LUND UNIVERSITY • CENTRE FOR EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES

A symbol becomes the culture:

Reinventing Japanese cherry blossoms

Author: Hanyan Ye
Supervisor: Annika Pissin

Master's Programme in Asian Studies

Spring semester 2015

ABSTRACT

A major concern of this thesis was the changing meanings of cherry blossoms in Japanese history, and the images of Japan created through the flower. With a peculiar emphasis on today's international context, when cherry blossoms have become a unique culture of Japan, this research inquired into the process of symbol-making. The Zenith concept of *nyoze* and poststructural discussions on language-power relations functioned as critical theoretical tools in revealing the articulation of knowledge within meanings related to the symbol, which empowered certain "truths" at different historical stages. In addition, the thesis illustrated that aestheticization and commodification were the two prominent forces in reinventing meanings, making them appear natural or commonsensical. Meanwhile, supported by interview findings, the thesis investigated into the uniqueness and authenticity of cherry blossoms in Japan, and contended that they reinforced the asserted cultural homogeneity of the country.

Keywords: cherry blossoms, national symbols, *nyoze*, reinvention of traditions, aestheticization, commodification, *Nihonjinron*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Annika Pissin. Without your help and encouragement it could have been so much more difficult to finish this thesis. Also, I would like to thank Professor Paul Watt from Waseda University, your knowledge on Zen Buddhism guided me to find out a linkage between Zenith concepts and post-structural discussions on language and knowledge.

In addition, many thanks go out to the interviewees who took part in my research, your insights in the topic greatly inspired me to look from an angel of cherry blossoms as a unique Japanese culture. Furthermore, I want to give my thanks to NIAS for granting me a scholarship to make use of the NIAS library and other resources accessible at the institute. Last but not least, I thank Adam for your support throughout the thesis writing process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research background and relevance: Why cherry blossoms?

Following the aftermath of the disastrous 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, in her documentary film *The tsunami and the cherry blossom*, the British director Lucy Walker (2011) captured the survival and revival in the areas hardest hit as the cherry blossoms season arrived, unfolding the difficulties that locals were facing, and the courage that they drew from cherry blossoms. In the film, cherry blossoms represented a powerful symbol with multiple meanings. The fallen pedals and the short blossom of cherries endow a season of goodbyes, and the deaths in the area. Meanwhile, the arrival of cherry blossom season after the catastrophes also epitomized rebirth, a season of new encounters, and a new point to restart with. Furthermore, a local resident of Fukushima describes in the film that the persistent blooming of cherry blossoms in the salty soil after the tsunami represents the "Japanese spirit": each flower is tiny, but they are incomparably beautiful when bloom together, just like Japanese people who are at their best when they work together (Carstensen & Walker, 2011).

As the film has displayed, Japan has been popularly associated with an image of "the land of cherry blossoms" on the international stage (In beautiful Japan, 1904). In addition, according to the annual visitors arrivals report of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), the Japanese practice of *hanami* (cherry blossoms viewing) is gaining increasing popularity worldwide. Each year, the number of visitors arriving in Japan to view cherry petals blanketing the archipelago "in soft, colorful splendor" (JNTO, 2014) grows, and JNTO gives credits to the tourist promotion of Japan's "iconic *sakura*[1] (cherry blossoms) culture" on the international stage (ibid.).

Despite the fact that flowers viewing is a celebrated event in all seasons throughout Japan (i.e., plum blossoms in February, iris blossoms in early June, hydrangea blossoms in late June, etc.), the annual grand banquets surrounding cherry blossoms is the most prominent one. In Japanese, the word for flower (*hana*[2]) itself equals to cherry blossoms. Each year, the archipelago engages in great enthusiasms forecasting and anticipation for the blossom. Cherry blossoms viewing has become a banquet for people from all social groups gather to drink, eat, and dance, and to reflect upon life and death for the individual and even for the mankind (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002 p. 10-11).

[1] サクラ

[2] 花

Moreover, even outside Japan, cherry blossoms festivals are frequently associated with traditional Japanese cultures so as to generate a sense of exoticness or authenticity of cherry flowers viewing. To illustrate, the United States has a show garden of cherry blossoms that resembled best cherry blossoms viewing (*hanami*[1]) places in Japan, which invokes a national awareness of blooming Japanese cherries every spring (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 84). In addition, cherry blossoms festival programs in European cities, for instance, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Hamburg and Budapest, etc., adopt Japanese names of *sakura* festival or *hamani* and provide performances of traditional Japanese art and culture in cherry blossoms viewing events.

Compared to the flower's tremendous popularity today within and outside Japan, it is noteworthy that until the eighth century, cherry blossoms were not as representative of Japan as it does now. Instead, in earlier Japanese literature, literati appreciations towards cherry blossoms were far less than those towards plum blossoms, when plum blossoms were appreciated as a symbol of the Han and Tang "high civilizations" on the Japanese archipelago (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 52). In addition, until the end of the eighth century, the word *hana* meant plum blossoms instead of cherry blossoms due to the literati admiration towards Chinese civilizations. However, plum blossoms today are rarely related to Chinese cultures or "Chinese traits", while cherry blossoms seem to represent special Japanese "national characters" or culture on a collective and international level. Given this research background, this thesis inquires into the symbol-making process related to the changing meanings of cherry blossoms in history, as well as the sequence of reinvention of traditions which enabled the nationalized symbol to appear natural and commonsensical. Most importantly, given today's context in which cherry blossoms as a national symbol has been naturalized as a unique culture of Japan, the thesis endeavors to deconstruct the uniqueness of the symbol with references to Zenith and poststructural theories, revealing the discursive knowledge that the symbol articulated at the transnational level. Therefore, the thesis is assertively trans-disciplinary. It derives its theoretical arguments from literature criticism, philosophical and most prominently, sociological conceptualizations, concentrating on the processes of symbol-making and naturalization.

1.2. Research questions

The research of cherry blossoms as a symbol starts with the questions of "What is a symbol?" while relating back to the context where meanings of cherry blossoms as a symbol have transcended their

[1] 花見

forms to formulate a totality, presenting itself as *the culture*. Afterwards, the thesis answers to the question of "What is the process of making a nationalized symbol appear natural or commonsensical?" with an examination on the naturalization of cherry blossoms through the reinvention of traditions in Japanese history. Based on the discussion of the reinvention of traditions, and with a particular focus on today's social contexts within and beyond Japan, the thesis puts forward its most prominent research question, asking "What is the knowledge articulated in the discourse of cherry blossoms as a unique culture of Japan on the international stage?".

1.3. Disposition

Having given the research background as well as research questions of the research in this chapter, the second chapter of the thesis consists a historical review of changing meanings of cherry blossoms, an illustration of relations between cherry blossoms and Japanese identities, followed by a critical review of existing literature on cherry blossoms in the third chapter. The fourth chapter explains the methodology as well as the purpose for adopting such research strategy for the topic, while the fifth chapter presents a short description of the interviewees and summarizes empirical findings of the fieldwork. The sixth chapter formulates the theoretical framework combined with data analysis, demonstrating how the research fits into a complex of different theories. A discussion which answers the main research question on the knowledge circulated in the naturalization of cherry blossoms as a unique culture of Japan is put forward in the seventh chapter. Last but not least, in the eighth chapter, the thesis presents its conclusion. At the same time, it illustrates its own limitations and proposes an alternative approach towards the theme of cherry blossoms as a symbol and culture.

2. JAPANESE CHERRY BLOSSOMS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1. Changing meanings of cherry blossoms

According to David Armitage and Jo Guildi (2014), by prioritizing long-term or slowly evolving structures, the Annales school's historical approaches of *longue durée* towards analyzing contemporary societies allows individual researcher to investigate into the process of long-term complexes, to do revisionary studies of a history and to make sense of contemporary societies (Armitage & Guildi, 2014, p. 23-24). In the light of the coming back into views of the Annales school's historical approaches of *longue durée* towards analyzing contemporary societies, this chapter starts with historicized changing meanings of cherry blossoms to understand the change of roles of cherry blossoms through time, and more importantly, their role as a national symbol in today's context.

Since the blossom of cherries forecasts the conditions of rice harvesting, the sacred plant of Japan in autumn, Ohnuki-Tierney observes that at earlier stages of their cultural history in Japan, meanings assigned to cherry blossoms was associated with agrarian prosperity and life power. Back to as early as the eighth century (during the late Nara Period), cherry trees was transplanted from mountains to households, and flower festivals (*hanae shiki*[1]) were held in shrines and temples, as well as in the imperial court with the *teno*[2] (emperor) performing as a priest to pray for a good harvest of rice crops in autumn (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 12; 29). Therefore, according to Wybe Kuitert and Arie Peterse (1999), at the same time, cherry blossoms also symbolized the power and responsibilities of the *teno* as a priest, which extended "as far as cherries are in bloom" (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 47).

Moreover, the importance of rice in agrarian Japan contributed to the emergence of the "aesthetics of productive power in an agrarian cosmology" (Ohunuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 31). cherry blossoms, just like rice, were linked with reproductive objectives, which include feminine sexuality, and the playful side of womanhood (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 61). Since at least the Heian Period (784-1185), cherry blossom viewing became the annual event for courtship: men and women from all social classes and occupations, went to drink, dance, masquerade, exchange poems and engage in intercourse amongst falling petals of the cherry flower (Ohunuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 33). One

[1] 花会式

[2] 天皇

peculiar form of feminine sexuality represented in cherry blossoms involves the *geisha*[1], the performer and entertainer. To illustrate, the world surrounds a geisha was often referred to cherry blossoms. A high-status *geisha* would be associated with cherry flowers in full bloom and their most refined dancing technique frequently embody cherry blossoms motifs (ibid., p. 35). The footbridge leading through the audience from the stage in the theater is *hanamichi*[2]- flower road, and the payment for a *geisha* is *hanadai*[3], the payment for the flower of cherry blossoms (ibid., p. 35-50). Even when women were banned from the theater during the Edo Period (1615-1868), cherry blossoms remained representative of transvestite *geisha*s, which marked a shift from the appreciation from reproductivity to non-reproductive relationships. Nevertheless, the connection between flowering cherries and male *geisha*s still highlighted the joy of life and romantic relations.

