What is *Omotenashi*? A Comparative Analysis with Service and Hospitality in the Japanese Lodging Industry

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Abstract—**Omotenashi, which is defined as a warm reception reflecting Japanese culture and courtesy, is perceived and practiced differently depending on the hosts and providers. Therefore, the views on *omotenashi* vary among researchers and practitioners, and it has been regarded as an ambiguous term. This study reviewed previous studies that discussed the definition and characteristics of *omotenashi* in recent years and has attempted academic conceptualization by comparing *omotenashi* with its synonyms, service and hospitality, as well as by conducting a case study analysis. As a result, the unique characteristics of *omotenashi* were identified: 1) being rooted in traditional Japanese culture, 2) understanding the implicit request of the guests (thoughtfulness), 3) the host and guests working together as one (equality), and 4) being offered in a casual manner. This paper proposes a new concept.**

Index Terms—**Omotenashi, hospitality, service, Yamashiroya, Sawanoya, FujiHakone Guest House**

I. INTRODUCTION

In Japan, there is a unique form of reception called *omotenashi* that reflects Japanese culture and courtesy. The word *omotenashi* became globally recognized after Japan's representative speech at the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Bid held by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) in September 2013. It was a very impressive speech, in which the word *omotenashi* was spelled out in syllables with a hand gesture for emphasis. According to a Japanese dictionary (*Daijirin*, Sanseido), *omotenashi* is defined as "Cordial reception, welcome and service to guests. It is a polite way of saying *motenashi* with an additional 'o' attached to the first syllable. It is mostly used in the form of *omotenashi*. Every act of *omotenashi* combines with exquisite politeness." Despite this definition, the concept varies depending on the researchers and practitioners and the definition remains ambiguous. *Omotenashi* can be compared to service and hospitality, and classified according to, for example, if there is an informal way of communication, and if it is offered to impress guests beyond their expectations. However, there is no clear classification for each of these [1]. In addition, *omotenashi* offered at a homely guest house is different from that offered at a high-class *ryokan* (Japanese-style traditional inn), even though the idea of the owner or landlady entertaining guests is the same. For this reason, the concept of *omotenashi* also varies among researchers [2]-[5]. This study reviews previous studies regarding *omotenashi* published in recent years and reconsiders the characteristics and concept of *omotenashi* through the comparison with cases of service and hospitality, especially in the Japanese lodging industry.

II. LITELATURE REVIEW

A. Origin of Omotenashi

Omotenashi is a term that corresponds to the Japanese hospitality culture, which originates from *motenasu* (welcoming and entertaining). It is also defined as "a person's welcoming attitude, manner and behavior towards others, which are fostered by the person's culture, etc." Offering *omotenashi* does not require a return, nor is it sacrificial" [6]. *Omotenashi* is based on Japanese etiquette and is a hearty reception that reflects Japanese culture and tradition [7]. The Japanese traditional culture that forms the basic idea of *omotenashi* is the Japanese tea ceremony. The aim of *omotenashi* is to make the guest feel comfortable and happy by offering a personalized experience to each guest in a casual way, without asking for anything in return [3]. The fusion between traditional Japanese etiquette inherited from the tea ceremony, and personalized experience offered to each guest led to the development of *omotenashi* being provided in Japanese inns today [8]. *Omotenashi*, which relies on non-profit-making personal acts, satisfies guests through personalization of the service. This sympathetic *omotenashi*, which is unique to Japanese people, is offered spontaneously with consideration for individual guests. It is presented in a casual and reserved action, in which the true intentions of the guests are understood before they convey it [9]. Different Japanese inns offer *omotenashi* in different ways, so the guests evaluate the Japanese inns based on the uniqueness of their *omotenashi*.

B. The Mutual Relationship between the Host and Guest in Omotenashi

Omotenashi is based on the concept of 'the host and guest working together as one' which comes from the

