

Japanese tourists' motivation for visiting cultural and heritage sites in the UK

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ABSTRACT: The paper examines the motivation of Japanese tourists who visit cultural and heritage sites in the UK. Britain is one of the most popular counties among Japanese tourists. The data was collected from 187 respondents by online questionnaire which was available online for one and half months. The results tell that 93.6% respondents have been to the UK or want to visit there someday. 96.3% think visiting the UK is still only the way to experience the authenticity of British cultural and heritage sites even in the Internet era. Regarding their motivation for their visit to cultural and heritage sites, 72.7% want to see, touch and experience authenticity of British cultural and heritage sites and 35.8% answered to experience something different from their ordinary life. Of all the tourism resources available in the UK, the most popular one for Japanese tourists is historic buildings and World Heritage Sites (66.3% chose).

1 INTRODUCTION

The UK is one of the most popular countries as an overseas tourist destination among Japanese people. Overall Japanese people seem to be well familiar with British culture and history: they study British history as students and British culture such as literature and pop music are everywhere in their daily life. Moreover, Japan has two theme parks which feature British culture and heritage: *Igirisu-mura* (British Hills) in Fukushima prefecture (British Hills 2009) and British Village in Shizuoka prefecture (Shuzenji Niji no Sato n.d.). For the above-mentioned reasons, cultural and heritage sites can be regarded as key features for Japanese people when they visit the UK as tourists. Therefore, it can also be assumed that many Japanese people have been to the UK or, at least, want to travel to the UK to enjoy its cultural and heritage sites. There are numerous previous studies looking at Japanese tourists, especially about their culture, behaviours, activities, spending patterns, but little has focused mainly on their motivation and its relationship with the Japanese cultural background (Gilbert & Terrata 2001). Furthermore, the typical figure of Japanese tourists established by past studies is somewhat outdated now. Many studies have also been conducted to explore cultural and heritage sites in the UK; however, no studies examined them as attractions for Japanese tourists. This paper tries to bridge a gap between these two study areas: Japanese tourists, especially their motivation, and cultural and heritage sites in the UK for Japanese tourists. Consequently, the paper examines the motivation of Japanese people who have been to/want to visit cultural and heritage sites in the UK through the investigation of their travel experience, travel styles, attitudes towards the UK and its culture, and views towards experiencing authenticity and something extraordinary from their daily life.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 *Overview of Japanese tourists*

In the past, numerous studies looked at Japanese tourists from different points of view. Reisinger & Turner (1999) tried to identify the main reasons for the decline in Japanese tourist arrival to Australia in terms of tourism marketers. Berger (2010) and Yamashita (2003) studied activities of Japanese tourists in foreign countries. According to Berger (2010), the most popular activity for Japanese tourists in Copenhagen is "Visit attractions and sights" (22.4%) followed by "Walk around town". This result implies that Japanese tourists want to experience the town itself and enjoy its culture and heritage which are unique to the town. On the other hand, Yamashita (2003) examined typical five-day package group tours to Bali. He noted that Japanese

tourists try to see everything important in Bali and they will deeply regret if they miss something important, although the length of stay is very short. Other researchers also refer to this characteristic of Japanese tourists. Moon (2002) argues that traditionally Japanese tourists are likely to visit well-known sites with a certain brand in groups, and Graburn (1995) asserts that generally they visit famous “culturally approved” attractions. Although it is not a case about their activities in foreign countries, the study of Shirakawa-go, Japan, conducted by Jimura (2007) also shows that Japanese tourists tend to visit Shirakawa-go with a coach tour and enjoy only the famous and important attractions due to their busy schedule and passion for such attractions. The main reason of the short holiday would be the Japanese work-oriented culture. It is still difficult for most Japanese people to take annual leaves for more than five consecutive days.

There is a significant point which cannot be ignored what “famous” and “important” attractions mean for traditional Japanese tourists are discussed. As a Japanese proverb, *Wa wo motte tatto-shi to nasu*, implies, harmony is always honourable for the traditional Japanese society. In other words, being the same to others has still been important for Japanese people, especially for old generations. This principle also applies to their way of thinking and decision making process when they choose which attractions they visit. Thus, Japanese tourists are likely to focus on where they should visit rather than where they want to visit. This tendency can lead to the inclination of Japanese tourists suggested by Graburn (1995): they tend to choose culturally approved attractions. Consequently, the attractions Japanese tourists visit and the routes they take in a tourist destination are relatively homogenous. This is especially true for tourists who join package group tours.

