Article

Cultural values matter: Attractiveness of Japanese companies in Malaysia

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Abstract

As the economic footprint of developing countries increases, talent management grows in importance for foreign multinational companies in emerging markets. Multinational companies, however, face fierce competition for local talent, and competitive recruiting calls for practical knowledge about the personal traits of job applicants. The present study applies a cross-cultural perspective to this issue, exploring how individually held cultural values influence the attractiveness of Japanese companies in Malaysia. Drawing on similarity-attraction theory and person–organization fit theory, the study quantitatively analyses data from a paper-based survey of 245 prospective jobseekers. The findings indicate that an individual cultural value fit with the foreign company's country of origin is significant predictors of employer attractiveness. Specifically, the study finds that potential Malaysian jobseekers who are lower in power distance and higher in risk aversion and long-term orientation view Japanese companies as attractive future employers and have higher job-pursuit behavior. Based on this finding, the study discusses theoretical and practical contributions to corporate employment strategies.

Keywords

Employer attractiveness, employment brand, individually held cultural values, Malaysian talent, P-O fit theory, similarity-attraction theory

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Introduction

As the initial process of human resource management (HRM), recruiting talent is crucial for companies to gain and sustain a competitive advantage (Ployhart, 2006; Williamson et al., 2010). Foreign multinationals, however, face greater difficulty in recruiting talent than local companies do, partly because of the liability of foreignness and the fierce competition among foreign multi-nationals in the local country (Lewin and Massini, 2009; Newburry et al., 2014; Turban et al., 2001). The problem is more severe in emerging economies, where talent is highly mobile (Ready et al., 2008); therefore, attracting and retaining potential employees is a critical issue for foreign multi-national companies in those economies.

As people are attracted to organizations differently (Schneider, 1987), each organization has a distinct group of employees with respect to personality type and values. The interactionist approach, such as similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) and person–organization fit (hereafter, P-O fit, Kristof, 1996), maintains that organizations have certain values and traits which make them distinct (Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). These values are activated as principal factors in attracting jobseekers whose endorsed values align with those of the organization (Dineen and Noe, 2009; Judge and Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996). In fact, prior studies clearly show the influence of 'value fit' between an organization and its applicants, and the effect of these values on the company's attractiveness (Hoye and Turban, 2015; Judge and Cable, 1997; Newburry et al., 2014).

Many scholars believe that individual cultural values are important for predicting different attitudes and behaviours among people (Kirkman et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2014; Tsui et al., 2007). Certainly, cultural values are fundamental to the study of cross-cultural contexts, where individual attitudes towards the foreign subject under consideration are significantly influenced by individual cultural values (Fischer and Poortinga, 2012; Yoo, 2009; Yoo and Donhu, 2005). In some marketing studies, individual cultural values were found to influence consumer behaviour towards foreign brands and thus determine purchasing behaviour, brand loyalty and brand equity (Laroche et al., 2003; Yoo, 2009; Yoo and Donhu, 2005). For example, Yoo (2009) revealed that collectivistic Koreans show higher brand loyalty and equity towards American brands than they do to other national brands. Despite their cross-cultural significance, individual cultural values have received less attention than those of national cultures, and in management research in particular, this remains largely unexplored (Fischer and Poortinga, 2012; Laroche et al., 2003). As prior research (Laroche et al, 2003; Yoo, 2009) evinces, individual cultural differences *within* countries should be consid-ered to clarify and determine individual attitudes towards certain foreign brands.

From the stakeholder perspective, local jobseekers considering foreign companies as future employers are analogous to consumers in the context of cross-cultural consuming decision (Ewing et al., 2002). The decision of jobseekers, thus, will be influenced by the country of origin (COO) of foreign companies, similar to the consumer's decision to purchase a foreign brand. Further, due to limited access to information about foreign companies, COO functions as a significant employer brand for local job applicants, particularly during the initial stages of job seeking (Collins and Stevens, 2002). As national culture is deeply ingrained in any organization's structure, policies and corporate philosophy, the national identity of a foreign company provides an important cue to prospective applicants about what it would be like to work there. Thus, from the interactionist perspective (Judge and Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996), applicants who find a good cultural fit with the COO are generally more attracted to the company.