Japanese tea ceremony, where hosts not only entertain guests, but also guests respond to the hosts' thoughtfulness [10]. The hosts never intend to seek appreciations from the guests, and everything the hosts do for the guests is unconditional *omotenashi* based on the spirit of altruism. Behind this contextual consideration towards the other person, there are the deep insight and high spirituality of the Japanese people, which are based on the unique high-context culture. *Omotenashi* not only requires the host to act in consideration of the guests' intentions, but also requires the guests to be sensible enough to appreciate what the host is trying to do. This kind of mutual relationship between the host and guest is established based on the high-context communication [11]. For example, in Japanese inns, the room attendants and waitresses try to understand the implicit intentions of the guests from their behavior, and create an appropriate atmosphere by easing tensions through talking about the seasons and the garden, etc. As a result of their thoughtfulness towards the guests, the guests appreciate not only the food, but also the details of the garden and hanging scrolls, and recognize the value of the *omotenashi* offered by the Japanese inn. *Omotenashi* is a value co-creation service, in which the host improves the guests' sensibility for *omotenashi* by understanding implicit situations and offering them personalized experiences [11]. That is to say, the main characteristic of *omotenashi* is to anticipate what guests want from the situation and context in order to please them.

C. The Japanese High-Context Influences Omotenashi

Omotenashi is influenced not only by Japanese culture and history, but also by the Japanese natural environment and lifestyle, and it relies on the sharing of implicit contexts between the host and guests [12]. This context-dependent *omotenashi* has become refined through various long-term relationships between the host and guests, and has been developed as a service that is highly structured and high-context. It assumes that the host and guests share the same context and interpret each other's implicit intentions in a timely manner based on their relationship. Hara (2018) classified services in terms of whether the service provider's way of offering their value is explicit or implicit, and whether the customers' needs are explicit or implicit in his study. He classified *omotenashi* as a "thoughtful type," in which the provider consciously offers appropriate services by understanding the customers' implicit thoughts [13]. In this "thoughtful type" of service, even if there is no explicit request or intention from the customers (guests), the provider (host) considers and offers appropriate services, and the customers recognize the value. As long as the context is shared between the two, *omotenashi* can be recognized appropriately through non-verbal communication, for example, gestures and facial expressions. *Omotenashi* evolves through mutual evaluation between the host and guests, and its quality improves based on this evaluation. Therefore, the knowledge of *omotenashi* is difficult to be shared and transferred in regions with different contexts, such as cultures and sense of values, and there has never

been a large-scale chain or globalization of businesses associated with *omotenashi*.

Based on the literature reviews, *omotenashi* was found to have the following characteristics: 1) the host and guest share the context, for example, unique Japanese culture and sense of values, 2) it is based on traditional Japanese culture and etiquette, 3) the host understands the guest's unspoken requests, and offers what they want in a casual manner, and 4) it sets up an opportunity where the host and guest work together as one and care for each other. This can be summarized as an altruistic Japanese hospitality behavior.

III. CONCEPT OF OMOTENASHI: COMPARISON WITH SERVICE AND HOSPITALITY

From the literature reviews, the definition and characteristics of *omotenashi* were summarized, and a comprehensive concept of *omotenashi* was formulated. Next, in order to capture the concept of *omotenashi* more clearly, an exhaustive review of the recently published literature on its synonyms, service and hospitality, was conducted and compared with the concept of *omotenashi*. Then new concepts of *omotenashi* as well as service and hospitality were proposed with the framework shown in Fig. 1.
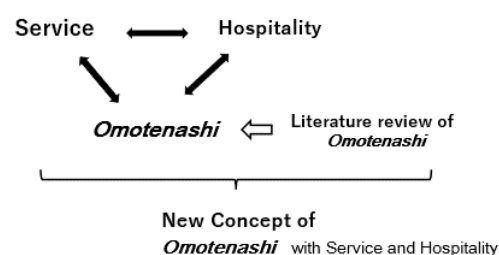

Figure 1. Analytical framework for a new concept of *omotenashi*.

A. Service and Hospitality

Service is defined as "the process of offering something tangible or intangible to a third party. The meaning can include volunteer or contribution, but is mainly an obligatory or functional behavior for the service providers to obtain their own benefit or compensation, and something in return is expected" [6]. Hospitality, on the other hand, is defined as "the practice of welcoming and entertaining guests in a friendly manner, and the provision of food or accommodation to people when they seek it outside their own homes," and often refers to the industrial aspects in the lodging and restaurant businesses [2]. In the early 1990s, the term 'hospitality' began to be used instead of 'service,' and today it is widely used in our daily lives, not only in businesses and management. In particular, hospitality means the friendly reception and treatment of customers in the tourism industry, and these businesses are collectively regarded as the hospitality industry [2]. Hospitality came to be widely used instead of service, but the definitions vary and the difference from the definition of service is not clear. Service and hospitality have in common that they are a form of social interaction

between the provider and customers [8]. The characteristics of service (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability) are the same as those of hospitality when these are compared to 'goods' which are tangible [2]. There is no unified view on the concept of hospitality, and there are many overlaps between service and hospitality in their practices, and the criteria to distinguish these two are also ambiguous [14].