Besides, since at least as early as the eighth century, cherry blossoms also represented the ephemerality of life and impermanence of things, due to the great cultural influence of Buddhism. Nevertheless, the prediction of death in cherry blossoms only epitomizes during the late Edo and earl Meiji Period (1868 - 1912) in a *samurai*[4] (a warrior) and his willingness to die in his prime in the way that a cherry petal falls at the height of its beauty (Keene, 1969, p. 305). Nitobe Inazo (1862 - 1933), who promoted the common use of *bushido*[5] in Japan and in the overseas used cherry blossoms, a flower that was "indigenous to the soil of Japanese"（Nitobe, 1912, p. 1), to emblem the greatest beauty and purity of death for a "true warrior" in the name of loyalty for one's master or the country.

At this point, the meaning of fallen cherry petals developed to another level. It transcended the circle of life and death that cherry blossoms conventionally represented in earlier Japanese histories and implied how individual can live and evanesce in beauty through detaching oneself from life. Moreover, the reinterpretation of *bushido* by Nitobe Inazo in the twentieth century also elevated the emperor from the status of a priest to a deity and reconstructed the sacrifice for the emperor as an

---

1 芸者

2 花道

3 花代

4 侍

5 武士道

ancient practice, rendering the *kamikaze*[1] pilots, the "young *samurai*s" mann the rocket-propelled human bombs named *oka*[2] (cherry blossoms) to fall like cherry petals for the emperor during the Second World War (Ohunuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 292).

So far as the thesis has demonstrated, from an individual level, cherry blossoms display the joy of life, which include the beauty of reproductivity, feminine sexuality, and same-sex romances; paradoxically, the meanings of cherry blossoms were also associated with the sorrowful side of life, the impermanence of things, as well as the significance of death. Additionally, from the societal level, this vast field of paradoxical meanings manifest in the single symbol of cherry blossoms also displays that the strategic choice of using cherry blossoms as a strong motif in promoting nationalism.

2.2. Creating images and identities of Japan through cherry blossoms

It is aforementioned that until the eighth century, literati attention contributed to cherry blossoms was far less than those to plum blossoms. By the end of the Nara Period (710 - 794 AD), plum blossoms were still the most applied motif in literati and aristocratic writings (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 42). The word of *hanami* at that time, in principle referred to plum blossoms viewing, while the practice of drinking *sake*[3](rice wine) and viewing cherry blossoms was primarily an agrarian ritual in the Nara era (Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 2006, p. 12).

It was by the end of the eighth century at the beginning of the Heian Period (794-1185 AD), when Japan endeavored to formulate its own *yamato*[4] identity distinctively from its "significant other", the Chinese (in addition to many minority groups from the periphery of Japan), cherry blossoms were made important by the elites (from the *yamato* race) (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 52). In the subsequent centuries, great efforts were contributed towards making cherry blossoms native to the country, and the trend spread from the court to the periphery, from elites to commoners (of the *yamato* people) (Keene, 1969, p. 294). Historical records have shown that even though cherry blossoms originated in the Himalaya area, many times they were recorded as native plants of Japan

---

[1] かみかぜ（神風特別攻撃隊）

[2] 桜花

[3] 酒

[4] 大和, which means the native settlers in mainland Japan to distinguish between the dominant group with other minorities. The term was written as 倭until the eighth century following the Chinese writing system.

with botanic testifies (i.e., by scholar-botanist Kaibara Ekken [1630-1714]) and was appreciated as a "magic imperial symbol" (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 44). In the year of 834, in front of the main hall of the imperial palace, emperor Ninmei had a cherry tree planted to replace the plum tree, which marked the "growing cultural self-consciousness" among aristocratic groups (ibid., p. 43). By the fourteenth century, cherry blossoms were fully recognized as a garden plant amongst the aristocratic circle in Kyoto (ibid., p. 49). At the same time, the word *hana* became synonymous with flowering cherries during the Heian Period, and the practice of *hanami* started to mean exclusively cherry blossoms viewing in Japanese poems (*waka* and *haiku*[1]). Additionally, in contrast to the Chinese style of painting of *kanga*[2] where cherry blossoms were seldom a theme, Japanese artists developed the style of *yamato-e*[3], which denoted paintings of the *yamato* race, with cherry blossoms being the most frequently represented subject (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 54). During the fifteenth century, growing nationalist sentiments among elites led to the propose of flowering cherries as a symbol of Japan despite the fact that Japan was not yet a fully established nation: "That our country is the *sakura* country has the same precious meaning as the peony for Chinese in Luoyang, or the crab apple for Sichuan in China" (Osen, 1935 cited in Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 51). By end of the Edo period until the Meiji Period, the admiration towards flowering cherries had widely spread to commoners with a wide reference to folklores (ibid., p. 54).

Even though there had been massive movements of burning down cherry trees due to their close connection with feudalism, what the modernized Japan was trying to get rid of during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 68), "*hana wa sakura, hito wa bushi*[4]*",* the idea that in every pedal of cherry flowers embodied with the soul of a "true Japanese" eventually overwhelmed and contributed to the aestheticization of soldiers' sacrifice for the emperor when tides of militarization engulfed the archipelago (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 104-106; Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 94). As a result, there was a resurgence of cherry trees plantation: in shrines, at wherever a military unit is based, and at national events including the victory over Russia or the birth of the heir to the crown. Indeed, as Ohnuki-Tierney observes, since the Sino-Japanese war, cherry trees "marched" with the Japanese military both within and beyond the archipelago. When

[1] 和歌、俳句

[2] 漢画

[3] 大和絵

[4] 花は桜、人は武士

Japan embarked on its colonial expansions, the Japanese armies would search for new species of cherry trees in the local, while planting Japanese cherry trees to assist Japanization of the colonized (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 122).

Meanwhile, cherry trees were introduced from Japan to Europe during the 1830s as a demonstration of Japanese garden stylings. After Japan's internationally acclaimed victory over Russia, cherry trees were presented at World Exhibitions or planted for permanent cultivation in Europe, instrumentally catching the attention of European gardening elites to the style of Japanese gardening (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 77 - 90). Furthermore, since 1906 until now, cherry blossoms have been kept shipping to Washington, and are planted along the Potomac River as a present of Japan for the United States to honor the bond between the two countries (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 12).

However, it is rarely mentioned now that the popularity of cherry blossoms was interrupted again after the defeat of the war in 1945 because flowering cherries were "no proud nation's flower" (Kuitert & Peterse, 1999, p. 98). Gardens previously covered with cherry trees were used for vegetable growing, rendering many cherry species in danger of extinction (ibid.). It was only during the 1960s that the enthusiasm for the flower resurgent, when the Olympics was to be held in Tokyo (ibid., p. 99). During the time, over 2.5 million cherry trees were planted all over Japan, as well as in some other countries, in addition to 1.5 million trees promoted by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) member's policy of spreading trees to the world (ibid., p. 99-100).

Today, the fever of flowering cherries is so high that not only domestic media of Japan, but also international scholars are investigating into the popularity of the flower, as well as the Japanese cultures of cherry blossoms viewing on the archipelago. For instance, Weathernews Inc., wold's largest private weather forecasting company headquartered in Japan, announced the results of "National cherry blossoms viewing survey (*Zengoku ohanami chosa*[1])" in 2013, defining the Japanese are people who love *hamami* the most (*Nihonjin wa ohanami ga daishiki*[2])" in its title (Weathernews, 2013). Meanwhile, within the academia, especially in China, cherry blossoms in Japan are frequently used as a reference for asserted "Japanese traits", which includes "extreme

[1] 全国お花見調査

[2] 日本人はお花見が大好き

nationalism", "*mono no aware*", or "collectivism", so as to emphasize on the extremeness and dangerousness of this neighboring country from a view point of its "unique culture of cherry blossoms" (Yan, 2010).

3. A CONTINUITY FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

In his article of J*apanese flowering cherry and Japanese national character*, Zhizhang Yan (2010) regards that flowering cherry was imported to Japan from China[1]. According to Yan, the geographical features, and the natural beauty of the archipelago gave birth to the "unique island mentality" and the aesthetics of the Japanese, making them sensitive towards the change of seasons (ibid.). In addition, he claims that the short life of cherry blossoms reflects the life philosophy of a Japanese person, who lives in a country of impermanence, of earthquakes and volcanos. Therefore, with references to Yan, like cherry pedals, the Japanese are people who are willing to fall at the height of one's life because of their awareness of the impermanence of life (ibid.). The death of one's flesh means a returning to the *kami*'s[2] land, and the cherry flower becomes the bridge that links life to death (ibid., p. 104). Meanwhile, Yan regards collectivism is a national character of Japanese people reflected in cherry flowers. The spectacular of tens of thousands of cherry flowers blooming together symbolizes the power of the Japanese working collaboratively as a group (ibid., p. 103). Similarly, with a special focus on cultural traits, Zhiqin Zhang (2009) relates cherry blossoms with *bushido*, and claimed cherry blossoms reflect the "vigorous death" that a Japanese pursue in the flower and in life, and she regards this as the uniqueness of Japanese aesthetics and cultures (Zhang, 2009, p. 95).

Compared to the aforementioned narratives based on articles that tend to essentialize Japanese traits through cherry blossoms, Ohuniki-Tierny's (2002) work on cherry blossoms provides a more rational and critical point of view towards the history of cherry blossoms in japan. As the above review of Ohuniki-Tierney's observations on cherry blossoms and symbolism shows, her work gives a very structured historical review on the changing meanings of cherry blossoms in Japanese history in relation their roles in constructing a distinctive Japanese identity at diverse historical stages. With a peculiar interest on how elite groups in Japan utilized the "native" symbol of cherry blossoms to provoke patriotism and to justify imperial militarization from the 1870s until the wartime period, Ohuniki-Tierney aimed to deconstruct the stigmatized loyalty of *kamikaze* soldiers in their tragic deaths. She agued about the discursive role of cherry blossoms as a powerful symbol in linking "the present directly to an imagined primordial past" (Ohunki-Tierney, 2002, p. 259),

---

[1] However, the most widely recognized origin of cherry blossoms was the Himalaya area, which was not yet a part of China when the flower spread to Japan. Nevertheless, there seems to have a dispute over the origin of cherries in East Asia in recent years. Some Korean media also claimed that cherries are native to the Jeju island.