In this regard, the study focussed on the cultural value fit between potential jobseekers and the employing company and explored those cultural values that influence the attractiveness of Japanese

employers in Malaysia. Building on the interactionist approach of P-O fit theory and similarity-attraction theory, the results reveal the influence of cultural values on organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention. Finding empirical evidence of the cultural value profile of prospective Malaysian employees who are attracted to Japanese companies, the results yield practical implications for Japanese companies regarding recruiting and retaining talent in the Malaysian context.

Literature review and theory

Attractiveness of Malaysia and Japanese companies

Malaysia is an upper-middle-income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US$11,120, and a GDP growth rate of 6 per cent (World Bank, 2014). Among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia is the third richest by GDP per capita, after Singapore and Brunei. Until the 1970s, Malaysia was predominantly dependent on exporting primary commodities such as tin and rubber; however, since the 1980s, it has become a manufacturing base for many foreign companies, making the country a leading exporter of electronic parts, appliances and automobiles. Malaysia is also one of the most attractive countries for foreign investors, according to the Global Competitiveness Index from the World Economic Forum (WEF), which ranks it 18th out of 140 countries. With the government offering a business-friendly environment (WEF, 2016), Malaysia is, by all accounts, a popular country for investors, making it a competitive market for talented workers as well.

Given the key role of human resource (HR) as a critical asset for sustainable corporate growth, developing and training employees is vital, particularly for companies in emerging markets like Malaysia (Debrah et al., 2000; Ogawa et al., 1993; Takeuchi, 1998). The Malaysian labour force is well educated and highly skilled and has a high level of English proficiency and a desirable work ethic – all of which are needed for the industry-wide development currently taking place in Malaysia (Mizuho Research Institute, 2015). Furthermore, significant efforts have been made to cultivate qualified talent in the country; in recent years, there has been a rapid increase in tertiary education enrolment of more than 35 per cent (UNESCO, 2015). These and other efforts on the part of the Malaysian government have made Malaysia's business environment highly attractive to foreign multinational companies.

Japan has significantly increased its investment in Malaysia. After the Matsushita Electric Industrial Corporation, now Panasonic, began operating in Malaysia in 1965, many Japanese companies began investing in the country (JETRO, 2010). Such economic cooperation between Japan and Malaysia facilitated knowledge and personal exchanges, with Japan inviting many Malaysians to learn about the Japanese culture, language and work ethic. Subsequently, attracted by the 'Look East Policy' of former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, it expanded its economic presence there during the 1980s and 1990s. Due to this relationship, Malaysian job applicants have a generally positive view of Japanese companies. For instance, a survey in 2012 showed that young Malaysians in their 20s and 30s held positive views of Japanese companies as prospective employers with respect to acquiring skills and expertise, trustworthy management and high compensation (Recruit, 2013). However, when the attractiveness of Japanese companies is compared to that of other foreign competitors, the picture is not so promising. A recent survey of 471 Malaysian workers showed that only 33.5 per cent of respondents wanted to work for Japanese companies. The majority saw European and American companies in a positive light – 55.2 per cent and 48.2 per cent, respectively (Recruit, 2013). This raises questions about the competitiveness of Japanese companies for recruiting talent in Malaysia.

Employer attractiveness in recruiting talent

The attractiveness of companies as prospective employers appears early in the recruiting and selection process (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Organizational attractiveness is defined as 'the "applicants" willingness to pursue jobs and to accept job offers in an organization' (Tsai and Yang, 2010: 49), and such organizational attractiveness is significant for companies. If they score high in organizational attractiveness, they will have a better chance of attracting and retaining talent (Tsai and Yang, 2010; Turban et al., 2001; Turban et al., 1998), which helps reduce organizational failure and enhances anticipated organizational success (Barber and Roehling, 1993). For similar reasons, applicants' job-pursuit intention, defined as pursuing a job or remaining in the applicant pool (Chapman et al., 2005: 929), is a significant indicator of the measure of overall employer attractiveness. As intention tends to precede behaviour, the applicants' job-pursuit intention provides practical information to companies for predicting application behaviour (Gomes and Neves, 2011). Indeed, studies have revealed that job characteristics and organizational attributes are influential factors that determine organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention (Gomes and Neves, 2011; Judge and Cable, 1997; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Ryan et al., 2005).

Similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) and P-O fit theory (Kristof, 1996) provide a rationale for those who are attracted to a given organization. The theories explain employer attractiveness as an interplay between the values of an organization and a jobseeker, such that jobseekers are attracted to organizations whose perceived values and traits mirror their own (Kristof, 1996; Dineen and Noe, 2009). For example, in the Belgian military context, Schreurs et al. (2009) found that an organization's inferred traits were influential in increasing organizational attractiveness to those whose personalities were similar, and Hoye and Turban (2015) uncovered that the personality fit between an employee and an applicant increased organizational attractiveness.

An organization's instrumental and symbolic characteristics or personality traits serve as schemata for determining its overall organizational image and, in fact, the P-O fit perceptions of job applicants (De Goede et al., 2011; Highhouse et al., 1999; Rynes et al., 1991; Uggerslev et al., 2012). Job applicants formulate such schemata using the limited information available about companies under consideration (Cable et al., 2000; De Goede et al., 2011; Turban, 2001). As shown in previous studies, readily accessible and available information, such as brand, equity, or industry, are important cues for formulating and activating the job applicant's cognitive evaluation of a company as a future employer (Cable and Turban, 2001; De Goede et al., 2011; Lemmink et al., 2003). Compared to local companies, foreign companies are not well known to job applicants in terms of the organization's instrumental characteristics such as physical working conditions and HRM policies. Therefore, the company's COO plays a critical role in framing the overall employer image and its attractiveness as an employer (Froese et al., 2010).

Effects of individually held cultural values

Values serve as an important guideline for directing and determining behaviours (Cohen, 2011; Cohen and Shamai, 2010; Glazer et al., 2004). Indeed, cultural values are among the more influential concepts in cross-cultural studies (Sheikh et al., 2013; Yoo, 2009; Yoo and Donthu, 2005). This suggests that cultural values should be incorporated into any study on individual choice, since such choices exist in a cross-cultural context.

According to Hofstede's (1980) value scheme, cultural values comprise five dimensions: power distance, collectivism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. Power distance defines the extent to which people accept inequality between the powerful and the less

powerful (Hofstede, 2001). Those high in power distance admit to the unequal distribution of power and resources between people depending on their social criteria, such as status, wealth and authority. Therefore, they tend to adapt easily to the organization's centralized and hierarchical social system, conforming to the organization's rules by following and obeying the powerful.

Collectivism refers to the extent of the association between people and the organization in which they are involved (Hofstede, 2001). High collectivistic people are strongly tied to their groups or organizations; thus, they value and pursue the group's goals and interests above their own interests. Less collectivistic people (i.e. those who are individualistic), however, are loosely tied to their organizations and pursue self-interest above the group's interests. Prioritizing their personal lives, they consider autonomy and independence to be most important.

The masculinity dimension is related to the characteristics of gender defined by society. Men and women are characterized differently. Men have 'masculine' characteristics such as being assertive, logical and competitive; and women have 'feminine' characteristics such as being modest, caring and peaceful (Hofstede, 2001). Accordingly, people high in masculinity emphasize material success and achievement, whereas less masculine people pursue conformity, group harmony and quality of life.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension is related to the level of tolerance of unexpected situations and ambiguities (Hofstede, 2001). Those high in uncertainty avoidance prefer explicit rules, regulations and practices because they dislike unexpected and insecure circumstances. In contrast, people low in uncertainty avoidance are more flexible about unexpected situations and are willing to take risks.

The cultural value dimension of long-term orientation is important in Eastern contexts. This cultural value is linked to concepts of endurance, thrift and industry – all of which have been principal factors in the remarkable economic development of many Asian countries (Huat, 1989). People high in long-term orientation tend to postpone present rewards for future success, whereas people low in long-term orientation have a shorter-term perspective, valuing the here and now.