Service is a professional behavior or scheme intended to help or satisfy the service users, regardless of personal or public interest, and is a paid economic activity aimed at the pursuit of profit as a business. In contrast, the original meaning of hospitality can be considered as an unpaid social action, which is excluded from economic activities. It originates from the voluntary actions of people who want to welcome others [8]. For example, when a person is invited to a friend's house for a meal, this is not a service-based action on the basis of the receipt of money, but a hospitality-based action. In the case of service, it is assumed that a hierarchical relationship is established temporally between the provider and customers. The service recipients are positioned higher than the provider who serves the customers to satisfy them. On the other hand, in the case of hospitality, the relationship between the provider and customers is considered to be mutually equal, in which both parties give pleasure and impression to each other [6]. If service is regarded as a vertical relationship between the provider and customers, hospitality, which is provided free of charge, is regarded as a horizontal relationship [6].

Other differences between service and hospitality include target customers, mind-set/behavior of employees, and the contents offered [2]. Because service is intended to offer the same thing to a large number of customers, it can be standardized in a manual. In contrast, because hospitality requires different responses to each customer, it is difficult to provide standardized responses in a manual. Regarding the mindset of employees, there is a difference in their attitude. In the case of service, they act and provide services passively based on a sense of obligation. In contrast, hospitality is a spontaneous action with a sense of mission and desire to please the customers. In one airline company, hospitality is "the act of creating added value and sharing joy, and is based on the idea: I am happy if you are happy." [15] Regarding the contents offered, while service offers basic values that meet the criteria and conditions appropriate to the price, hospitality is expected to offer added values that exceed the expectations and desires of the customers. A provider may think that he/she has offered hospitality to a customer, but if the customer does not judge that he/she has received hospitality, the provider's action becomes unsuccessful. That is to say, as with *omotenashi*, only when both the host and guests realize the value of the hospitality, and share the feeling of joy and pleasure, the action is regarded as hospitality [15]. Such characteristics of hospitality are also considered to be 'rooted in the equal relationship, which is mutually beneficial, between the host and guest' [6], [10]. Hospitality is considered as

a superordinate concept of service because it requires responses that exceed the basic values of service and are provided flexibly to suit different customers [2]

B. Service and Omotenashi

In the case of service, it is highly recognized by customers when the provider gives 'thoughtfulness' and 'attentiveness' worth more than the amount that the customers paid. Therefore, some companies and organizations train their employees to offer more thoughtfulness and attentiveness spontaneously than the standard service, and such thoughtfulness and attentiveness have been regarded to be *omotenashi* [6].

There is a viewpoint that distinguishes hospitality and service in terms of whether it is intended for individuals or for the general public [16]. Modern-day chain stores provide homogenized services to a large number of customers efficiently through standardization of operations, preparing manuals in advance and developing systems. Such services that follow manuals do not disappoint customers, but it is difficult to satisfy and impress them. In addition to providing regular services, it is necessary to take measures to attract customers and keep them coming back. *Omotenashi*, on the other hand, gives satisfaction and impresses customers by anticipating and understanding their requests and expectations in advance.

There is also another idea that regards service as predetermined routine work and *omotenashi* as improvised service performances beyond the scope of those routines [17]. Standard services that assume to be provided for average customers can be prepared in advance, but no customers will regard such services as *omotenashi*. *Omotenashi* is often dependent on individual customers and situations, and is offered in unpredictable situations. It adds value by identifying implicit requests of customers through conversations with them and by providing services appropriate to the time and place. In order to offer appropriate *omotenashi,* it is important for the providers to have observation skills, to think from the customers' viewpoint and also to have empathy to understand customers' feelings [17].