According to Jimura (2007), however, a certain proportion of Japanese tourists no longer stick with visiting such famous and culturally approved sites and attractions, and this phenomenon is remarkable amongst young generations. In other words, these people want to visit the sites and attractions that are important for them, even if such sites and attractions are not well-known and do not have cultural significance. For instance, some Japanese people are eager to visit the small towns along the discontinued railway lines (*haisen*); however, these places are not popular as tourist destinations amongst general Japanese tourists (Jimura 2007). Others try to find a “hidden gems” for themselves. A typical example of this is the quest for a small hot-spring in a mountainous area which has not been touched or discovered by tourists. For the above-mentioned reasons, it could be said that a gradual shift from collectivism to individualism can be observed in the motivations, behaviours and activities of Japanese tourists (Jimura 2007).

In recent years, the whole of world has been experienced globalisation and the development of technologies such as the Internet, and overseas travels have become more and more accessible in every sense. This study tries to explore the latest profile of Japanese people as tourists to foreign countries, focusing on the UK as their destination (Questions 1, 6 & 8 in the questionnaire).

2.2 *British culture and Japanese people*

Gilbert & Terrata (2001) identified UK’s features such as culture, language and novelty to be significant pull factors for Japanese tourists. In Japan students start studying English when they enter a junior high school at 12 years old and most of them keep studying it for six years until they graduate from a high school. If they enter a university, in many cases they study English at least for one more year. Students in elementary schools (10 & 11 years old) have also started learning English since April 2009 (Anon 2009). Although overall American English rather than British English is dominant in English education in Japan, Japanese people still have a lot of opportunities to learn about the UK through English education in schools. Furthermore, Japanese junior high school students study British history briefly as part of the History subject and a certain proportion of Japanese high school students also study it as part of the World History subject. They also study the Geography subject. Moreover, some Japanese people read English and English literature at universities. Hence, it can be said that most of Japanese people have the basic knowledge about the UK and its culture including its history and literature. It could also

be assumed that a certain proportion of Japanese people feel a close connection to the UK and its culture.

In addition to school education, there are a lot of other opportunities for Japanese people to be familiar with the UK and its culture without visiting the UK. For example, numerous British literatures have been translated into Japanese for a century. British pop music is everywhere in the daily life of Japanese people (e.g. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Oasis & Coldplay). Many art galleries have and display British paintings and British potteries (e.g. Royal Doulton & Wedgwood) are also very popular amongst Japanese people. English tea and Scotch whiskey are also well known to Japanese people.

Of course all of the above-mentioned issues have been influential for Japanese people to develop their images of the UK and foster their motivation for visiting the UK. In tourism studies, however, the media, especially the mass media such as television programmes, films and Internet, have also been regarded as very powerful pull factors to induce tourists to visit a site, city or country such media featured (e.g. Beeton 2005, Kim & Richardson 2003, Riley 1994, Riley et al. 1998, Riley & Van Doren 1992, Tooke & Baker 1996). This type of tourism is called 'media-induced tourism' (Suzuki 2009). As for the impact of media on Japanese tourists, Kim et al. (2008) examined the effect of Korean television drama series, *Winter Sonata*, on a temporary increase in the number of Japanese tourists to screened locations. Intriguingly, however, the main motivation for these Japanese tourists to visit such locations was not their interest in the screened locations themselves but the high level of interest and empathy for leading actors and actresses (Kim et al. 2008). Regarding the research which investigates the relationships between Japanese tourists and the UK as their destination, the number of studies have been conducted is highly limited. The studies conducted by Iwashira (2006, 2008) are rare examples. She discussed the relationships between Japanese tourists and the UK as their destinations, focusing on the impact of media, especially films and television programmes. According to Iwashita (2006), the film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the television series of *Sherlock Holmes*, and the illustrated book series of *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit* are all affect the Japanese people's holiday decision making process. Iwashita (2008) also notes that films and television dramas have a power to create destination awareness, consciousness, and images which can lead to a high level of interest in the destination and actual visits to there.

