

WHEN IT COMES TO INTERNATIONALISATION, JAPANESE CRAFT COMPANIES USE CULTURAL TACTICS

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ABSTRACT

There are two major topics surrounding internationalisation plans that are of importance to academia, business, and society as a whole. The first is the internationalisation of SMEs, and the second is the internationalisation of local cultures. This article focuses on Japanese tea ceremony ceramics and the special internationalisation tactics employed by Japanese SMEs to exporting traditional handicrafts to global markets. In their internationalisation process, SMEs face challenges due to limited resources, but what about SMEs whose commercial activity is influenced by indigenous cultural factors? The findings, which came from in-depth conversations with pottery makers as well as qualitative studies of webpages and other sources, point to a new phase in the export of culturally significant objects. This phase is known as the 'reverse previous phase,' and it is my contention that it is an appropriate method to begin the internationalisation of Japanese traditional arts. Our findings paint a picture of mass customization as a continuous process that occurs in tandem with a company's global expansion, as manufacturers and distributors seek to overcome cultural gaps. They shed light on managers' efforts to achieve a balance between standardisation and adaptability as they internationalise through a long learning phase and unlearning, changing, and rethinking.

Keywords: Internationalization strategies, Asian SMEs, Cultural aspects as differentiation, Japanese culture.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is a strategy used by businesses to increase revenue from overseas markets. This process has accelerated in recent decades as trade barriers have fallen and other reasons such as the development of communication technologies and transportation improvements have decreased the cost of exporting (Blundel & Smith, 2013).

These characteristics have aided the internationalisation process for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). When the owner-manager of a Japanese tatami (traditional Japanese rush-covered straw mats) went on a trip abroad, he discovered that many overseas Japanese companies possessed very ancient tatamis. He also saw that Japanese cuisine and culture were gaining popularity (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2004).

Furthermore, he noted that foreigners were using tatamis as carpets and decorations, which was not the case in Japan. He began to believe and with a little creativity, we could begin to employ traditional crafts in new ways. While these traditional internationalisation tactics are appropriate for items that are quite similar to one another, are mass-produced in big quantities, and are widely utilised, the question remains whether they would work for products that have cultural aspects embedded in them. This article attempts to answer this topic by concentrating on SMEs that create tea ceremonial pottery in Japan (Fan & Tan, 2015).

This type of ceramics is unique for several reasons: it is made by master potters utilising Japanese traditional methods; it is produced in very small quantities; each piece is unique; it is fired in a unique type of kiln; the potters are unable to control the final result of the work; environment finishes it, covering the exterior with natural ash glaze generated by wood burning; and its aesthetic reflects Zen qualities of asymmetry (Hennart et al., 2019).

The following three key aims will be pursued to address the above question. To begin, investigate the internationalisation tactics used by master ceramic artists in Shigaraki, Japan, who are organised in SMEs. The key concern is how Japanese tea ceremony pottery can be internationalised, given both the particular aesthetics of this type of ceramics and the Japanese cultural characteristics inherent in it. The second goal is to investigate the origins and significance of the cultural variables embedded in these tea-related clay pieces (Kim & Jensen, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to add to the literature on SME internationalisation methods by introducing the specific practises used by Shigaraki tea ceremony ceramic makers. The small number of instances analysed (nine) is one of the study's limitations.

As a result, the conclusions and recommendations of this article cannot be generalised, and more research in other Japanese pottery locations is required to compare results. Another restriction is that the findings are limited to the internationalisation techniques used by manufacturers of this specific type of pottery and cannot be extended to other SMEs in the ceramic sector that create industrial products in huge numbers.

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