The duration and frequency of communication with customers is another viewpoint on the differences between service and *omotenashi* [10]. In the case of service, the duration and frequency of communication between the provider and customers is limited, and the providers do not have the responsibility to offer additional services at their personal discretion. Therefore, it is difficult for the providers to anticipate customers' needs and to respond to them in a timely manner. In many cases, customers do not wish to have a close relationship with the provider, and rather prefer to be served quickly and efficiently. In contrast, *omotenashi* requires the provider to have longer and more frequent communications with customers in order to understand their needs not only through verbal expressions, such as conversations, but also through non-verbal expressions, such as attitudes and gestures. Those who offer *omotenashi* are often given discretionary rights to provide additional services, and are empowered to act on their

own judgments. In terms of human resource development, training for service providers is mainly based on manuals, whereas hospitality providers are mainly educated and trained to be able to act by making their own decisions [10]. However, introducing some exceptional *omotenashi* experiences to customers as if it were a legendary or miraculous service and making them expect too much can damage their trust. Therefore, it is important to have a system that enables customers to be impressed and to make them feel that *omotenashi* has been specially offered to them, no matter when and who experiences it [18]. When the conventional services become no longer able to meet the customers' needs, personalized *omotenashi* becomes necessary. In this case, new ways of providing services should be discussed, and the information and knowledge need to be shared in the organization. In order to prepare a variety of services that meet the customers' needs in advance and to ensure carrying them out through training employees, it is necessary to standardize individual elements of *omotenashi* as service. Moreover, it is necessary to prepare a variety of options to meet the needs of different customers in advance, and to deal with them as a whole organization, so that the confidence from customers grows.

C. Hospitality and Omotenashi

Hospitality and *omotenashi* have in common that in the process of offering, both are evaluated in accordance with a functional aspect of the service, emotional aspect of hospitality/*omotenashi,* as well as personalization that is required to respond to each guest differently [8]. The word hospitality is derived from a Latin word *hospes* meaning 'to welcome and provide shelter to guests' and the origin of *omotenashi* is to 'invite guests,' so both of the original ideas were to welcome strangers [4]. In addition, both hospitality and *omotenashi* share the following points in common: 1) being based on etiquette and rules, 2) treating guests as individuals, and 3) being adaptable without feeling limitations, for example, a way of thinking: 'there is nothing I cannot do' [19]. From the viewpoint of the actions taken by *omotenashi* and hospitality providers, have the same attitude that places importance on the guests' satisfaction and they think in the way that, 'the guests' satisfaction is my satisfaction' [15]. Moreover, there are also similarities in their spirit that focuses on the emotional aspect, for example, making the other person feel comfortable, as well as the host-guest equal relationship [20].

The difference between *omotenashi* and hospitality is whether it is paid for or not. The hospitality providers are paid for the services they provide to the guests, while the providers that offer *omotenashi* do not expect anything in return from the guests [13]. In contrast to *omotenashi* which is offered free of charge, hospitality is converted into a monetary service charge [6]. In the lodging industry in particular, hospitality offered to guests is very important to improve their satisfaction, and as a component of the service, hospitality involves a price to be paid, and its paid nature is different from *omotenashi* [8].

Omotenashi and hospitality differ in terms of the emotional distance between guests and the provider [19]. While the words such as formality and politeness are used to express *omotenashi*, the words friendliness and intimacy are used for hospitality offered in the US, which indicate cultural differences. *Omotenashi* is characterized by its profoundness, casualness, *kata* (cultural pattern) and collaboration. These elements are rooted in Japanese culture, and are not found in hospitality [21]. *Omotenashi* is also characterized by its carefulness, and even overly polite attentions are paid to the guests in order to ensure not to be rude. There is a common understanding of courtesy between guests and the provider, and *omotenashi* contains a potential hazard that a lack of courtesy can cause disrespect to the guests. *Omotenashi* has a rule that both the host and guests work together to create a comfortable atmosphere, and it is assumed that both parties are aware of the rule [10]. Even if the other party does not know about this rule, courtesy is shown to avoid embarrassment and to save face, and no fault of the other party is pointed out on such an occasion. *Omotenashi* has its own features based on traditional Japanese culture: trust relationship; once-in-a-lifetime meeting; role exchange; sensitivity and culture of the person being treated; reading the atmosphere, and these are never found in hospitality [2]. While hospitality reflects basic ethics and human morality, *omotenashi* is considered to be rooted in Japan's unique traditional culture, spirituality and relationships.