This study aims to explore the motivation of Japanese tourists to the cultural and heritage sites in the UK. However, the study does not stick to the impact of culture featured by media and does not focus on the power of media itself. The study looks at the appeal of the UK and its culture including its cultural and natural heritage and Japanese tourists' views towards them. In other words, this study attempts to examine how much Japanese people (tourists) feel familiar to the UK and its culture, and to what extent they feel British culture are similar to Japanese culture. The study also tries to identify which elements of the UK are appealing to Japanese people (tourists) (Questions 2, 3 & 9 in the questionnaire).

2.3 Motivation of tourists to cultural and heritage sites

Numerous numbers of the past tourism studies explored what tourists want in their journeys. MacCannell (1976) regards tourist as contemporary pilgrims fleeing the superficiality, instability, and inauthenticity of modern society in quest of "authenticity". Tourists are looking for a kind of authenticity which has been lost in modern life (MacCannell 1976). The tourism industry is fully aware of this aspiration of tourists and responds by providing "staged authenticity" (MacCannell 1976). There are various views towards authenticity when the term is discussed in a context of heritage and tourism. Reisinger & Steiner (2006) assert that heritage can be authenticity; however, the concept of object authenticity, which means the authenticity towards objects and events, should be abandoned as there is no consensus or agreement in relation to its definition. From academic point of view, the opinion of Reisinger & Steiner (2006) seems to be reasonable. However, the researchers in heritage and tourism studies need to recognise that most of visitors and tourists, the researchers examine for their studies, at least have certain knowledge

about and awareness of what authenticity is, though it would be challenging for them to define the term in a logical manner. Hence, this study still deals with the object authenticity from tourists' point of view.

Meanwhile, Graburn (1989) sees tourists as persons who are engaged in a sacred journey to a world free from the constraints of work, time, and conformity, a ludic interlude that revitalises the traveller, enabling him/her to cope again with the strictures and structures of everyday life. Urry (1990) suggests that tourists in the post-modern era are looking for something "extraordinary" that cannot be found in their daily life. Cohen (1988) and Urry (1990) also regard tourists in the post-modern era as "post-tourists" who accept the inauthentic tourist experience as well as the authentic experience and note that such tourists seek experience that contrasts with the ordinary: being a tourist implies being away from the routine of everyday life.

It is assumed that all of the above-mentioned motivations of tourists could more or less apply to Japanese tourists visiting cultural and heritage sites in the UK. The desire to see and experience authenticity would also apply to Japanese tourists to British cultural and heritage sites. This is because, as discussed in 2.2, overall Japanese people are well familiar with British culture and heritage; however, it can be assumed that a relatively large proportion of them have never been to the UK mainly due to the time and money the travel to the UK costs. As Cohen (1988) and Urry (1990) state, tourists want to have extraordinary experiences by travelling to somewhere and Japanese tourists would not be an exception. British culture and history are definitely extraordinary for Japanese people whose country is referred to as "Far East" by British people. Japanese tourists also seem to accept the inauthenticity or staged authenticity at least to some extent. As for something British look-a-likes, for instance, a number of British pubs are available in Japan, especially in metropolises such as Tokyo and Osaka. Needless to say, however, part of such pubs are owned and/or managed by non-British people. In many cases, furthermore, the menus they offering are somewhat modified to suit Japanese people's taste, though customers can still enjoy typical pub menus such as Fish and Chips. Some more examples are available. The Professor Layton series is a puzzle video game series for the Nintendo DS (Level 5 2010). The setting of the game is the UK, mainly London, and the main characters, including Professor Layton, are British. Furthermore, as mentioned above (see Chapter 1), Japan has two theme parks featuring British culture and heritage: *Igrisu-mura* (British Hills) and British Village. The visitors to such theme parks can enjoy the British atmosphere by seeing the British look-a-like town scenery and double deckers. In fact some of the buildings in the theme parks were actually moved from the UK to the theme parks.

However, most Japanese people who enjoy British pubs, the Professor Layton series and the theme parks featuring British culture and heritage do not seem to expect that they could experience the authenticity of British culture and heritage through engaging such activities available in Japan. Moreover, most of them do not seem to regard such objects even as the staged authenticity of British culture and heritage. In other words, most Japanese people seem to think that these British look-a-likes are not genuine but fake, even if the staged authenticity of British culture and heritage have been carefully designed by "experience" producers and suppliers and presented to visitors and tourists in a well considered manner. In other words, it can be assumed that actually visiting cultural and heritage sites in the UK is still only the way for the majority of Japanese people to have authentic British experiences, though in Japan numerous British look-a-likes are available for people to appreciate them.