[2] 神, literarily meaning the deity

which elevated the status of the emperor to patriarch and military commander. Ohnuki-Tierney adopts an anthropological approach with an in-depth review of five *kamikaze* pilots' diaries written before their suicide, and she presents them as deviant cases in which individual soldiers did not indiscriminately internalize the notions of loyalty and nationalism. However, Ohnuki-Tierney fails to recognize the stratification within the ethnic "Japanese", and overlooked the role of the minorities in her work. In addition, her research also reaches its limits confining to the ancient and the wartime period in regards of its arguments on cherry blossoms as a naturalized national symbol. Nevertheless, Ohnuki-Tierney's cross-cultural perspectives on cherry blossoms as a symbol, as well as her theoretical contributions to the naturalization of certain social practice or ideology through the power of symbols can transcend time and contribute to further analysis on symbolism.

Quite different from Yan' and Zhang's focus on cultural characters represented in the flower, or Ohuniki-Tierney's anthropology approaches towards cherry blossoms and nationalism, Kuitert and Peterse's work (1999) on cherry blossoms covers the disciplines of history, geography, horticulture and botany, and gives a closer examination on the naming of cherry trees, the spread of cherry blossoms to historical capitals, and the evolution and hybridization of different cherry kinds in relation to evolving political situations. However, as their book of *Japanese flowering cherries* primarily focuses on illustrating botanical facts of cherry trees, the thesis mainly refers to the book in regards of its detailed historical reviews of cherry blossoms in Japan based on ancient Japanese and contemporary Western documents,which consolidate the research background for the research.

So far as has been shown in the thesis, literatures concerning cherry blossoms as a national symbol in contemporary Japanese societies with a critical stance is lacking in the field. Based on the historical background given in existing materials, in addition to Ohnuki-Tierney's theoretical contributions, this thesis endeavors to enrich the field of cherry blossoms as well as symbolism in contemporary Japanese studies. When Ohunuki-Tierney's work highlights the power of cherry blossoms as a symbol that facilitated militarization and nationalism, this thesis looks into the uniqueness of cherry blossoms as a representation of Japanese cultures, examining the symbol's major roles as a national symbol following the aftermaths of the Second World War, where Ohnuki-Tierney's research ends. Meanwhile, it is also this thesis' aim to enrich the theoretical scope on symbolism through adopting both Western and Japanese philosophies of symbols within the framework of Japanese cherry blossoms.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Metatheoretical considerations

In view of the wide array of changing meanings attached to cherry blossoms in history, in addition to the close tie between multiplicity of Japanese identities built upon the symbol of cherry blossoms, the thesis takes up a constructivist point of view in terms of ontological position. In the light of constructivist rejection towards the existence of an external reality and that culture as something pre-given, the thesis argues that like all cultural symbols, the meanings of cherry blossoms in Japan are socially and historically negotiated, influenced by different social conditions and discourses, and are always in a continued state of reproduction and reinterpretation (Bryman, 2008, p. 19; Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Furthermore, the thesis approaches the process of symbol-making with a qualitative method, and argues for real status of discontinuity underneath the homogenous appearance of a symbol. In the following chapters, intensive theoretical reviews, ranging from Benjamin's discussions on symbolism to poststructural doctrines on discourse and power are presented to support this argument.

4.2 Research design

The major focus of the thesis is the contemporary role of cherry blossoms in representing Japanese cultures on the international stage. In order to investigate into the image of cherry blossoms in the contemporary world before starting the discussion, the thesis inquires into the perceptions of people in Japan towards cherry blossoms, the meaning individuals or companies ascribe to the symbol, and the reason behind it with a qualitative research strategy. The choice of qualitative research is that instead of highlighting the quantification of data, the strategy functions as a critical tool to obtain individual insights regarding the role of cherry blossoms in their social worlds (Bryman, 2008, p. 22). Among qualitative research strategies, the thesis utilizes semi-structured qualitative interviews because the method provides individual researchers with a more flexible means to adjust highlights and to ask supplementary questions apart from the pre-set ones to deepen the conversation (ibid.). The findings of the research thus are largely based on primary data collected from the field, which enabled an inductive approach to support and to relate back to the theories that the thesis largely bases its arguments upon.

4.3. Data collection

During a six-week long fieldwork in Japan, the researcher conducted sixteen interviews in total, fifteen with individual participants in addition to one with a housing agency in Tokyo. In order to increase the heterogeneity of interviewee backgrounds, the research adopted purposive sampling, and set the inclusion criteria for participants as both domestic as well as international residents in Japan, of all age ranges.

As a result, within the timeframe of the fieldwork, the researcher was able to conduct interviews with eleven domestic and four residents in different cities in Japan, out of whom nine were female and five were male, in addition to the housing agency of Flowering Cherries Apartment. In terms of occupation backgrounds of the interviewees, seven of them were university students (five Japanese and two Chinese) from Waseda where the fieldwork was based. In addition, the researcher also arranged three interviews with four formal students (two Japanese, one Indonesian, and one Canadian) from Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) who currently work in Tokyo and Osaka and were willing to participate in the interview.

Thanks to the Flowering Cherries Apartment, from where the researcher got her residence in Tokyo, the researcher had the opportunity to hold one interview with the general manager of the company regarding the reasons for choosing cherry blossoms as their company name. Additionally, at a "*Geisha* Night" event held by the Flowering Cherries Apartment, the researcher also interviewed a *geisha* who was in her forties to talk about her perceptions of cherry blossoms. Besides, during her leisure time going for a plum blossoms viewing at Shinjuku Gyoen, the researcher held an interview with a lady who was in her sixties regarding symbols of Japan and cherry blossoms. In the end, before moving back to China, the researcher took a trip to Kyoto and Osaka where she did her final two interviews with the landlord of her residence in Kyoto and a friend of his, both of whom are in their late thirties.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese, English or Japanese, depending on the interviewee's personal preference. Like most qualitative interviews, the interview questions tended to be flexible. Emphasizing on the interviewee's own perceptions, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to maintain the conversation in a way of casual talks, and to adjust supplementary questions depending on the feedback. Interviews for this research all started with casual chats regarding the participant's personal information: his/her age, if he/she has been living abroad before or how long the person has been living in Japan if he/she is from the overseas, etc. Afterwards, the

researcher asks questions regarding the theme of the research. In case one does not consider cherry blossoms as a national symbol of Japan, when explaining the research theme, the researcher avoided asking leading questions about cherry blossoms, but generalized her topic into "an investigation on national symbols of Japan", and inquired into the participant's perception national symbols of Japan and their personal relations with the symbol. Only if cherry blossoms were not mentioned in this part, the researcher extended the length of the interview, and asked about if the individual perceived cherry blossoms as a national symbol, why so or why not, as well as individual relations with the flower. In addition, with the interview with the housing agency, the interview started with the history of the company, followed with the questions regarding flowering cherries blossoms as the company name and the reasons behind the choice.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

In accordance with Bryman's recommendations, ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the interviews that the researcher conducts in the field. Following the guidelines of *The Swedish Thesis Council*, during the fieldwork, the researcher respected the cultural differences in Japan and obtained informed consent from participants before starting the project. At every stage the researcher informed the interviewees of the purpose of the interview as part of the Masters thesis, their roles in the study, and their rights to terminate the interview at any time. Also, the researcher acknowledged the participants of that the thesis would be published at Lund's public website, so the thesis also guaranteed the anonymity and privacy of the participants. The data collected from the thesis were used sole for thesis writing. As the participants'/company name were to be mentioned, the researcher guaranteed that she assigned pseudonyms during thesis writing.

4.5. Critical consideration with the data collection

As can be seen, the sample universe of the interviews displays a wide array of diversity. However, the scope of findings can be rather restricted due to the subjective nature of qualitative research approach (ibid., p. 391). The majority of domestic interviewees concentrate on major cities on the Honshu island - Tokyo, Kanagawa, Osaka, Kyoto, suggesting the presence of big cities locality in the results with Japanese participants. Apart from the nationality difference of the interviewees, their age difference has also yielded valuable findings for the research. However, among the fifteen individual interviewees, eleven were in their early twenties (eight are undergraduate students and four have been working since 2013); two in their late thirties, one in her early forties and one in her late sixties. In this sense, the interviewees participated in the research do not represent the whole

population and can only suggest the differences between younger (student) and elder (working) people's perceptions of cherry blossoms. In other words, the generalizability of findings in this thesis tend to be integrated with theories rather than to populations.

Another issue with the data collection process lies in the background of the researcher. As a foreigner researching for national symbols in Japan, the interviewees might have give answers from a point of view of how a foreigner person would picture the country, and it was actually the case in this research. Therefore, the researcher also asked about influencing factors for the way that an individual pictured Japan during the fieldwork, taking into account of foreign influences in their answers. Meanwhile, it is also due to "the unstructured nature of qualitative data", data interpretations in the thesis can be affected by the researcher's subjective leanings (ibid.). Therefore, the researcher beard in mind of her own specific worldview which could be projected in the thesis during data collection and analysis, and tried to use the findings to support the theories instead of making generalized assumptions.

5. CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS: INTERVIEWEES AND OBSERVATIONS

In the following paragraphs the thesis provides a brief introduction and analysis of the interview-content. Although this thesis is mostly theory-based, the interviews play an illuminating role with respect to how cherry-blossoms are actually perceived now – or indeed blended out – by a selected group of people. The interviews therefore serve as both, an introduction to the following theoretical discussions and as a sample of how people deal with cherry blossoms as symbol following the end of the Second World War, which is missing in Ohnuki-Tierney's historical narrative.

For the sake of anonymity, the thesis applies random popular names to each interviewee. As is suggested above, the difference between the nationalities, as well as the gap in age of the interviewees are the two most decisive elements in the heterogeneity of sampling. To illustrate possible perceptional differences in different subjects regarding Japanese symbols and cherry blossoms, the data collected during the interviews are divided into three categories, one with Japanese and another with international participants, in addition to one with the housing agency. Within the two categories of Japanese and international interviewees, the presentation of results are further divided into age groups.

The youngest group among domestic interviewees from Japan are four female and one male undergraduate students from Waseda (Yuna, Yui, Aoi, Koharu, Sho), all of whom are in their early twentieth. All of them have been studied or who traveled abroad from seven weeks to thirteen years. This indicates an international outlook embedded in their responses. However, it can also mean that some interviewees may put themselves in the shoes of foreigners more easily when thinking of "symbols of Japan", especially during a interview talking with a foreign researcher about Japanese symbols. As Koharu has clearly mentioned in her answer to the question about what "image of Japan" was, she pictured Japan in a way that a foreigner would "typically imagine".