Globalization has greatly progressed in the hospitality industry, in which locality does not have a negative impact, and has been successful in various sectors. The level of reproducibility in hospitality through modularization, standardization, and horizontal specialization is relatively high, but development that takes religious and cultural diversity into account can be a challenge [20]. On the other hand, *omotenashi* prioritizes sustainability over business expansion and it has been developed to suit the Japanese environment. It is therefore difficult to adapt to globalization because of its business operating style that does not assume expansion of scale. In the case of hospitality that is offered to the Western guests, who usually explicitly convey what they want and need, the guests are deemed to be positioned at the top. The providers' minimum task is to fully understand guests' requests, and it is important for them to offer hospitality that exceeds guests' expectations and to please them. *Omotenashi*, on the other hand, is offered in response to the implicit expectations and requests of Japanese guests, who usually do not express what they want and need explicitly, and it is preferred to be offered in a casual manner, on the assumption that the host and guests are on equal footing. In fact, hospitality is often treated synonymously with thoughtfulness and attentiveness observed in *omotenashi* and there is a strong similarity. However, hospitality has a broader meaning of welcoming and entertaining guests, while the thoughtfulness and attentiveness of *omotenashi* are carried out differently in that the providers offer these

based on anticipation of the needs of guests in order to please and satisfy them [1], [6].

IV. DISCUSSION: SUMMARY OF THE COMPARISON OF OMOTENASHI WITH HOSPITALITY AND SERVICE

The characteristics of *omotenashi*, hospitality and service, with their common and different points, are summarized in Fig. 2 on two axes: individualized or standardized, and global or Japanese.
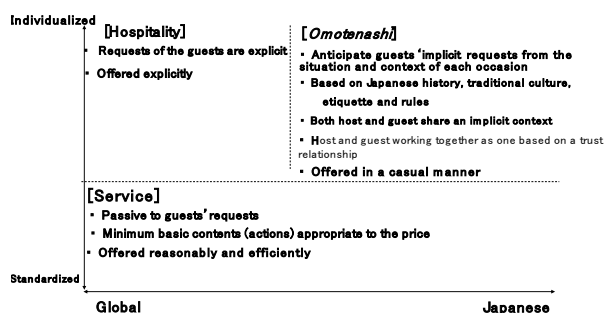
Individualized

[Hospitality]
- Requests of the guests are explicit
- Offered explicitly

[Omotenashi]
- Anticipate guests 'implicit requests from the situation and context of each occasion
- Based on Japanese history, traditional culture, etiquette and rules
- Both host and guest share an implicit context
- Host and guest working together as one based on a trust relationship
- Offered in a casual manner

[Service]
- Passive to guests' requests
- Minimum basic contents (actions) appropriate to the price
- Offered reasonably and efficiently

Standardized

Global   Japanese

Figure 2. Summary of the research on the characteristics of *omotenashi*, hospitability and service

A. Concept and Cases of Service

Based on the literature reviews and analysis, service is regarded as the minimum basic contents or actions passively offered to guests' requests reasonably and efficiently, and it is appropriate to the price. At Super Hotel, which operates business hotels across Japan, services that only trouble one in 100 guests have been removed [22].

Figure 3. Super Hotel[1]

For example, there is no fixed telephone in the guestrooms. In this modern age when cellular phones are widely used, the usefulness of guestroom telephones is low. By getting rid of guestroom phones, the hotel benefits by eliminating the initial cost of installation and billing equipment, and there is no need for front desk clerks to transfer calls to the guestrooms, or to check on the telephone usage at the time of checkout. The guests also benefit from not being woken up in the middle of the night by the sound of a telephone call in the next room. A number of measures to improve both management efficiency and guest satisfaction have been implemented

at Super Hotel. In another example, they have deployed a 'no-key, no-check-out system,' which allows guests to pre-pay for their stay at an automatic check-in machine located in the lobby, and receive a receipt with their room number and a PIN number printed on it which unlocks the room [22]. This system eliminates the need to checkout on busy mornings, as there is no room key to return or payment to be made, and this creates a win-win situation for both the hotel and guests. Another example is the provision of a public bath with a hot spring. They have reduced water consumption and the time for cleaning bathrooms in each guestroom. The bed legs were also eliminated to reduce cleaning time [22]. This means that, standardization and optimization of services is important to satisfy a large number of guests with limited resources.

B. Concept and Cases of Hospitality

Hospitality, as with *omotenashi*, requires practical applications beyond service in that it is actively performed in response to requests from guests. The performance varies according to the situation and individual needs [4]. Examples include free upgrades to a suite room with champagne as a gift for a birthday or anniversary; taking a bullet train to deliver a guest's belonging left behind; attending and guiding a guest to a nearby place if asked; preparing a handmade message card for a birthday; offering ginger tea and a hot water bottle to a guest who has a cold; warming a baby's bottle; and taking a guest's luggage to the station. It is characterized by the employees being attentive and acting spontaneously without being told to do so by guests. By responding flexibly to the guests, hospitality values that go beyond service are created.

