived benefits, the results confirm that Japanese employees view differently the benefits of cultural diversity depending on the unique nationality of their foreign coworkers. The results, however, do not support our second hypothesis H2 about perceived threats. The most convincing results apply two subcomponents of perceived benefits, "understanding of diverse groups in society" and "social environment", and to comparisons between Western, Chinese and South Korean coworkers.

Japanese do not like to deal with complete strangers (Alston, 1989). Introductions by shared relations and developing trust before doing business are important in interpersonal relationships (Igarashi et al., 2008). This premise led us to propose that cultural distance matters in the perception of cultural diversity by Japanese employees. A lower distance informs the Japanese perceiver about the target of his/her perception, thereby influencing his or her perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity in the Japanese workplace. This influence unfolds in two opposite fashions. On the one hand, lower cultural distance works to reassure because of the familiarity if conveys. For instance, this familiarity may help reduce perceived symbolic threat or intergroup anxiety. On the other hand, higher cultural distance is a gateway to the unknown, raising expectations; even sometimes unrealistic ones. Because undefined, the contributions an exotic stranger can bring have no clear boundaries. This, for instance, could be particularly true regarding the benefits related to understanding of diverse groups and creative potential.

Japanese employees interacting with Western coworkers-only or with Chinese coworkers-only reported higher perceptions of understanding of group diversity (or diverse groups) than those interacting with South Korean coworkers-only did. This finding is consistent with our hypothesis: the more "foreign" a foreign coworker, the higher the perceived benefit in terms of gaining insight about distant and unfamiliar stakeholders and markets. In other words, respondents may have felt that they understand neighboring countries better just due to the fact that they are closer geographically (with the cultural influence concomitant to this physical proximity), because Chinese and South Koreans represent the majority of foreigners living in Japan, and because these two countries receive more exposure in the news broadcast at home.

South Korea is closest to Japan and the Western cluster is furthest from Japan based on our previous calculation of cultural distance (Figure 1). We have defined the Social Environment Benefit as the perception that "the presence of different cultural groups in a department is 'fun' and leads to a more inspiring and comfortable work environment" (Hofhuis et al., 2015, p. 196). Among Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, the sixth one, indulgence, is the dimension most closely related to the BTDS' social environment dimension. While Japan's score on this dimension is 42, slightly below the mid-score of 50, South Korea's score is even lower, at 29. Conversely, Western countries have high scores, all around 70 (except France, the only non-Anglo-Saxon country of our cluster of Western countries). However, this explanation alone is not sufficient since China has a score that is even lower than South Korea's on the indulgence dimension (Japan and Southeast Asian countries score very similarly on this dimension). The difference between the two countries in the way they are perceived by the Japanese regarding the social environment could come from the dimension of masculinity, which is related to emotions and roles (Hofstede, 2011). While competition is driving masculine societies, in feminine societies the focus is on quality of life and caring for others. With a score of 66, China is a masculine society, like Japan. On the other hand, with a score of 39, South Korea is a feminine society. A similar masculine emulation in the workplace may conceal social environment-related differences between Japanese and Chinese coworkers, while the feminine approach to work of the South Koreans makes their presence perceived as less beneficial to the highly masculine Japanese employees.

Japanese working with South Koreans-only systematically reported less perceived benefits while interacting with them in terms of cultural diversity. This was the case for overall benefits and regarding "understanding of diverse groups in society" and "social environment". These results suggest that Japanese perceive South Koreans as much less different, compared to foreigners of other nationalities. As we have seen earlier in our literature review and in the course of our model development, South Koreans are the foreigners culturally closest to the Japanese. Our model predicted that Japanese employees would perceive few cultural diversity-related benefits in working with South Koreans. Japanese employees' perception that not much is to be gained by working with South Korean colleagues might also be impacted by the overall ethnic and racial animosity towards South Koreans in the country. Ethnic animosity refers to feelings of active hostility towards a group of people by virtue of their ethnicity, race, and regions (Ochiel, 2007). Ethnic animosity will indeed influence the perceived benefits and threats of cultural diversity based on the nationality of one's coworkers. This animosity may have historical roots but also be a recurring emergence with new political developments (Nakos and Hajidimitriou, 2007). These are both the case for the relationships between Japan and South Korea (Koga, 2020). At the individual level, both unconscious and latent animosity and conscious and overt animosity towards South Koreans may result in reduced contribution (perceived or real) to the workplace (Moule, 2009). Furthermore, even being conscious of one's bias may not help eliminate latent racism in the workplace (Noon, 2018).

Our results show that the difference in aggregate perceived benefits of cultural diversity at work between Japanese employees working with either Chinese-only or Western-only coworkers and

Japanese employees working with South Korean-only coworkers is very high and significant. In particular, the "understanding of diverse groups" subcomponent of the perceived benefits of cultural diversity, the mean of the scores provided by Japanese respondents working with South Koreans-only was 2.36 while it was 3.24 for those working with Westerners and 3.27 for those working with Chinese. These numbers show differences of respectively 0.88 and 0.91, or about 18% (0.9 on a five-point Likert scale). As laid out in our hypothesis development, we expected the benefits of cultural diversity to be relatively low in the case of South Korean coworkers because of the cultural proximity of Japan and South Korea. This high difference highlights how Japanese employees perceive their South Korean coworkers as being similar to them, to the point that they do not perceive much diversity-related benefits in working with them, despite cultural heterogeneity (Lie, 2014).