The second group of Japanese interviewees are two former undergraduate students (Anzu and Hiroto) from APU, one female and one male. Both of them aged twenty three, and have been either working or studying in the overseas (China and Korea) for one year before starting working in Osaka since 2013. Additionally, both of the interviewees mentioned that when thinking of symbols of Japan, they would take into consideration how the country is presented in foreign media like in foreign movies.

The third group of interviewees consists of the host of the researcher's residence in Kyoto (Haruma) and his friend (Riku). Both of them are male and are in their late thirties. Both of them have been traveling to the different foreign countries since high school. The fourth and the fifth group of interviews are the *geisha* that the researcher met at the "*Geisha* Night" event held by the Flowering Cherries Apartment, and the lady Hinata whom the researcher interviewed during plum blossoms viewing in Shinjuku Gyoen. They ware in their forties and sixties respectively, and neither of them has been abroad before.

In terms of the international interviewees participating in the research, the first group is one undergraduate (Zhen) and one graduate students (Chan) from Waseda, aged twenty one and twenty three respectively. Both of them came from China. Zhen has been living in Japan for over three years, since 2011, while Chan only started her studies in Japan in 2013. In addition to that, two former APU students (Naoh, Canadian; Aini, Indonesian), both aged twenty three, who currently work in Osaka and Tokyo also contributed their insights in the research subjects. Both of them have been living in the country for over five years.

As a result, six out of fifteen individual interviewees directly answered cherry blossoms as a national symbol of the country to the first question of what they considered as a symbol of japan. Among eleven domestic interviewees, only three mentioned the flower as the answer, one was a student from Waseda, one was the *geisha*, and the other one was Hinata, the lady whom the researcher met during plum blossoms viewing. In comparison, expect for Noah, all other three international interviewees replied cherry blossoms as the national symbol of the country. It was astonishing that all of interviewees directly mentioned cherry blossoms were female participants. Male interviewees, they considered that cherry blossoms was included in other answers to symbols of Japan, for instance, the Japanese perception of seasons, *samurai* and the *tenno* system etc., due to their close relations with cherry blossoms.

Even though most of the participants did not mention cherry blossoms in the beginning, when the researcher asked if the individual considered cherry blossoms as a national symbol as well, everyone replied yes. The reasons for not mentioning cherry blossoms in the beginning varied. For instance, Yuna and Aoi said that actually the image of cherry blossoms was the first thing appeared in mind when thinking of Japan. However, it was so commonsensical that they conversely ignored it (*sakura ga atarimae sugide, gyakuni mushi shichau*). Moreover, Yuna， Yui, and Hiroto all pointed out that cherry blossoms was a spring phenomenon and it had been almost nine months since they

last saw cherry blossoms (despite commodities with cherry patterns on the street), and the interviews were done in January and February. Therefore, if the interview was conducted two months later, they said that they might give a different answer.

Reflecting on their daily lives in Japan, everyone, both domestic and international interviewees agreed that cherry blossoms were an indispensable part of their lives, without which their days in Japan would be rather different, or even "sad" and "insignificant". For domestic interviewees, cherry blossoms symbolized different stages in life, from the first school entrance ceremony in life among flowering cherries to the first days of one's first job, which usually started in April. Therefore, cherry blossoms provoked life memories. In addition, Yui and Riku compared cherry blossoms viewing with *momijigari*[1] (maple viewing), as well as other grand seasonal events for appreciating blooming flowers in Japan. They explained that other natural splendors, like maple trees only represented the beauty of the nature and did not necessarily invoke an individual to reflect on life like most people did during cherry blossoms seasons. This was the reason why despite the great popularity of maple viewing in Japan, the maple trees still seemed less meaningful than cherry blossoms to Japanese people. Additionally, Yui and Riku also indicated the national enthusiasm towards one flower illustrated how peaceful the country was. However, this contradicted with what the *geisha* and the lady Hinata said, that there were older people in Japan who did not like cherry blossoms because cherry blossoms were associated with deaths, and wartime memories.

In relation to different meanings of cherry blossoms, many interviewees also reflect on picture of Japan with its "indigenous" and "sophisticated" culture that the flower represented. For instance, *mono no aware*[2], the spirit of *bushido*, the reconstruction of the *Ise Jingu*[3] every twenty years which resembled fallen cherry blossoms in their most beautiful state. Based on the multiple meanings the cherry blossoms represented, the *geisha* considered the flower as the thread that connected different cultural phenomenons in history, from ancient Japanese poems to the vigorous death of soldiers during the war. Therefore, to a certain extent, she said the flower itself was "the culture of

---

[1] 紅葉狩り

[2] 物の哀れ

[3] 伊勢神宮, Ise Grand Shrine which was dedicated to the major shinto deity *Amaterasu Omikami* 天照大神

Japan" (*sakura wa ninon no bunkada*[1]). Meanwhile, international interviewees considered that cherry blossoms represented the profound grace of Japanese aesthetics, as well as the Japanese sensitivity towards subtle changes of the seasons. More importantly, the flower demonstrated a lifestyle they adopted after living in Japan.

So far as results for this research displayed, the biggest difference regarding the quality of cherry blossoms occurred among the domestic interviewees above forty years old. While younger groups of interviewees, both domestic and international, based their statements of cherry blossoms on individual daily life experiences and personal relations with the flower, seeing it as the joy, the peacefulness and beauty of lives in Japan, the *geisha* and Hinata who were the two interviewees above forty years old reflected on cherry blossoms from mostly the point view of Japanese cultures, and also recalled the dark side of the symbol, relating it back to the militarism of wartime Japan and the deaths of soldiers that the flower signified. Besides this difference concerning the quality of the symbol, all interviewees considered that cherry blossoms were only unique in Japan as when it came to the question regarding the comparison between cherry blossoms in and outside Japan, everyone replied that there was a huge difference. To them, cherry blossoms did not simply mean the flower itself, but a combination of the beauty of the nature, an individual's life memories in the country, the cultural history and the aesthetics of Japan, or the sorrowful past of the war and so on. Riku pointed out that cherry blossoms viewing in a foreign land put more emphasis on the flower itself, just like maple viewing in Japan. It was beautiful, but did not necessarily evoke any philosophical thinkings of life. Therefore, as Aini has pointed out, cherry blossoms in Japan were *sakura*, which is a combination of a nation's culture, aesthetics, and a whole nation's expectations in the flower, while outside Japan, cherry blossoms without the Japanese cultural atmospheres were only cherry flowers, which still looked beautiful but somehow seemed "incomplete".

Furthermore, the interview with the Flowering Cherries Apartment demonstrated how commonsensical cherry blossoms as a national symbol was that they adopted the name without much consideration. Instead, using Flowering Cherries as the company name helped their target customers to understand their business purposes easily: providing short-term accommodations for international residents in Japan. When the researcher asked about the purpose of the agency in choosing flowering cherries as its company name, the general manager of the company, Yuri, explained that it was because the company was the very first agency that provided short-term

[1] 桜は日本の文化だ

residences in Japan for foreign tourists, there was no previous experience or textbooks to lead business. Therefore, the owner of the company wanted things to start as simple as possible. Cherry blossoms was also simple because it was a commonsensical symbol of Japan. Using the symbol as a name made it easy to approach to their target customers. Yuri repeatedly emphasized the simplicity in the name of flowering cherries, as it represented the way the company grew from providing bunk beds in hostel rooms to decent apartments, like a cherry tree grew out of a simple seed. It broke down the wall between the local and the world, sheltering people from different cultures. At this point, the name fully displayed the service that the company provided, just like cherry blossoms were attracting people from the globe to visit Japan, the agency was a cherry tree under which different worlds met. Flowering cherries could deliver a happy image for people who come to visit, and attracted them to come back to Japan.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

6.1. What is a symbol? From Kant to Benjamin

Although it might seem counterproductively to ask expressively about the 'symbol', but during the interview, apparently the concept of a Japanese symbol appeared to be confusing. Some interviewees did not understand of the concept of a symbol, and the question was changed into what the image was when they thought of Japan in order to make sense of the research; also, when one interviewee was asked why they did not mention cherry blossoms as a national symbol in the first beginning, she replied that she considered a symbol as something artificial (like shrines and temples) in the beginning. For this reason, data analysis will start with a theoretical discussion on symbolism itself within the fields of philosophy and sociology, followed by an investigation into the process of making a nationalized symbol appear natural or commonsensical. Afterwards, the thesis will investigate into the major roles cherry blossoms as a national symbol are playing today on the international stage.

In Kant's *Critique of judgement* (1970), the earliest characterization of symbols, Kant defines a symbol as an indirect form for hypothesis, and a rhetorical mode that conveys a "sensible illustration" (Kant, cited in Bell 1997). In Kant's account, a symbol can be an analogy in which concepts are "found to function according to similar formal principle", as the concept of the beautiful can be the symbol of the "morally-good" (ibid.). Therefore, the form that delivers the abstract meaning of "Japan" does not necessarily need to be artificial as the interviewee, Aoi had expected, but also something natural or even conceptual. Nevertheless, to Kant, the object and concept, appearance and essence of the symbol must be separable in a symbol (Homburg, 2013, p. 4).

However, as the interview data suggested, cherry blossoms in Japan are so intertwined with Japanese aesthetics and culture that the symbol has become the culture itself. To elaborate, when the *geisha* spoke of cherry blossoms during interview, she considered cherry blossoms the thread that linked different cultural elements of Japan, which in terms made the flower itself a unique culture of Japan. To be more specific, first of all, the flower stood for the very important element in Japanese culture, the evanesce of things (*monono aware*), because the flower would fell without bearing a fruit. Secondly, cherry blossoms symbolized power and wealth in history, as she mentioned the the famous cherry blossoms viewing held by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, when he invited five thousand

guests to Yoshino. Thirdly, she explained that cherry flowers are most likely to face the ground, and this represented the *ura*/*omote*[1] culture of Japan: just as Japanese people are most likely to conceal their real feelings in front of others. In addition, the lady Hinata revealed to researcher of the wartime imperialist ideologies assigned to cherry blossoms, and that in postwar Japan, almost every stage of a Japanese person was marked by the blossom of cherry flowers, from the day the persons entered school to the first days one started working. She emphasized that cherry blossoms viewing thus become a time for an individual to reflect on one's life, and nothing else could provoke such a life memory for Japanese like cherry blossoms did. Therefore, cherry blossoms were not only a symbol of past histories of an individual and the country, but also the symbol of future of the person as well as of Japan. The flower signified a time for the "young futures" of Japan to bloom in the new year (*wakai mirai tachi ga shinnendo ni saiteru*[2]), and she explained that this was also the reason why there were movements advocating the plantation cherry trees in Tohoku, in the ruin of the earthquake to give hope to the locals. Likewise, Aini, an international residence in the country also consider that cherry blossoms were so integrated with Japanese cultures that without the Japanese soil, the blossom of cherries still looked beautiful but somehow seemed "incomplete" to her. At this point, the signified of the symbol, the meanings that cherry blossoms were related to have transcended the symbol's objective form to become a totality as the culture itself. This thesis thus directs its attention to Walter Benjamin's discussion on symbolism which can be related to the historical backgrounds of cherry blossoms.