One of the characteristics of hospitality is to impress guests by exceeding their expectations in response to their explicit requests, mainly requests from Westerners who often make their requests explicit. At the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, for example, a beach attendant staff was asked by a guest to leave behind one of the beach chairs as he was going to make a marriage proposal to his girlfriend. The beach attendant staff then laid a white tablecloth on a table, put flowers and champagne on it, and put a towel in front of the chair to keep the sand off the guest's knees. In addition, he changed his uniform from a t-shirt and shorts to a dinner jacket borrowed from another employee, with a white cloth draped over his arm, and waited on the guests [23].

Figure 4. The RITZ-CARLTON, Tokyo[2]

In another example, a concierge was asked by a guest where he could buy a tape to record a meeting. The concierge did not only go to a shop to buy a tape, but also found and provided one of the hotel's extra tapes as a spare [24]. In another case, when a guest inquired about booking a banquet room when there was no room available in the hotel, a concierge searched and found a banquet room in another hotel and recommended it to the guest. Furthermore, to avoid any inconvenience, he made preparations and exchanged information in advance at the hotel to which he recommended the guest, and served as a support on the day of the event [24]. In this way, hospitality is characterized by making impressions and surprises for the explicit requests from the guests by responding to them more than they expect.

C. Concept and Cases of Omotenashi

Omotenashi is characterized by the fact that the host anticipates guests' implicit requests from the situation and context of each occasion and offers it in a casual manner [6], [9], [11], and this is regarded as the 'thoughtful service' [13]. Regarding *omotenashi*, Mayumi Oda, the landlady of Kagaya, which has a high reputation for its *omotenashi*, thinks that: "…To offer the greatest *omotenashi*, we have to sense what the guests need, and think by ourselves about what we can put into action, while keeping a smile on our face" [25]. Room attendants at Kagaya are required to anticipate the needs of guests, work tactfully according to the situation, and keep smiling. For various situations and guests, they are expected to think by themselves about what they can do to make the guest happy, and provide the best service.

Figure 5. Kagaya[3]

For example, at Kagaya, a room attendant had a conversation with a male guest who had a picture of a woman in his guest room, and heard that the woman in the picture was his late wife and that today was the anniversary of her death. The room attendant then asked the chefs to prepare a meal for his late wife, which was served in front of the picture [26]. In another case, a room attendant found out that an elderly couple came to the inn for a celebration of a 77th birthday, and then the room attendant delivered a birthday cake and asked the inn's exclusive Mexican band to play a birthday song for them [26]. Kagaya has a customer service manual of about 100 pages, which contains the essentials in the lodging business, including how to bow when welcoming and

seeing off guests, how to show guests around the inn, and how to serve the guests in their rooms, as well as prohibitions against mentioning politics, religion, and physical characteristics. However, Oda says: "If you work according to the manual, you get 50 out of 100. The manual is just a guideline. Every guest is different. To sincerely deal with each guest, what you need is a mindset to devote yourself to the guest" [26]. Because working in a ryokan requires flexible responses to any kind of guests according to their situation, employees have to judge the situation by themselves and take actions on their own when offering *omotenashi*. In order to anticipate the needs that the guest does not convey, both the host and guest must share the implicit context of etiquette [7] and rules [10] rooted in Japanese history and traditional culture [12]. *Omotenashi* is based on this implicit context, and room attendants with a certain amount of experience should be able to anticipate what each guest needs. Just by observing the mood of a guest in the room, they can judge whether it is better to visit the room frequently or keep it to a minimum. On the other hand, inexperienced room attendants, who have not learned the skill to grasp the situation properly, are trained by working with senior room attendants, so that they become able to observe guests closely and get a feel for what they need. In some cases, inexperienced room attendants are assigned to guests with whom they seem to have better rapport, so that they can gain successful experiences and make quicker progress. In this way, Kagaya's room attendants steadily accumulate experience, learn to observe guests carefully, acquire a good sense of identifying what the guests need, and become fully-fledged room attendants. Oda says: "Conversation with guests is the best way to get to know them. From conversations, I try to get a feel for what this person wants, why he booked a room at Kagaya, and if he is tired from his daily work or not, etc. Firstly, I try to relax their mind" [25]. Each guest has a different way of thinking and a different reaction to *omotenashi*. It is not enough to simply follow the way things have been conducted in the past. Therefore, those who offer *omotenashi* must always remember not to be afraid to make a change. The Japanese style ryokans are different from hotels in that it is difficult to respond to customers by following a manual.