This study tries to examine Japanese people's awareness of the above-mentioned theme parks, which feature British culture and heritage, and their attitudes towards such theme parks (Questions 4 & 5). The study also explores how much the two main motivations of tourists which were identified in the previous tourism and heritage studies, "the experience of something different from ordinary life" and "the quest for authenticity", are influential for the motivation of Japanese tourists to cultural and heritage sites in the UK (Question 7).

3 METHODOLOGY

A number of alternative approaches are available in social research. Of these, the distinction between positivist and interpretive approaches is a primary dichotomy (Veal 1997). The positivist approach aims to follow the principles of natural scientific research and proceeds by the formulation and testing of hypotheses with a view to making inferences about the causal connections between two or more social phenomena or “facts” (Jupp & Norris 1993). Meanwhile, the interpretive approach puts more reliance on the people being studied to provide their own explanation of their situation or behaviour (Veal 1997). This research stems from positivism and mainly adopts a deductive approach on the basis of relevant past studies. In other words, this research is conducted by a quantitative method rather than a qualitative method. The population (N) this research needs to deal with is Japanese people who live in Japan and have some interest in the UK. This means that the population for this research is enormous. Under the constraints of labour, time, budget, and the fact that the researcher is now based in the UK, the best feasible data collection method was explored. Regarding the number of samples, needless to say, a larger number of samples means more reliance of data. After careful consideration, a free questionnaire survey website in Japanese, *Mr. Ankeito* (Mr. Questionnaire), was selected as an appropriate data collection method for this research. All questions were close-ended to decrease the amount of time questionnaire respondents need to spend and encourage them to complete the questionnaire. The online questionnaire was open to the public for one and half months (16 January - 28 February 2010). Consequently, 187 samples (n) were collected. The collected data was summarised and analysed using Microsoft Excel and the study results are presented in Chapter 4.

4 STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results: Overview of Japanese tourists

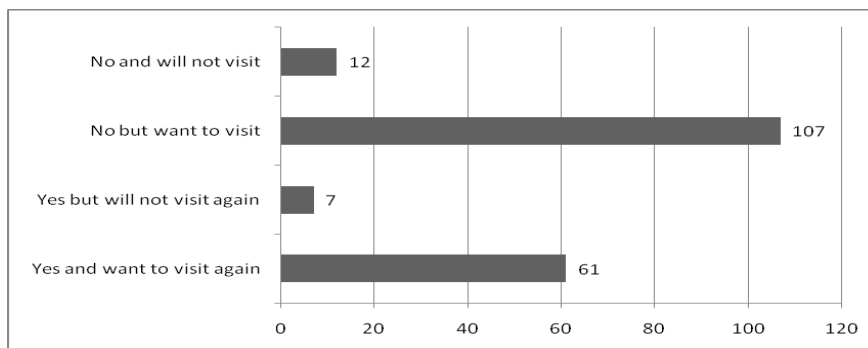


Figure 1. Q1 Have you been to the UK for sightseeing?

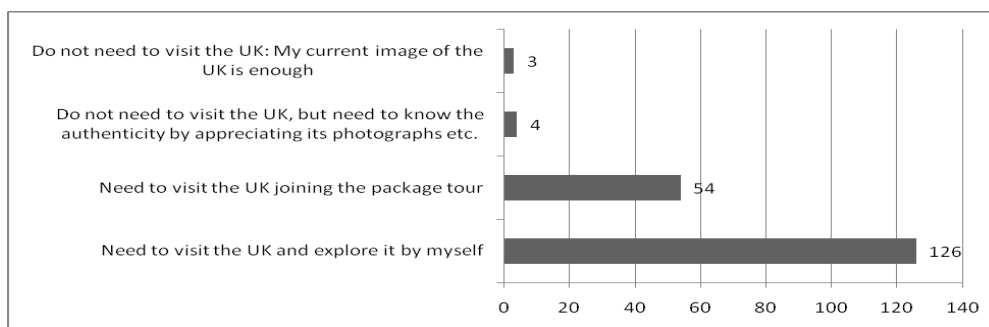


Figure 2. Q6 What do you need to do to experience the authenticity of British culture and heritage?