Different from Kant, Benjamin sees the symbol as the unit of signs and intentions that fulfills the object (ibid., p. 6). To Benjamin, the appearance can disappear to fulfill the "essence". In other words, a symbol can totalize its significations, transcend its finite existence to become the intention, and to become a whole of the symbol itself (ibid., p. 7). In such way, the symbol represents itself as a stable, timeless object, presenting harmony, transcendence and totality, and in the case of cherry blossoms, the symbol becomes the culture itself (McCole, 1993, p. 136). However, beneath this totality and transcendence, Benjamin argues that the real state of a symbol is a state of disunity. By illustrating allegory, a decadent form of symbolism which is able to go beyond the false eternity and totality that symbols have built up, Benjamin argues that the meaning of a symbol should be related to its historical index (Stead, 2003). To be more specific, Benjamin uses the allegory to tear apart

---

[1] 裏、表

[2] 若い未来たちが新年度に咲いてる

the seemingly continuity and coherence in the symbol, pointing out the false representation of eternity in symbolic concepts, and recognizes the temporal experience of them, which is progressive, mobile, and requires the "very fluidity of time" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 165). Moreover, Benjamin acknowledges that the perceived totality and harmony in a symbol is actually imposed by the demand of the specific setting of social relations, which can also be denied at other levels of a society (Homburg, 2013, p. 10). In other words, the epistemology of a symbol represents the dominant ontology of specific social levels, given the specific stage in history. As can be seen from the previous discussions, the nationalization of cherry blossoms started among the Heian elites, which later spread to commoners by the Edo Period. Therefore, within a symbol embodies a state of temporality, and the symbol is influenced by the practical demand from social relations within a particular level. A symbol thus presents itself as the signs and intentions that fulfilled it, transcending its finite appearance and "becoming" a whole, and disguises itself with false totality and transcendency (ibid.). In the context of cherry blossoms as a national symbol in contemporary Japan, the flower has transcended its objective form to become the cultural elements emerged from different historical indexes that fulfilled the form, presenting itself as *the culture*.

6.2. The language that enables a meaning: From Zenith to post-structuralist approaches to symbolism

At this point, even though cherry blossoms as a national symbol appears transcendent and coherent, the "historical indexes" in Benjamin's sense, and the social mechanism in manufacturing its social meanings resurfaces. In addition to Western doctrines regarding meaning construction of social and cultural phenomenon, this thesis also applies a Japanese philosophical approach towards social meanings associated with symbols. As Foucault (1999) has pointed out: "if philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequences of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe" (Foucault, 1999, p. 113). Even though symbolism is assuredly a imported concept in Japan, the old Zenith Buddhist idea of *nyoze*[1] (suchness), systemized by Hakuin (1685 - 1768) is interlinked with Western discussion on the concept.

Whilst Post-Kantian scholars saw the separation between appearance and essence in a symbol, in contrast to which Benjamin proposed the disappearance of the appearance and the transcendence of the essence, started as a Zen Buddhist concept, suchness sees them as a result of multiple causality and is essentially "empty", which means not absolute (Dissanayake, 2009, p. 456). On the surface,

[1] 如是

inscribing its central principles in insubstantiality, causality and impermanence, Japanese Zen Buddhism does not seem to be directly related to symbolism. However, the paradox between infinite contradictory meanings and the finite appearance of cherry blossoms coincides the status of *nyoze* in Zenith Buddhism which discusses the existence of things.

As is previously demonstrated in the historical review of cherry blossoms, meanings attached to the flower have undergone tremendous changes in Japan: its representation of the power of production and reproduction at the very early stage of Japanese history changed to ephemerality, mortality, and non-productive sexuality (transvestite *geisha*, same sex relations) in later years of the history; meanwhile, cherry blossoms' metaphorically meaning of the beauty of life, frequently associated with the beauty of girls, also changed to the promotion of the beauty of death, namely, the suicide acts of warriors or the kamikaze pilots for the display of loyalty. Nevertheless, the contradictories reside in harmony with each other within the symbol, which resembles the self-contradictory expressions in Zen regarding the existence of things.

In the article of *An interpretation of Zen experience*, Suzuki Daisetsu Teitaro (1986) indicates that within Zen, what was negative becomes positive and what was positive becomes negative (Suzuki, 1986, p. 131). This contradiction is shown in the multiple meanings attached to cherry blossoms, in history, contraries turn into correlatives, and the changing and the co-existence of meanings points to a status what *nyoze* means regarding the existence of things: being-in-non-being, affirmation-in-negation and continuity-in-discontinuity (Heisig, 2001, p. 66). Out of formless that the form (of a symbol) grows, and the *nyoze* of the formless means that the form remains unaffected by all the changing modes, including the meanings assigned to cherry blossoms. Therefore, with references to the concept of *nyoze*, a symbol itself is beyond meanings (Suzuki, 1986, p. 135). *Nyoze* reveals that expressions of meaning, are artificial constructions, which only take shape within language, and do not exist prior to language (Dissanayake, 2009, p. 460). In other words, reality should be understood as a "linguistic construct" in *nyoze*, rooted in Nagarjuna thinkings (ibid.). In this sense, The concept bear many resemblance with poststructuralism in revealing the discontinuity underneath cherry blossoms a culture as *nyoze* regards the essential meaning of things (symbols) as void. Thus no symbol has an absolute essence, but the relativity of meanings. *Nyoze* illustrates that there is no objective world, but a creation based on the instrument of language; the world that one perceives is one of many worlds, it is artificial and should not be taken as absolute.

Similar to the concept of *nyoze*, post-structuralist discussions on language and knowledge also reveals where the world is situated, and how words make the subject important through giving them meanings. In his editing book of *Beyond the symbol model: Reflections on the representational nature of language*, John Stewart (1996) reaffirms that language should be treated as event, and that the "ongoing process of understanding-via-language is the human's way of constituting world" (Stewart, 1996, p. 3) owing to Foucault's debt, whose approach towards power-knowledge relations relocated the epistemological framework to the analysis of disciplinary power.

The results of interviews have shown that cherry blossoms as a unique culture of Japan is built into the commonsensical for both domestic and international residents of the country. Even if an individual did not mention cherry blossoms as a symbol from the beginning, everyone agreed that there was a special connection between Japan and cherry blossoms and such bound existed nowhere else in the world. Moreover, during the interview with the Flowering Cherries Apartment, the general manager's explanation on the choice of the company name also demonstrated how commonsensical cherry blossoms as a national symbol was that it made their business purpose simple and understandable by their target customers. However, the commonsensical, as Friesen (2008) has pointed out in his explanation of critical theory, is always shaped by human interests, and is "historical and broadly political in nature" (Friesen, 2008), this leaves space for Foucauldian concepts on the power of language.

Foucault's inquiries into the choice of certain language to engage in particular discourse at a given time, illustrates how worlds of meanings, "truth", and the commonsensical are created by social communications. Starting from structuralism where relations are linguistic and discursive, Foucault reminds scholars that it is through discourses that power constrains the production of knowledge, allowing certain statements - in the case of this thesis - meanings of a symbol to make sense while excluding others, and thus constructs what appears to be the "reality" (Takayama, 2010, p. 56). In addition, Foucault reveals how the objects systematically formed in discourses serve to develop notions of commonsense, or truth. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention the conditions, timing, and languages that form the objects of a certain discourse, and to understand whose interests that they serve. In the case of cherry blossoms, post-structural doctrines become a valuable critical tool to discuss how historical indexes assign meanings to a certain object in the interests of certain groups. For instance, the very early celebration of cherry blossoms as a national symbol of Japan,

remained primarily among the upper class and elite groups, in their interests of formulating a national identity at the presence of the "other", namely the Chinese, in addition to other minority groups (see before). The practice later spread to all levels of the Japanese society and was constantly reinforced and refashioned especially during the pre-wartime period, when cherry blossoms symbolized a citizen's loyalty towards the emperor, the destined sacrifice of the soldiers. Even through the nationalization process was interrupted after the defeat, the Olympics held in Tokyo in 1964 contributed to restore the image of cherry blossoms as a national pride. Today, despite the fact that some of the older generations still recall the dark side of meanings of cherry blossoms which concerned memories of the war (i.e., the *geisha* and Hinata), younger generations mostly recognized the positive images that cherry blossoms represent, which related back to the ancient history of Japan, the aesthetics of the country, and the life stages of a Japanese person marked by blooming cherry trees, emphasizing on the uniqueness of cherry blossoms in the Japanese soil. At this point, the nationalization of cherry blossoms displays the circulation of discourse running through the whole social body which to empower certain knowledge to produce domains of objects and meanings, defining the "general politics" of truth, as well as allowing certain type of statements function as true, or "commonsense" within and beyond the Japanese societies (Gečienė, 2002, p. 119-120). In addition, the thesis argues that this articulation of truths and commonsense, are accomplished by a sequence of reinvention of traditions.

6.3. Making the national symbol commonsensical: The reinvention of traditions

It is aforementioned that discontinuities have been illustrated in the history review of the time-honored traditions of cherry blossoms, when cherry trees were burnt down in early Meiji era or were facing the danger of extinction following the defeat of the war. But the symbol was constantly restored. Clifford Geertz concerns that the symbolic is an integral dimension of politics, where rites, customs and signs, contract truth and meanings are invented to serve certain interests with references to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Geertz, cited in Snodgrass 1997). According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), social constructions seek to create a fictitious continuity "with a suitable historic past" through inventing and reinventing traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1). In other words, "traditions" that appear to be ancient can be later inventions by social agents who "wish to present altered cultural institutions as 'our tradition from time immemorial' so that people will accept them as 'natural'" (Ohnuki-Tierny, 2002, p. 15). Throughout the book of *The invention of tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger illustrated how the Welsh and Scottish "national cultures", the development of British royal rituals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the changing

imperial rituals in India under British rules, and martial arts of Japan that alleged to be ancient are all newly invented through accepted rules, or the repetition of behavior. However, they pointed out that such references to the continuity of the historical past are to a large extent fictitious. There are three main purposes for inventing traditions: to create social cohesion or collective identities, to legitimatize institutions and social hierarchies, or to socialize people into certain contexts by the ruling elites (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 9).