A recent investigation into cultural values across nations indicated that people in Japan and Malaysia have clear differences in the five cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010). Figure 1 shows the differences between Japan and Malaysia regarding cultural orientation, indicating that the Japanese have a higher tendency than Malaysians in the cultural values of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term avoidance, whereas Malaysians are higher in power distance and collectivism. While cultural values are shared countrywide and national borders are used as a unit of delineating cultures, individual differences in cultural values should be noted (Yoo and Donthu, 2002). Individual values are shaped by a complex process involving the interaction of diverse internal and external factors, to which all people are exposed, and the extent of cultural values that each individual embraces varies. Thus, differences in cultural values among individuals and P-O fit theory suggest that Malaysian job applicants whose values mirror Japanese values would likely find Japanese companies attractive as future employers. Thus, those who are low in power distance and collectivism and high in masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term avoidance would see Japanese companies as attractive future employers. This yielded the following hypotheses:

H1: Power distance negatively influences organizational attractiveness and intention to work, such that those high in power distance will be less attracted to Japanese companies.

H2: Collectivism negatively influences organizational attractiveness and intention to work, such that those high in collectivism will be less attracted to Japanese companies.
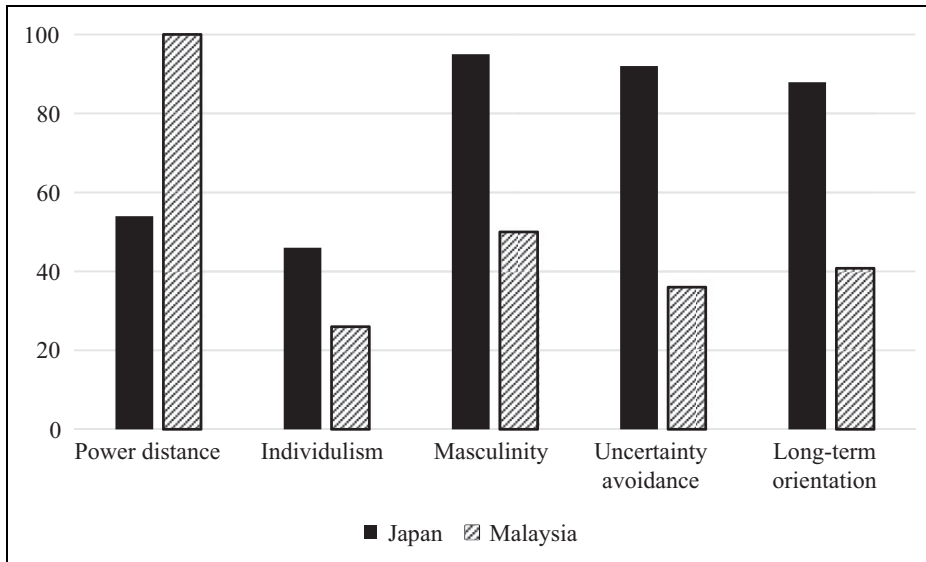
Figure 1. Difference in cultural dimensions between Japan and Malaysia.

H3: Risk aversion positively influences organizational attractiveness and intention to work, such that those high in risk aversion will be more attracted to Japanese companies.

H4: Masculinity positively influences organizational attractiveness and intention to work, such that those high in masculinity will be more attracted to Japanese companies.

H5: Long-term orientation positively influences organizational attractiveness and intention to work, such that those high in long-term orientation will be more attracted to Japanese companies.

Figure 2 depicts the hypothesized research model in this study.

Method

Sample and procedure

The target group for the present study consisted of talented future employees ready to search for jobs. With the exclusion of low-level university students, we targeted third- and fourth-year university and postgraduate students in science and engineering at two prestigious universities in Kuala Lumpur. To minimize the common-method bias derived from using this single-source data (Podsakoff et al., 2003), the researchers exercised considerable care in both developing and conducting the survey. The survey was prepared in English by adopting well-established constructs employed in prior studies. Considering the high English literacy of Malaysians, the survey was distributed in English to students, and participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses.