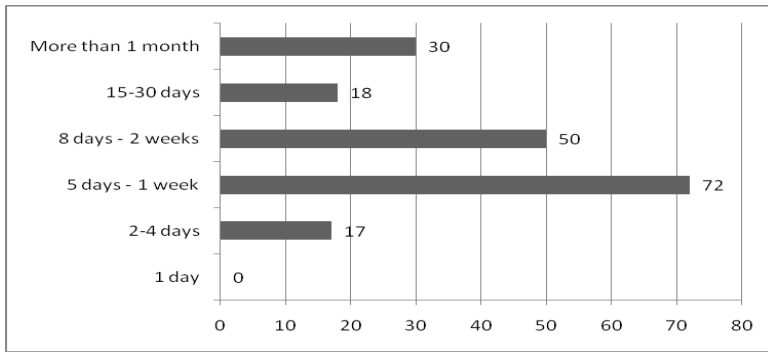


Figure 3. Q8 How long do you want to travel within the UK, if there is no limitation of time and budget?

4.2 Results: British culture and Japanese people

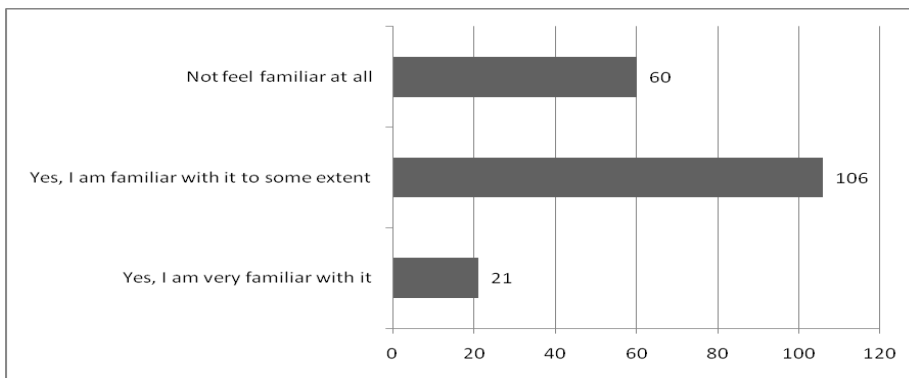


Figure 4. Q2 How much do you feel familiar to the UK and its culture and heritage?

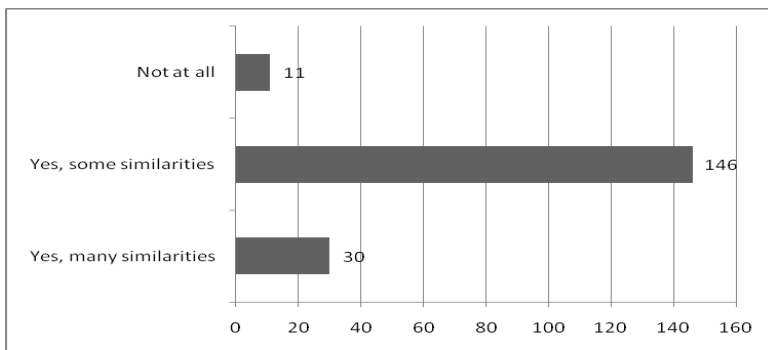


Figure 5. Q3 Is British culture similar to Japanese culture?

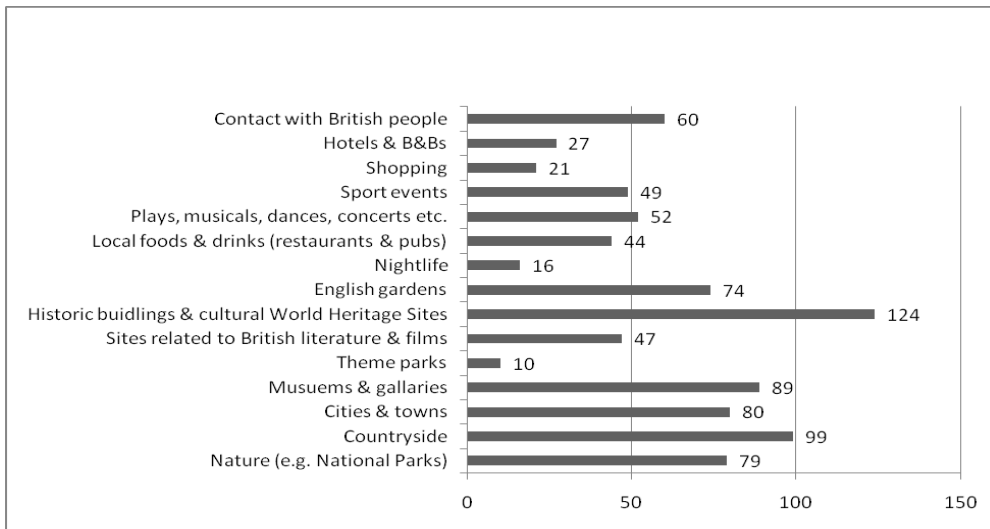


Figure 6. Q9 Which elements of the UK are appealing to you? (Multiple answers allowed)