All these purposes appeared manifest in the context of cherry blossoms in Japan, when the elites of Heian Period started to utilize cherry blossoms as a symbol of the distinctive Japanese identity, or when cherry blossoms became aestheticized for the sacrifice for the emperor with references to *bushido* doctrines from the Edo Period. After the 1960s, when interrupted traditions of cherry blossoms were restored, once again the symbol was referred back to the Heian and Edo period, and represented a positive image which connects to the uniqueness of Japanese aesthetics and culture. Here, of particular importance is to clarity the notion of a tradition itself as a very ambiguous idea facing postmodern criticisms, and should be judged case by case. In the very first place, all traditions and symbolic phenomenons are social constructions. The distinction between "genuine" and "invented" traditions, therefore, is highly controversial. It is also aforementioned that in Zenith conceptualization of *nyoze* and in poststructural arguments, the divisions between genuine and invention, ancient and modern are very much discursive. In addition, in the context of cherry blossoms, apparently rituals related to the symbol developed during at least the Nara period but modifications and reinventions of rituals and meanings have been constantly "in motion" since the practices began. For this reason, this thesis adopts the term of "reinvented traditions" instead of "invented traditions", and it does not aim to argue for the authenticity of a certain meaning or a particular way of cherry blossoms viewing. Rather, the thesis utilizes the term as a critical theoretical tool to analyze the naturalization of national symbols, to exam the drives that contribute to make the exotic flower "local" to the archipelago, which disguise historical discontinuities as continuities. Furthermore, it also illustrates the process that enables "cultural arbitrariness" to appear as "given" or "natural" through the reinvention of traditions (Bourdieu, cited in Ohnuki-Tierney 2002).

Therefore, building upon Ohnuki-Tierney's theoretical framework of naturalization of symbols, this thesis examines the process of traditions reinvention throughout the Japanese history from ancient to modern times, illustrating it as an on-going event, at social, cultural and political levels.

Meanwhile, to complement the concept of naturalized symbols, this section of the thesis also illustrates the ideas of aestheticization and commodification from various angles to explain how cherry blossoms are naturalized as a national symbol of Japan.

In Ohnuki-Tierney's sense, naturalization is a process facilitated by the three equally important methods of refashioning of traditions, aestheticization and Méconnaissance (ibid., p. 15). However, as far as this thesis is concerned, reinvention of traditions is the major mechanism that enabled the naturalization of cherry blossoms as a national symbol, while aestheticization is remarkably the most magnificent means for traditions reinvention and naturalization during federal Japan until now.

6.3.1. Aestheticization

Aestheticization is a process which makes symbols appear more visually and conceptually tangible to people, and can instill a sense of belonging as well as individual disenchantment with the governing institutions in them (Falasca-Zamponi, 2012). As is pointed out before, in his investigation on symbolism, Kant has discussed the bond between morality and aesthetics which operate symbolically. The two concepts are recognized to function in one analogy according to cognate formal principles, and the beauty can motivate people to act towards the "common good" (Kant, cited in Bell 1997). It is shown in history that the aestheticization of cherry blossoms began with the elite class assisted in constructing the purity of cherry blossoms and linked it to primordiality by recording the foreign flower as indigenous to the Japanese soil in legendary tales as well as in botanical records. In sequent years, the recreation of the image of the imperial palace with a cherry tree planted in front of the main gate, the promotion of the beauty of flowering cherries in literal works as well in woodblock prints, and the attempt of putting an "aesthetic equation" between cherry blossoms and the sacrifice of *samurai*s propelled a conceptually positive image of cherry blossoms as noble or morally good. Nowadays, the aesthetics of cherry blossoms, as most interviewees have mentioned, are closely associated with the *hanami* practices, the Japanese sensitivity towards the nature, or the awareness of *monono aware* which links back to ancient Japanese cultures tracing back to the Heian Period. This linkage enabled them to reflect on the uniqueness of the cherry blossoms cultures in Japan, and made the symbol more conceptually appealing to people.

Even though older interviewees still recognize the negative aspect of cherry blossoms due to its relations with deaths of the war, the wartime memory seemed to have faded in the perceptions of

younger generations in Japan. Falling cherry petals are no more related to the sacrifice to the country but present an increasingly positive image for younger generations. According to Yui, falling cherry petals look "innocent" and they provoke a reflection on the impermanence of things, which is "the beautiful part of the Japanese culture" (*nihon bunka no utsukushisa*[1]). Ironically, even though now recognized as immoral, the promotion of militarization in prewar Japan, was in the first place facilitate by the aestheticization of cherry blossoms which enable the sacrifice to appear as a symbol of "the common good", and a time-honored and exalted tradition embodied in the fallen cherry petals. This directs the discussion focus back to Walter Benjamin on the power of symbolic aestheticizations in serving reactionary political interests.

To Benjamin, the aestheticization of politics can transfigure existing power structures through building up utopian dreams and fantasies that overcome materiality to appeal to sensory perceptions (Koepnick, 1999, p. 85). Benjamin thus warns against the aesthetic politics like fascism as it aestheticizes war and destruction, which was also the case of cherry blossoms as a symbol of the *kamikaze* pilots. One example Benjamin gives has its locus classics in the case of Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law. Coincidently, like Japanese propagandas used falling cherry pedals as a metaphor for "human bombs" of *kamikaze* pilots, Ciano also compared the bombs exploding among Ethiopian sites to flowers in bloom during Italy's colonial war in Ethiopian in 1936 (Jay, 2013, p. 73). Despite the rhetoric usage of blooming flowers instead of mangled bodies, Benjamin points out that the comparison also gives evidence of "a heightened sensitivity" of modern life (war) - the view from the sky and the mechanical reinvention of time through the aircraft desalinate the shocking and sorrowful aspects of war, aestheticizing it as more sensually appealing to people (Benjamin, cited in Falasca-Zamponi, 2012).

This exploitation of aesthetics by the state started from ancient regimes, as can be seen in cases of Roman monumental architectures, Napoleon's triumphal marches, and the reinvention of connections between falling cherry petals with *bushido* where the suicide of *samurai*s symbolized ones' loyalty towards their masters. During the twentieth century, this invented tradition of *bushido* was employed again to aestheticize fallen Japanese soldiers of *kamikaze* as cherry petals for their "fatherland". Additionally, Benjamin's famous criticism on aesthetic politics also illustrates how symbols can become transmissible through the reproduction of technology: in films, books,

[1] 日本文化の美しさ

paintings etc., which leads to the second method that the thesis considers as major force behind the reinvented traditions of cherry blossoms - the commodification of symbols. In addition to aestheticization, the thesis regards the process of commodification as another major mechanism for naturalization in postwar Japan (Chales, 2012, p. 26).

6.3.2. Commodification

Following the aftermaths of the Second World War in tandem with rapid paces of national rebuilding, the advancement of technologies and economic growth, in addition to a further integrated global world, the overdoes of signs, symbols and images, the dominance of reproduction, commodification and consumption determined that the economic role of cherry blossoms started to become more significant. During the interview, Koharu noticed that no one could escape from information of cherry blossoms in March and April. Almost in everywhere and at any time people were talking about cherry blossoms: at schools, in workplaces, within the internal decoration of shops, the among special edition of commodities, and even in News. She found it astonishing the amount of time that people in Japan would dedicate to the flower in news and weather forecasts, while they can use the time to "report something else, like terrorism". No where else in the world was doing so as she observed in her bringing up in the overseas. Similarly, among most international students (Chen, Zhen and Aini), their earliest impression of Japan came from media and commodities, where cherry blossoms represent the "national characteristics" but also a form of lifestyle of the country. Aini particularly pointed out that Japan was very successful in commercialize cherry blossoms in varies patterns (travel, food, clothes pattern, etc.) compared to any other country in the world. More specifically, the two Chinese students (Chen and Zhen) studying at Waseda both mentioned that the reason for them to came up immediately of cherry blossoms as a national symbol was because of Japanese songs, TV series and animations where the motif of cherry blossoms were frequently applied. This enthusiasm towards one kind of flower, was not a common phenomenon in other countries as both of them have studied in China and the United States before coming to Japan. For them, they only adopted the habit of going cherry blossoms viewing every spring after they have lived in Japan. Things with cherry blossoms decorations seemed to urge them to internalize such a lifestyle, whereas in other countries they have lived, going for cherry blossoms viewing was to a large extent a personal interest instead of a national cultural practice. Furthermore, they both mentioned that it was astonishing that cherry blossoms appeared in almost every kind of souvenir, from snacks, folding fans, lacquerware, to stationaries. In addition, Chan noticed that even foreign brands, including McDonalds and Starbucks would

introduce limited editions of drinks and tumblers every year during cherry blossoms season.

This is the point where the trade of images and ideas enabled the “intangible aspect” of a nation’s culture to become international, and the refashion of meanings of cherry blossoms turning into a global practice (Tzanelli, 2008, p. 3). While cherry blossoms continued its role as a cultural phenomenon rooted in ancient histories of Japan, the symbol also gained increasing exposures in the proliferation of commodities, ranging from food, fashion design to TV programs and popular songs transnationally. The knowledge embodied in the commodity, for instance, technology, social knowledge, authenticity and aesthetics, in addition to the knowledge individual customers read from the commodity reproduced the sign value of cherry blossoms, presenting it as an lifestyle or aesthetic expression of the country at the international level (Baudrillard, cited in Appadurai 2000). Through the power of media, one is urged to accept one’s social responsibility in consumption, taking the mass-produced as “desirable-yet-reachable”, and replicating the social modalities that the commodity circulates (Appadurai, 2000, p. 52-56). This is the case in which Zhen and Chan mentioned that being surrounded by commodities related to cherry flowers, going for cherry blossoms viewing also became an internalized lifestyle for them as a foreigner surrounded by the motif in Japan.