The survey collection occurred over 3 months from January to March 2016, and 255 responses were collected. After excluding responses with missing information (13 incomplete responses; around 5 per cent), 242 responses were included in the final statistical analysis. Simple statistics on the respondents' demographic features revealed that their average age was 24.17 years (standard
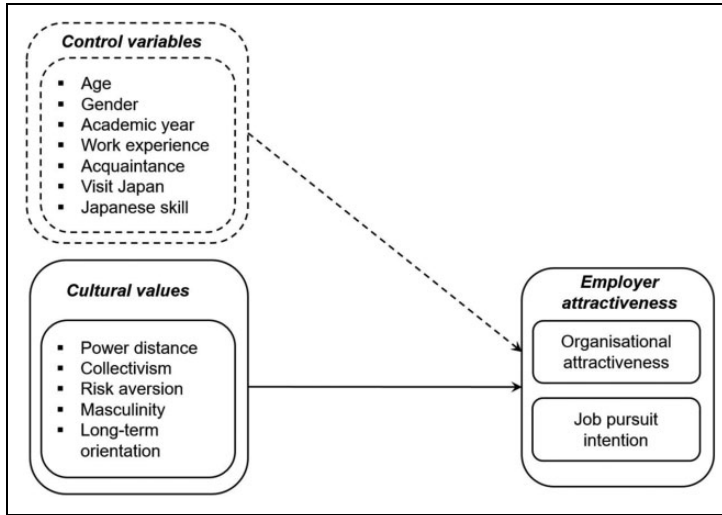
Figure 2. Hypothesized research model.

deviation [SD] = 2.86) and their prior work experience was 1.44 years (SD = 3.07). Regarding gender composition, there were more male (56.2 per cent) than female (43.8 per cent) respondents.

Measures

Organizational attractiveness. The organizational attractiveness of Japanese companies was measured using Bauer and Aiman-Smith's (1996) five-item framework. Ratings were completed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's α showed the internal consistency of items (0.86). Sample items are 'I would want a Japanese company in my community' and 'I find Japanese companies very attractive'.

Job-pursuit intention. The intention to pursue a job with a Japanese company was measured using six items developed by Bauer and Aiman-Smith (1996). Ratings were completed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and the internal consistency of items was ensured (Cronbach's α = 0.92). Sample items are 'I would actively pursue obtaining a position with a Japanese company' and 'I would accept a job offer from a Japanese company'.

Individually held cultural values. Individually held cultural values were measured using a 26-item five-dimensional individual cultural values scale (referred to as CVSCALE) developed by Yoo et al. (2011). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) was applied to all questions. The *power distance* dimension, measured with five questions, showed internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.86). A sample question is 'People in higher positions should make decisions without consulting people in lower positions'. The *individualism-collectivism* cultural value was measured with six questions (Cronbach's α = 0.76) and included the sample item 'Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group'. The *uncertainty avoidance* cultural value was measured with five questions (Cronbach's α = 0.87). A sample question is 'It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do'. The

masculinity cultural value was measured with four questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$) and included the sample item 'It is more important for men than for women to have a professional career'. The *long-term orientation* cultural dimension was measured with six questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). A sample question is 'Giving up today's fun for success in the future is important'.

Control variables. Following prior research (De Goede et al., 2011; Newburry et al., 2014; Schreurs et al., 2009), demographic variables that were shown to influence employer attractiveness were controlled. Thus, participants' age, gender, academic year and work experience (number of years) were included in the analysis. In addition, since this study investigated the attractiveness of Japanese companies specifically, variables relating to familiarity with, and exposure to, Japan were controlled by asking whether participants had acquaintances in Japan, had visited Japan or could speak Japanese. Such variables were controlled to exclude other possible explanations and allow for considering the more-or-less true influence of cultural variables on the attractiveness of Japanese companies (Newburry et al., 2014).