7. Conclusion

Our findings show that Japanese employees differentiate the benefits brought to their workplace by their foreign coworkers according to their origins. The most significant result showed that Chinese and Western coworkers are perceived as contributing the most, by helping their Japanese colleagues better understand cultural diversity. On the other hand, due to the more limited global spread and standing of South Korean culture and lower soft power but also to Japan's familiarity with it (McClory, 2019), South Korean workers based in Japan are perceived as contributing less to the benefits of cultural diversity in the Japanese workplace.

7.1. Theoretical Implications

We showed that the nationality of foreign coworkers can affect the perceived benefits Japanese employees have when working with them. In doing so, we demonstrated that cross-cultural perception and its related cross-cultural adjustment are not one-sided experiences that are either statically negative (Oberg, 1960), or statically positive (Adler, 1975; Shaules, 2007), but permanent reconfigurations of the relation between the perceiver and the target (Kim, 2008). Our model shows that it is the relative positions of perceiver and target which determine their mutual perceptions. Rather than nationality itself, it is the relative cultural distance (Hofstede, 2011; Ghemawat, 2007) between the two dyadic nodes that predicts the output in terms of positive and negative perceptions. We contribute to the literature on trust with foreign coworkers, including trust building between foreign and host country nationals, and to the literature on foreign worker socialization. We also answer Onishi (2002)'s call for more integrated research around the psychological effect of cross-cultural contact and the adjustment and adaptation it entails. Moreover, our study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between cultural distance and the perceived benefits and threats of diversity at work. We clarified the dimensions of cultural diversity's perceptions specific to the Japanese workplace by highlighting how these perceptions are influenced by the nationality of foreign coworkers. We show that citizens of the two Asian neighbors of Japan, namely China and South Korea, are perceived as contributing differently to the Japanese workplace. By doing so, we also answer Komisarof (2009)'s call to identify the factors shaping intercultural relationships in the Japanese workplace and contribute to the literature on foreigners' occupational status in Japan (Higuchi, 2016).

7.2. Practical implications

Our findings have concrete implications for international human resource management and workforce diversity management (Davis et al., 2016), including the management of the relationships between local employees and expatriates (Wang and Varma, 2018). They provide points of reference in team composition for companies willing to encourage a 'value-in-diversity' viewpoint, energize commitment among domestic employees (Magoshi and Chang, 2009), have individual multiculturalism permeate organizational culture (Orsini and Uchida, 2019), and improve well-being and job satisfaction among both host nationals and their foreign coworkers

(Bergbom and Kinnunen, 2014). Firstly, organizations in Japan have to be aware of perception biases among their native employees regarding the nationality of their foreign coworkers. Secondly, Japanese firms have two options in light of these findings. They can indulge their Japanese employees' fear of the unknown and cultural biases by having only the nationalities they find beneficial, such as having coworkers from Western countries. Or they can choose to educate their domestic employees and draw their attention to these biases, in order to bring their perceptions in line with the real benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace, which can address the demands of globalization.

By the same token, public policies need to promote the benefits brought by nationalities that are today perceived as contributing less to cultural diversity. For instance, schools may incorporate cultural responsiveness in their teaching, such as building pedagogical bridges between cultural diversity and subjects routinely taught. To do so, they may have to overcome resistance in teachers' attitudes and beliefs about cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity (Gay, 2013). After helping teachers become culturally responsive, Richards et al. (2007) recommend including specific activities for culturally responsive instruction such as acknowledging students' differences, validating students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials, and educating students about the diversity of the world around them.

7.3. Limitations and Perspectives

Japan, as the particular context of this research, is both a limit to the generalization of our findings and a first step towards comparative research. The contextual characteristics of the country are expected to be dissimilar to those of other countries. In particular, different results can be expected in national contexts of high multiculturalism such as those of the United States, Canada, most West European countries, but also Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of which have populations comprising more than 10% of foreigners, against less than 2% in Japan (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Researchers may also have to differentiate between countries where the overall foreign population is rather homogeneous in origin and culture and close to that of the host country, and countries where foreigners are very diverse. In Japan, half of the foreign population originates from the country's two immediate neighbors, China and South Korea (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2019). While we do not differentiate between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese in the paper, this distinction could prove important for future research as the two have contrasting relationships with Japan (Chang, 2001). Respective images between China, Taiwan and South Korea are dynamic (Sung, 2010) and affect the psyche of the average Japanese employee. This dynamism, along with the changes in public opinion formation and evolution, general ideology, and central and local governments' policies towards foreigners and immigration are among the factors that need to be taken into consideration. They call for a longitudinal study comparing the conditions at the time of our survey to future conditions. The weight of foreigners in Japan's population, as well as the composition of this foreign population, or the overall national attitude towards foreigners may change and impact the perceptions, both positive and negative, of these foreigners in the Japanese workplace.

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