Here it has become manifest that globalization simultaneously erodes and recreates cultural diversity, reinforcing the exoticness and uniqueness of a specific culture, like cherry blossoms in Japan (Moore, cited in Schedneck 2014). Schedneck illustrates that case of meditation in Thailand, where the ritual practice is commodified to re-inscribed in media as a universal practice, a cultural icon that “links Thailand to its ancient past” (ibid., p. 439). Schedneck discusses how discourses construct the authenticity of meditation in Thailand, contextualizing the practice as a marker of Thailand’s ancient culture disregard of the fact that it is a modern and universal practice in many countries (ibid.). Similarly, the Japanese culture of cherry blossoms is also one such instance. The aestheticization and commodification of cherry blossoms presents a specific lifestyle of the country which relates Japan to its ancient past, which justifies the uniqueness of the symbol in its representation of the culture.

During the interview, when it came to the question regarding the comparison between cherry blossoms inside and outside Japan, most interviewees considered that there was a huge difference.

For instance, Yuna and Yui thought that the existence of cherry blossoms in the overseas itself was strange as cherry blossoms was unique to Japan (*haigaini sakura mo aru no wa hen dana, yappari nihon no tokubetsu na mono da to kanjiru*[1]). Aoi and Koharu, who had actually been to *hanami* in Northern Ameria, in Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, and Washington D.C., was very happy to see that many cherry trees were either dedicated by the Japanese government or planted by people who fancied the Japanese *hanami* culture, because as after all, cherry blossoms was a "unique Japanese phenomenon". However, at the same time, Koharu felt that people outside Japan were trying too hard to imitate Japanese *hanami* by including irrelevant Japanese things into one session. Locals were wearing Japanese *yukata*[2] and participated in *origami*[3] teaching sessions, while *yukata* was actually a summer phenomenon and people do not have really *origami* sessions in Japan during cherry blossoms viewing. Despite the fact that Ohnuki-Tierney has reminded one that every different social group of the Japanese society has their own tradition in cherry blossoms viewing, this tendency of recognizing that cherry blossoms are only unique in Japan generates the authenticity of Japanese ways of cherry blossoms viewing regardless of internal stratifications. To consolidate this authenticity, commodities with cherry motifs, especially those limited editions only produced in Japan, reproduces the sign value of cherry blossoms as a cultural experience to be consumed only within Japan, and contributes to reinforce the image of Japan as a "land of cherry blossoms" to both domestic and international consumers, which in terms highlights the "difference" and "uniqueness" of the country on the world stage.

---

[1] 海外に桜もあるのは変だな。やっぱり日本の特別なものだと感じる。

[2] 浴衣, a casual type of summer kimono

[3] 折り紙, folding paper

7. DISSCUSSION: CHERRY BLOSSOMS AS THE PERSISTENCE OF *NIHONJINRON*

Here, the imaginary of uniqueness of cherry blossoms in Japan becomes a simultaneous practice within and beyond Japanese boundaries. The data generated by the interviews displayed how the awareness of a national symbol emerged in the presence of "the other", when individual interviewees pictured the image of Japan from the view point of a foreigner. At the same time, it also displayed how foreign influence can contribute to the restoration of a national symbol, when Riku and Haruma's answers revealed that the symbols of *samurai* and cherry blossoms were reconsolidated in Japan because they became representative of the country in the overseas. Interrupted cultures flourished within Japanese boundaries in tandem with the process of globalization, and spread to other countries again to further reinforce the uniqueness, authenticity and indigenousness of such cultures, like cherry blossoms to Japan. Cherry blossoms viewing events in the overseas thus also becomes a practice that enables an individual to escape into an imaginary exotic, and seemingly timeless space, wearing *yukata* and appreciating Japanese cultural events, which in terms highlights the romanticism and exoticism of the country that the practice originated in, contributing to the articulation of Japaneseness on the world level.

However, those discourses of "Japaneseness", are frequently a holistic generalization of "cultural traits" or "national characters" of the country, known as *Nihonjinron.* According to Koichi Iwabuchi (1994), *Nihonjinron* is a complicity produced by the West's Orientalist discourses of Japan and Japan's internalized Orientalist discourses on its own national characteristics (Iwabuchi, 1994). Related to the Japaneseness generated by cherry blossoms, in the human nature of a Japanese is one's sensitivity towards subtle changes in seasons, or a spirit of collectivism, because "each flower is tiny, but they are incomparably beautiful when bloom together, just like Japanese people who are at their best when they work together" (Carstensen & Walker, 2011); in addition, the close connections between *bushido* and cherry blossoms decided that the Japanese appreciate a vigorous way to die at the peak of one's beauty; also, the vagueness in the Japanese language, as the *geisha* has pointed, determines that Japanese people do not speak straightforwardly but rather conceal their real feelings just like cherry blossoms which have *omote* and *ura,* with *omote* usually facing towards the earth, etc. (Carstensen & Walker, 2011; Yan, 2010, p. 103). Here, the meanings that fulfilled the symbol of cherry blossoms, with references to Benjamin's arguments on symbolism, have already transcend the limited presence of the flower and formulated a "whole" of the symbol as the culture itself. Cherry blossoms represent itself with stability, timelessness and transcendence as the culture of Japan. In addition, while the imaginary of Japaneseness in the overseas during

cherry blossoms viewing events enabled one to escape into a timeless space with Japanese traditions, those events are perceived as less “authentic” by Japanese individuals. When interviewees explained their impressions of cherry blossoms in a foreign land, their emphasis on the “uniqueness” of cherry blossoms in Japan as part of life memories or particular cultural atmosphere of the nation, which existed nowhere else in the world also demonstrated the cultural relativism that *Nihonjinron* advocates. However, it is worth emphasizing here that cultural relativism functions on the precondition of a "internally uniform cultural configuration" (ibid., p. 92) shared by the whole nation in comparison to other countries.

In such way, cherry blossoms are allegedly a flower appreciated by the whole nation, regardless of one’s social background because of the close tie of Japanese culture and cherry blossoms. However, the claimed “uniqueness” of Japanese *sakura* culture, is primarily the culture of the *yamato* people, disregard of the geographical and demographic heterogeneity within the country. As most critics on *Nihonjinron* have pointed out, through putting an arbitrary equation between Japanese culture, ethnicity and nationality, the doctrines mask the empirical diversity of the Japanese society. It identifies the Japanese in racial with the dominant *yamato* race, which consequently excludes minorities. As a matter of fact, when the flower started to be nationalized to generate Japanese identities among Heian elites, the articulation of the discourses of Japanese identity primarily referred to the *yamato* race, whereas other ethnicities or clans either had their own kingdoms (i.e., the Ryuku Kingdom) or were excluded as part of the country. Even after the unification of Japan by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, in the following centuries when the archipelago was administrated by the Tokugawa Bakufu, social stratifications which put *samurai* on the top, merchants and artists in the bottom, excluded ethnic and social minorities (i.e., the *burakumin*[1]) as part of the society.

Therefore, the culture of cherry blossoms in Japan, is in principle a culture of the *yamato* Japanese whereas other ethnicities were not part of it from the beginning and throughout history. Even today, when talking about the Japanese cultures embedded in cherry blossoms, it refers invariably the culture of the *yamato* people, while masking the presence of minorities, i.e., the Ainu and the Okinawans who are "administratively Japanese, but not 'genuinely' so" (Sugimoto, 1999, p. 82) within the “unique” but “homogeneous” Japanese society and culture. The constant reinvention of cultures of cherry blossoms viewing, the historical meanings embodied in the flower, and the “Japaneseness” extracted from the symbol within and beyond Japan, which frequently refer back to

[1] 部落民

Heian aesthetics and Edo *samurai* spirits, thus give evidence of Foucauldian arguments on knowledge and power. The discourses contribute to reinforce the arbitrary equation between Japanese culture and the *yamato* ethnicity, making *sakura* essentially a representation of *yamato* aesthetics and culture both within the country and on the international stage.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. Concluding the thesis

Started with a historical review on changing meanings of cherry blossoms, and a examination on the image and "identities" of Japan generated from cherry blossoms, this thesis inquired into the symbol-making process, asking how the nationalized symbol appeared natural or commonsensical. As a result, the thesis presented the spread of popularity of cherry blossoms from elites to commoners in history with changing symbolic meanings attached to the flower in history. Given the fact that contradictory meanings resided in harmony within one symbol, the thesis approached this status with Zenith concept of *nyoze* and poststructural doctrines on knowledge-power relations, revealing that meanings are constructions of language and functioned to articulate curtain truths in the interest of dominant social groups, given the specific historical index. For instance, the nationalization of cherry blossoms started with the Heian elites' effort in constructing a distinctive identity at the presence of their "significant other", the Tang Chinese. The appreciation towards plum blossoms under the influence of Tang civilizations was abandoned and the word of *hana* and *hanami* shifted to mean cherry blossoms and cherry blossoms viewing in such circumstance. Likewise, the utilization of cherry blossoms as a symbol of *bushido*, as well as a soldier's sacrifice for the emperor functioned to elevate the status of the emperor from a priest for seasons to a deity of the country. At this point, the celebration of life embodied in meanings of cherry blossoms shifted to an emphasis of the aesthetics of death in the historical context of prewar Japan. However, as the interview results show, nowadays, cherry blossoms once again display an increasingly positive image a national symbol, which relates back to its ancient and profound culture, stressing its uniqueness and authenticity on the world stage. Thus the thesis proposed that the circulation of knowledge in the symbol was accompanied by sequent practices of reinvention of traditions, in order to disguise historical discontinuity as continuity, and to make the naturalization of contradictory meanings possible given different historical indexes.

By putting forward aestheticization and commodification as two prominent forces that enabled the naturalization of cherry blossoms as a national symbol, the thesis simultaneously inquired into the uniqueness and authenticity that the flower presented through the naturalization process on the international stage and argued that the major roles of cherry blossoms as national symbol were to reinforce the cultural uniqueness of the country. The interviews conducted for the research were supportive information for illustrating how aestheticization and commodification contribute to

consolidate the authenticity of cherry blossoms viewing in Japan, as well as image of Japan as "a land of cherry blossoms" in today's world. However, the thesis argued that this cultural uniqueness represented in cherry blossoms within and beyond Japan was largely based on cultural relativism, and it demonstrated the persistence of *Nihonjinron*, which put an arbitrary equation between Japanese culture with Japanese ethnicity. In other words, the discourse of cherry blossoms as a unique culture of Japan conceals the demographic stratification of the country, and makes the dominant *yamato* culture of cherry blossoms viewing the culture of Japan. Nevertheless, it is worth reminding here that the homogeneity represented in cherry blossoms does not necessarily mean that every one have same perceptions regarding the symbol or same ways of cherry blossoms viewing. Differences do exist within the culture of cherry blossoms as Ohnuki-Tierney has pointed out, but only pre-agreed on within the dominant *yamato* culture. It is in such way that the existence of minorities is made invisible, or at least, underrepresented within this framework.