Results

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the mean values, standard deviations and correlations of the variables. Significant correlations were observed between individual cultural values. Specifically, the table indicates that power distance was positively related to collectivism ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), masculinity ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and long-term orientation ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$) but had no significant relationship with risk aversion ($r = 0.05$, not significant [n.s.]). Collectivism was significantly correlated with risk aversion ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), masculinity ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and long-term orientation ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$). Risk aversion was also positively related to masculinity ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$) and long-term orientation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). Masculinity showed a significant correlation with long-term orientation ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$). As expected, individual cultural values also showed positive relationships with both organizational attractiveness and intention to work at the company. Specifically, individual cultural values, except for power distance, were significantly correlated with organizational attractiveness and intention to work at the company. In addition, a significant correlation between organizational attractiveness and intention to work ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that the two concepts were closely related.

Hypothesis testing

To test the conceptual distinctiveness of constructs in this study, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The goodness-of-fit indices confirmed the statistical adequacy of the seven-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1007.41$, $df = 539$, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.901, Tucker–Lewis Index [TLI] = 0.891, root mean squared error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.060), which showed better fit than the nested six-factor model combining two constructs – namely, organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention ($\chi^2 = 1318.40$, $df = 545$, CFI = 0.836, TLI = 0.821, RMSEA = 0.077).

Table 2 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. In models 1 and 2, variables were regressed on organizational attractiveness, and in models 3 and 4, they were regressed on intention to work. Only control variables were regressed on dependent variables in models 1 and 3. The results indicated that only academic year ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.05$) and acquaintance ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.10$) were significantly related to intention to work, suggesting that Malaysian potential

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	24.17	2.86	—													
2. Gender[a]	0.56	0.50	0.04	—												
3. Academic year	4.52	0.55	0.31**	−0.01	—											
4. Work experience (years)	1.44	3.07	0.90**	−0.02	0.28**	—										
5. Acquaintance[b]	0.45	0.50	0.02	0.01	−0.23**	0.00	—									
6. Visit Japan[c]	0.29	0.45	0.01	−0.02	−0.42**	0.06	0.35**	—								
7. Japanese skill[d]	0.57	0.50	−0.21**	−0.06	−0.52**	−0.17**	0.31**	0.40*	—							
8. Power distance	2.19	1.00	0.03	0.14*	−0.13*	0.05	0.02	−0.01	0.03	—						
9. Collectivism	3.77	0.76	0.02	−0.00	−0.01	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.32**	—					
10. Risk aversion	4.22	0.77	−0.09	−0.09	0.17*	−0.07	0.03	−0.03	−0.13*	0.05	0.40**	—				
11. Masculinity	3.59	0.97	0.02	0.36**	0.03	0.00	−0.00	−0.08	−0.04	0.28**	0.28**	0.18**	—			
12. Long-term orientation	4.00	0.70	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	−0.00	0.14*	0.08	0.04	0.21**	0.57**	0.52**	0.36**	—		
13. Organizational attractiveness	3.82	0.72	−0.05	−0.01	0.03	−0.03	0.02	−0.01	0.05	−0.04	0.24**	0.32**	0.19**	0.31**	—	
14. Job-pursuit intention	4.01	0.69	−0.07	−0.02	0.10	−0.08	0.10	−0.02	0.04	−0.06	0.17**	0.37**	0.16**	0.38**	0.59**	—

Note: The variables gender, acquaintance, visit to Japan, and Japanese skill are dummy coded. SD: standard deviation.
[a]Gender: female = 0, male = 1.
[b]Acquaintance: no acquaintance in Japan = 0, acquaintance in Japan = 1.
[c]Visit to Japan: have never visited Japan = 0, have ever visited Japan = 1.
[d]Japanese skill: no Japanese skill = 0, Japanese skill = 1.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis: The effect of individual cultural values on organizational attractiveness and intention to work for Japanese companies.