4.3 Results: Motivation of tourists to cultural and heritage sites

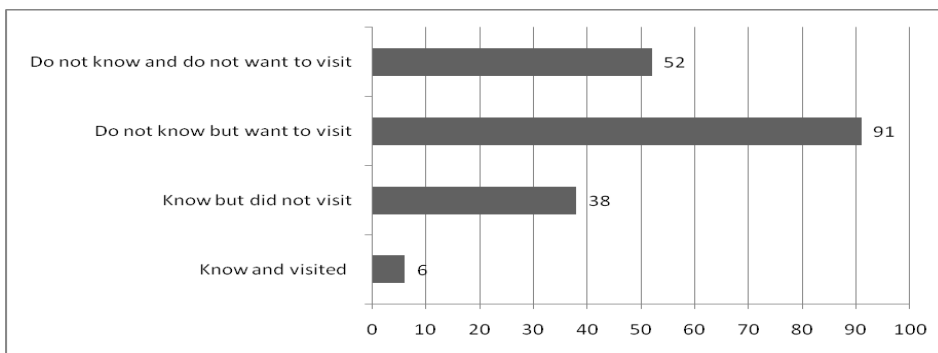


Figure 7. Q4 About Japanese theme parks featuring British culture and heritage

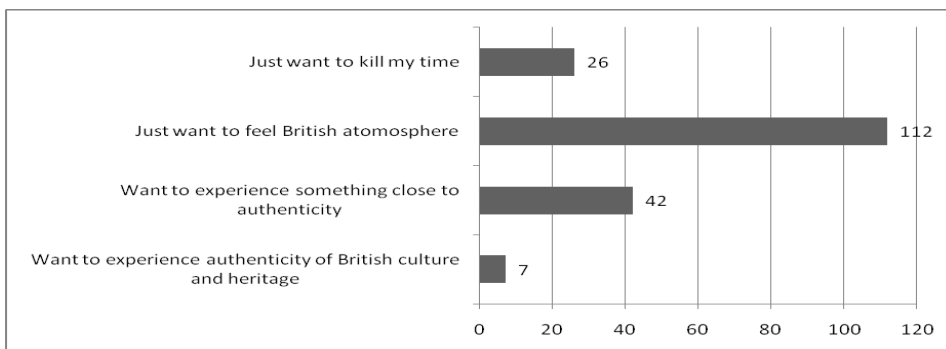


Figure 8. Q5 What do you expect when you visit theme parks featuring British culture and heritage



Figure 9. Q7 What is (are) your main motivation(s) to visit British cultural and heritage sites? (Multiple answers allowed)

4.4 Discussion

According to Figure 1, 36.4% (68) of the questionnaire respondents have been to the UK for sightseeing. This can be regarded as a very large proportion, considering the time and budget the trip to the UK requires them. Moreover, 89.7% of these respondents think that they want to visit there again. In total, 93.6% (175) have been to the UK or want to visit there someday as tourists. Hence, it can be said that the UK is a very popular tourist destination amongst Japanese people. Figure 2 shows that 96.3% (180) of the questionnaire respondents think visiting the UK is still only the way to experience the authenticity of British culture and heritage even in the Internet era like now. Interestingly, 67.4% (126) believe that they should explore the UK by themselves for this purpose, whilst only 28.9% (54) state joining the package holiday for the purpose (Fig. 2). This result would match the assertion by Jimura (2007) which notes that a gradual shift from collectivism to individualism can be observed amongst Japanese tourists, although a certain proportion of Japanese tourists still prefer taking part in the package tour to travelling by themselves (Jimura 2007, Moon 2002). More than half (98) of the questionnaire respondents want to travel within the UK more than a week, though five to seven days is the most popular answer (72) (Fig. 3). As stated in 2.1, it is still difficult for most Japanese workers to be away from work for more than a week. In fact, however, the majority of them want to have a longer holiday and think that the UK is a tourist destination they need more than a week to enjoy its culture and heritage fully.