As mentioned earlier, *omotenashi* is characterized by the emotional aspect unique to Japanese people, such as profundity, casualness, *kata* (cultural pattern), collaboration and a reserved manner, which are all rooted in Japanese culture [19]. Furthermore, the host and guests are on equal footing, and casual reception in which both parties care for each other is preferred [12]. Oda says: "There is a moment when you become one with the guest when offering *omotenashi*. There is a moment when you return to your true self. Room attendants do not go beyond the position of serving guests, but they do become one with guests and feel sympathy." As she says, the value of *omotenashi* is co-created by the host and guest working together as one. In order to achieve this, a trust relationship is essential, with which the *omotenashi*

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[3] Homepage of Kagaya (https://www.kagaya.co.jp/) Mar.19.2021

providers need to be able to read the situation, and the guests are sensible and cultured [2].

Comparing *omotenashi* with service and hospitality, *omotenashi* is based on etiquette and the rules have originated from Japanese history and traditional culture, and premises a trust relationship in which both host and guest share and consider the context of a Japanese sense of values and culture. It is a reception unique to Japan, in which the host anticipates and understands implicit requests of guests and offers *omotenashi* in a casual manner, while taking the situation into account. *Omotenashi* differs from service and hospitality in that it does not need to be explicitly communicated in language because the host and guest share the same context based on Japanese culture. The level of thoughtfulness and attentiveness for guests varies according to personal tolerance and character of the provider, and the evaluation of *omotenashi* also depends largely on the sensitivity of each guest. The thoughtfulness and attentiveness of *omotenashi* are characterized by being offered in a casual manner and it assumes both the host and guest share a sense of values that are unique to Japan. *Omotenashi* differs from hospitality that is offered explicitly to guests, and this makes it difficult for *omotenashi* to be developed globally.

V. CONCLUSION

Omotenashi has been practiced and perceived differently depending on practitioners and researchers, so the concept remains ambiguously defined. In this study, an exhaustive review of previous studies on *omotenashi* in recent years and a comparison with service and hospitality were conducted in order to find clearer concepts. *Omotenashi* is a superordinate concept that requires more complex practices than service in that *omotenashi* is tailored to suit different situations and individual guests. *Omotenashi* differs from hospitality offered mainly in Western countries in that it requires understanding of the guests' implicit requests. When a context based on Japan's unique traditional culture is shared by both the host and guests, *omotenashi* can be recognized. In this study, various previous studies on *omotenashi* were reviewed, and through the comparison with the concepts of service and hospitality, the characteristics of *omotenashi* were identified, and these have been successfully integrated into the certain general concept.

When these characteristics of *omotenashi* are applied to the lodging industry in Japan, mainly *ryokan*, Japanese style inns, the following points can be discussed. In recent years, there has been a noticeable dichotomy between foreign-brand luxury hotels and relatively low-priced lodging-specialized or lodging-focused business hotels [27]. As a result, traditional small and medium-sized family-run *ryokan* that do not fit these business models have been placed in a difficult economic situation. In Japan, population decline will accelerate with its low birthrate and aging population. However, the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan, which had been increasing rapidly before the COVID-19 outbreak, is expected to increase again when the outbreak is over. It will become important for the management of *ryokan* to find a way to offer *omotenashi* to satisfy such foreign guests. However, if they pander to foreign guests, their *omotenashi* may become no different from globalized hospitality. If this happens, differentiation of *ryokan* from hotel chains will become difficult. Foreign guests expect a unique Japanese *omotenashi*, but the challenge is to find a way of satisfying the foreign guests who do not share the same context of Japanese history and culture. Even if the same *omotenashi* is offered as that offered to Japanese, foreign guests may not always perceive the same value. The value of *omotenashi* is co-created by the interaction between the host and guest, which is influenced by the guests' attributes, physical environment, and behavior of other guests [20]. How to offer Japanese *omotenashi* to foreign guests from different cultures, who do not share these contexts, is the future research task.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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