Dependent variable	Model 1 Organizational attractiveness	Model 2 Organizational attractiveness	Model 3 Job-pursuit intention	Model 4 Job-pursuit intention
Constant	4.008**	2.204*	3.139**	1.471
Control variables				
Age	−0.033	−0.016	−0.027	−0.016
Gender[a]	−0.040	−0.016	−0.059	−0.016
Academic year	0.118	0.015	0.318**	0.211*
Work experience (years)	0.017	0.014	−0.015	−0.005
Acquaintance[b]	0.020	−0.041	0.172†	0.096
Visit Japan[c]	−0.032	−0.090	0.006	−0.062
Japanese skill[d]	0.103	0.144	0.124	0.170
ΔR^2	0.011		0.059	
Independent variables				
Power distance		−0.101*		−0.082†
Collectivism		0.101		−0.037
Risk aversion		0.206**		0.215**
Masculinity		0.061		0.031
Long-term orientation		0.156†		0.291**
ΔR^2		0.168		0.198
R^2	0.011	0.179	0.059	0.257
Adjusted R^2	−0.021	0.133	0.028	0.215
F	0.356	3.856	1.925	6.086

Note: The variables gender, acquaintance, visit to Japan, and Japanese skill are dummy coded.
[a]Gender: female = 0, male = 1.
[b]Acquaintance: no acquaintance in Japan = 0, acquaintance in Japan = 1.
[c]Visit to Japan: have never visited Japan = 0, have ever visited Japan = 1.
[d]Japanese skill: no Japanese skill = 0, Japanese skill = 1.
$^{\dagger}p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$.

jobseekers in higher academic years, who have acquaintances in Japan, may have a stronger intention to work for Japanese companies. Individual cultural values were added to models 1 and 3, and full models are presented in models 2 and 4 for organizational attractiveness and intention to work, respectively. The regression results indicate that power distance was negatively related to both dependent variables ($\beta = -0.101$, $p < 0.05$ for organizational attractiveness; $\beta = -0.082$, $p < 0.10$ for intention to work). We hypothesized that those lower in power distance would be more attracted to Japanese companies. Thus, we found support for Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the results for collectivism showed no significance with both dependent variables ($\beta = 0.101$, n.s. for organizational attractiveness; $\beta = -0.037$, n.s. for intention to work), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. Risk aversion showed a significantly positive relationship with the dependent variables ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < 0.01$ for organizational attractiveness; $\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.01$ for intention to work). Risk aversion was assumed to be positively related to organizational attractiveness. Therefore, we found support for Hypothesis 3. As the results for masculinity showed no significance with the dependent variables ($\beta = 0.061$, n.s. for organizational attractiveness; $\beta = 0.031$, n.s. for

intention to work), there was no support for Hypothesis 4, which predicted a positive influence on organizational attractiveness. As assumed in Hypothesis 5, long-term orientation indicated significant positive influences on the dependent variables ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.10$ for organizational attractiveness; $\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.01$ for intention to work), supporting Hypothesis 5.

In summary, the regression results indicate that the individually held cultural values of Malaysian jobseekers are influential factors in determining organizational attractiveness and intention to work for Japanese companies. The results also show that power distance, risk aversion and long-term orientation are significant cultural values that increase organizational attractiveness and intention to work. This specifically suggests that jobseekers in Malaysia, who are low in power distance, high in risk aversion and high in long-term orientation, are drawn to Japanese organizations and show a high intention to work for them. However, contrary to our expectation, collectivism and masculinity did not show a significant effect on organizational attractiveness and intention to work for Japanese companies.

Discussion

Drawing upon similarity-attraction theory and P-O fit theory, the present study investigated the influence of individually held cultural values on employer attractiveness in a cross-cultural recruiting context. Supporting these theories, the findings reveal that individually held cultural values determine the attractiveness of Japanese companies and job-pursuit intention among Malaysian potential jobseekers. Some findings merit further discussion.