Figure 4 tells that 68.0% (127) of the questionnaire respondents feel familiar to the UK and its culture and heritage at least to some extent. This result can support the argument about Japanese people's familiarity with British culture which is discussed in 2.2. This could also be related to the result indicated by Figure 5. According to Figure 5, 94.1% (176) deem that British and Japanese cultures have many or some similarities and only 5.9% (11) consider that there are no similarities between the cultures of the two countries. In fact, there are some similarities between British and Japanese cultures. For instance, generally people stand in a queue in a good manner when they are waiting for something and politeness is very important in the society. However, Japanese people would not be able to identify such similarities in cultures between the UK and Japan, if they are not familiar with British culture at all. Therefore, it could be said that the results shown by Figures 4 and 5 have a positive relationship. Figure 6 demonstrates that of all the tourism resources available in the UK, the most popular one for Japanese tourists is its historic buildings and World Heritage Sites (66.3% = 124 chose) followed by its countryside (53.0% = 99 chose) and its museums and galleries (47.6% = 89 chose) (multiple answers allowed). Considering the result shown by Figure 6, it can be said that culture and heritage unique to the UK are very appealing to Japanese tourists, though the strong influence of media on Japanese tourists cannot be ignored as Iwashita (2006, 2008) and Kim et al. (2008) note. This is because the above-mentioned three elements have also been constantly delivered to Japanese people by media.

As Figure 7 shows, the existence of Japanese theme parks featuring British culture and heritage are not well-known to Japanese people: only 23.5% (44) of the questionnaire respondents know

them. However, the theme parks are relatively appealing to them: 51.9% (97) want to visit or visited there. This result also implies the popularity of British culture and heritage amongst Japanese people. According to Figure 8, 86.1% (161) of the questionnaire respondents expect at least something British when they visit such theme parks. Intriguingly, 82.4% (154) of the respondents seem to have already realised that such theme parks cannot give them the authentic experience of British culture and heritage, even if the buildings and other objects are British look-a-likes, and only 3.7% (7) expect the authenticity of British culture and heritage by visiting such theme parks. However, Japanese people's aspiration for the authenticity or at least something authentic to some extent is still strong as 26.2% (49) expect such authentic elements by visiting these theme parks, although the majority of Japanese people recognise that they will not be able to have any authentic experience by visiting there. Figure 9 indicates that for Japanese tourists the quest of authenticity is a stronger motivation than the experience of something extraordinary, although 8.6% (16) of the questionnaire respondents chose both as their main motivations to visit the cultural and heritage sites in the UK. For the above-mentioned reasons, in general the quest of authenticity can be regarded as a primary motivation for Japanese tourists who visit the cultural and heritage sites in the UK. Most of them recognise the existence of staged authenticity prepared by tourism providers and understand that the staged authenticity is not the same to the authenticity they are looking for. Overall, however, as Cohen (1988) and Urry (1990) argue, Japanese tourists could accept such inauthenticity and the experience of something different from their ordinary life is also a main motivation for Japanese tourists to cultural and heritage sites in the UK.

5 CONCLUSION

The UK and its culture and heritage are relatively familiar to Japanese people and most of them also think that there are some or many similarities between British and Japanese cultures. The UK is very popular as a tourist destination for Japanese people and the majority of them want to travel within the UK more than a week. Of various tourism resources available in the UK, it is confirmed that cultural and heritage resources, especially historic buildings and World Heritage Sites, are most attractive for Japanese tourists. Although two theme parks featuring British culture and heritage are available in Japan, most Japanese people do not think that they could experience the authenticity of British culture and heritage by visiting such theme parks. The majority of Japanese people also believe that exploring British cultural and heritage sites by themselves is the best way to experience their authenticity. Although both the quest of authenticity and the experience of something extraordinary are main motivations for Japanese tourists to visit cultural and heritage sites in the UK, the former is a stronger motivation for Japanese tourists than the latter. It can also be said that the desire to experience the authenticity is a key motivation for Japanese tourists to cultural and heritage sites in the UK, though they could also accept the inauthenticity of British culture and heritage as tourists in the post-modern era.

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