8.2. Limitations and alternative approaches of the thesis

The thesis argued that the nationalization of cherry blossoms contributed to the identification of the Japanese in racial with the dominant *yamato* race, which consequently excludes minorities. However, the research itself also had the limitation of including the voice of ethnic minorities in Japan, even though it endeavored to represent as much diversity of interviewees as possible. On the other hand, it is also a dilemma to have minorities represented in the research, which may run the risk of furthering alienalization of the groups or essentializing Japan the same way as *nihonjinon* did, by prescriptively declaring that Japan *should* be a multicultural society regardless of the context the *sakura* might be a universal phenomenon within the country or a phenomenon that had already spread to those groups (Hankins, 2012, p. 3). Nevertheless, the thesis developed its conclusion based on the fact that the perceptions and habits related to cherry blossoms of minority groups are hardly mentioned in any documents in history, within and beyond Japan.

Having discussed so far, the thesis also proposes an alternative approach towards the topic. It is aforementioned that globalization is a process that simultaneously erodes and creates cultural diversity. Therefore, how Japan keeps up with the trend of globalization while promoting its culture distinctiveness through promoting cherry blossoms as a national symbol can be an alternative way to investigate into the topic. More precisely, with an emphasis on traditions, Japan has been striving to maintain its national identity, even to strengthen its cultural influence worldwide through promoting the *hanami* cultures within and beyond its boundaries. Therefore, it could also have been

an interesting angel to examine if the culture of cherry blossoms in Japan also fits into academic discussions on globalization in country as a process of “closing in” that again emphasizes the cultural uniqueness of country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appadurai, A. (2000). Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value. A. Appadurai (Ed.). *The social life of things* (pp. 3-63). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Armitage, D. & Guildi, J. (2014). The Return of the *Longue Durée*: An Anglo-American perspective. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales, 69*(2014).

Bell, V. (1997). Falling into time: The historicity of the symbol. *Other Voices,* 1(1). Retrieved from http://www.othervoices.org/1.1/vbell/symbol.php

Benjamin, W. (1998). *The origin of German tragic drama*. London: Verso.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (2006). *Mizue Sawano: The art of the cherry tree*. New York: Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Carstensen, K. (Producer), & Walker, L. (Director). (2011). *The tsunami and the cherry blossom* [Motion Picture]. United States: HBO, 2011.

Charles, M. (2012). On the conservatism of post-Jungian criticism: Competing concepts of the symbol in Freud, Jung and Walter Benjamin. *International Journal of Jungian Studies, 5*(2), 120-139.

Cresswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & thesis design: Choosing among five approaches*, (2nd ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Dissanayake, W. (2009). The production of Asian theories of communication: Context and challenges. *Asian Journal of Communication, 19*(4), 453-468.

Falasca-Zamponi, S. (2012). *The politics of aesthetics: Mussolini and fascist Italy*. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/simonetta-falasca-zamponi/politics-of-aesthetics-mussolini-and-fascist-italy

Foucault, M. (1999). *Religion and culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Nitobe, I. (1912). *Bushido, the soul of Japan*. Retrieved from http://livros01.livrosgratis.com.br/gu012096.pdf

Friesen, N. (2008). Critical theory: Ideology critique and the myths of E-learning. *Ubiquity, 9*(22).

Gečienë, I. (2002). The notion of power in the theories of Bourdieu, Foucault and Baudrillard. *Sociologija. Mintis ir Veiksmas 2002*(2), 116-124.

Hankins, J. D. (2012). Maneuvers of multiculturalism: International representations of minority politics in Japan. *Japanese Studies, 32*(1), 1-19.

Heisig, J. W. (2001). *Philosophers of nothingness: An essay on the Kyoto School.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Homburg, P. (2013). *Symbol, sign, and fetish*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/5028320/Sign_Symbol_Fetish

Hobsbawm, E. (1983). Introduction: Inventing tradition. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (pp. 1-14). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In beautiful Japan: Why is it called "cherry blossom land?". (1904, June 11). In beautiful Japan: Why is it called "cherry blossom land?" *The Pittsburgh Gazette*, p. 10.

Iwabuchi, K. (1994). Complicit exoticism: Japan and its other. *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture, 8*(2).

Jay, M. (2013). *Force fields: Between intellectual history and cultural critique*. New York: Routledge.

JNTO (2014) *2014 travel information.* Retrieved from http://us.jnto.go.jp/cherryblossom/

Keene, D. (1969). Japanese aesthetics. *Philosophy East and West, 19*(3), 293-306.

Koepnick, L. P. (1999). *Walter Benjamin and the aesthetics of power*. Lincoln: the University of Nebraska Press.

Kuitert, W. & Peterse, A. (1999). *Japanese flowering cherries*. Oregon: Timber Press.

McCole, J. J. (1993). *Walter Benjamin and the antinomies of tradition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2002). *Kamikaze, cherry blossoms, and nationalisms: The militarization of aesthetics in Japanese history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schedneck, B. (2014). Meditation for Tourists in Thailand: Commodifying a Universal and National Symbol. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 29*(3), 439-456.

Snodgrass, J. (1997). Inventing modern Japan: Hobsbawm, Foucault and Meiji history. *Asian Studies Review, 21*(1)*, 155-162.*

Stead, N. (2003). The value of ruins: Allegories of destruction in Benjamin and Speer. *Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment, 6,* 51-64.

Stewart, J. (1996). *Beyond the symbol model: Reflections on the representational nature of language*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Sugimoto, Y. (1999). Making sense of Nihonjinron. *Thesis Eleven, 57*(May), 81-96.

Suzuki, D. T. (1986). An interpretation of Zen experience. In C.A. Moore (Ed.), *The Japanese mind: Essentials of Japanese philosophy and culture* (pp. 122-142). Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: The Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.

Takayama, K. (2010). Politics of externalization in reflexive times: Reinventing Japanese education reform discourses through "Finnish PISA success". *Comparative Education Review, 54*(1), 51-57.

Tzanelli, R. (2008). Cultural imitations and the commodification of culture: Sign industries as marker of the “public sphere”. *The Global Studies Journal, 1*(3), 1-10.

Weathernews. (2013, March 29). Nihonjin no ohanami ishiki issei chousa! “Zengoku ohanami chosa” kekka happyo: Nihonjin wa ohanami ga daisuki! [A national survey on Cherry blossoms viewing awareness of Japanese! Result presentation: Japanese people love *ohanami* the most!]. *Weathernews*. Retrieved from http://weathernews.com/ja/nc/press/2013/130329.html

Yan, Z. Z. (2010). Japanese flowering cherry and Japanese national character. *Journal of Jilin Institute of Chemical Thecnology, 27*(6), 102-105.

Zhang, Z. Q. (2009). Ribenren de guominxing yu yinghua qingjie [Japanese national characters and cherry blossoms complex]. *Read and Write Periodical, 6*(5), 95-96.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Sign up sheet for an interview

(distributed during lectures at Waseda University)

Looking for interview candidates for a research on symbolism in Japan

Hanyan Ye

Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University

Hello,

My name is Hanyan Ye, a second year student from Lund university. A major concern of my thesis is the manifold meanings assigned to one single symbol at different historical stages in relation to identities construction in Japan and I am looking for interviewees who are willing to share perceptions regarding symbols of Japan, and personal relations with them. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes, conducted in either English or Japanese depending on personal preference. If you are willing to participate, please write down the following information in the next page:

1. Name
2. E-mail address
3. Availability (please write down 1-3 preferences of time between Jan 27th to Feb 11)
4. Places you would like to meet for the interview

Thank you very much for your time and I am looking forward to meeting you!

初めまして、こんにちは！私は葉含煙と呼びます。現在はルンド大学の大学院生で、日本社会の現状について卒業論文を作成しています。私の論文の主な対象は、異なる時代で、日本におけるアイデンティティーの構成に影響を与えているシンボルです (簡潔に書くと、日本らしさを感じ取れる要素を持っているものです)。この調査のため、上記の日本らしさと関係のあるシンボルに対して、個人的な印象や認識をインタビューをさせて頂ける方を探しています。インタビューは大体、20分程度で終了します。英語、日本語どちらでも構いません。参加できる方は次のページに以下をご記入お願いします。

1. 名前

2. 電子メール

3. 1月27日〜2月11日間で都合の良い時間帯を3つまで

4. インタビューに都合の良い場所

それでは、お会いできる日を楽しみしています！

どうぞ、よろしくお願いします！

Appendix 2. Preset interview questions

1. What is your Age?
2. Have you resided/studied abroad before? (If yes, for how long?)
   For international interviewees: How long have you been living in Japan?
3. What do you perceive as a symbol of Japan? (What is the image that you come up with when you think about Japan?)
4. Is there any reason why you think of them as symbols of Japan?
5. Can you explain your personal relations with those symbols?
6. What is the quality of the symbol? Does it represent a positive/neutral/negative image to you?
7. From when is the symbol became the symbol of Japan?
8. Do you think it is unique/native to Japan? why?
9. If cherry blossoms were not mentioned before, do you consider cherry blossoms as a national symbol of Japan?
10. Why do (not) you consider cherry blossoms as a national symbol?
11. Why did not you mention cherry blossoms in the first part of the interview?
12. What is your personal relation with the symbol?/ What are your own perceptions of the flower?
13. Since when do you think it became a national symbol of Japan?
14. Do you consider it unique to Japan? Why?
15. Have you thought about why it became a symbol of the country?
16. Do you know why cherry blossoms are planted all over Japan?
17. Have you noticed cherry blossoms in other countries where you have traveled to?
18. (If yes), if you compare them to those in Japan, do they show the same quality?

20. (If not), considering that there are cherry blossoms outside Japan as well (eg., Washington D.C., Stockholm, Wuhan), do you consider cherry blossoms outside Japan the same as those in Japan? Why or why not?