First, the findings of the study specifically indicate that individuals whose cultural values are aligned with Japanese cultural values are attracted to Japanese companies. While supporting P-O fit theory, this also highlights the differences in cultural values among individuals and the importance of cultural values in determining individual attitudes and choices in the recruiting context. This is in line with the argument that the individual-level approach to measuring cultural values should be adopted in a cross-cultural context (Fischer and Poortinga, 2012; Laroche et al., 2003; Yoo, 2009; Yoo and Donthu, 2005; Yoo et al., 2011). Although such an argument has been raised primarily in the marketing field, this study validates the argument in the research on recruiting as well. Such a view may require further consideration in research on multicultural societies such as Malaysia where diverse ethnic, racial and religious groups live together. Given the diversity to which individuals are exposed in Malaysia, cultural values among individuals will vary and function differently in shaping their attitudes and behaviours even while they share cultural characteristics overall (Laroche et al., 2003). Thus, the findings from this study underline the need to adopt an individual-level approach in assessing cultural values and their expected effects, particularly in cross-cultural research.

Second, the rejection of Hypotheses 2 and 4 concerning collectivism and masculinity was unexpected. While these two cultural dimensions evinced no significant impact on organizational attractiveness, this does not mean that those values are not important for determining the organizational attractiveness of Japanese companies. This particular result may be the result of high intercorrelations with other cultural variables. Table 1 shows the high correlation of collectivism with risk aversion ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$) and long-term orientation ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, there was a relatively high correlation between masculinity and long-term orientation value ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$). Such high correlations with other significant cultural values might have attenuated their main effects on the dependent variables.

Furthermore, the mere effects of individual demographic factors should be addressed. Although demographic factors are generally considered as significant in predicting organizational attractiveness (Kim et al., 2012; Newburry et al., 2006), the results show no significant effects of the individual demographic variables – except for the positive effect of academic year and the marginal effect of acquaintance on intention to work. This result highlights the crucial role of cultural values even more in forming employer attractiveness.

Theoretical and practical contributions

This study provides several theoretical and practical contributions to the subject of cultural values and recruitment. First, it indicates the relevance of similarity in cultural values between successful jobseekers and organizations in the early recruiting context. This suggests that Malaysian jobseekers whose cultural values are similar to those of Japanese companies are more attracted to them. With a focus on cultural value fit, this finding supports similarity-attraction theory and P-O fit theory and extends prior research findings in the cross-cultural recruiting context (Judge and Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996).

Second, the study reveals that a foreign company's COO is a principal factor in determining cultural fit with a future employer in the recruiting context. Thus, Malaysian job applicants whose cultural values are similar to Japanese values show increased organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention. This finding is worthwhile because the COO approach has rarely been investigated in the research on recruitment, although the diverse, instrumental and symbolic attributes of organizations have been considered in adopting the P-O fit theory (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter and Greguras, 2009). However, the study clarifies that a foreign company's COO can be seen as a schema for determining the overall fit perceptions of job applicants. This study, therefore, stresses that cultural value fit, based on the company's COO, must be considered when investigating employer attractiveness and employment brand (Sherry, 2000; Ewing et al., 2002). Thus, the study not only corroborates the existing interactive approach in employer attractiveness studies but also suggests a new avenue for understanding organizational characteristics in recruiting employees, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

Third, the study contributes to developing international HRM research in the area of recruitment studies. Thus far, hiring practices in Malaysia have received little academic attention, despite the country's growing global economic presence. Considering its growing economic influence and the potential increase in Malaysian talent, a thorough investigation into the characteristics of potential talent in Malaysia is needed. The study reveals the personal attributes and values of Malaysian talent and their significance in shaping attitudes towards a foreign multinational employer. Thus, the findings extend prior research on recruitment to the Malaysian context and should inspire other related research in the context of international HRM.

Furthermore, the study provides practical suggestions for present and future businesses. The findings provide useful information regarding the values of the young generation in Malaysia. As Table 1 illustrates, the respondents' cultural values are generally low in power distance and high in collectivism, risk aversion, masculinity and long-term orientation. This represents a stark difference from the cultural values assessed at the country level, particularly in the dimension of power distance. While these results cannot be generalized to the entire young generation in Malaysia, such difference should be noted. The young generation in Malaysia is certainly exposed to a societal infrastructure which is totally different from that of the older generation. Younger Malaysians were raised during a period of rapid economic growth and globalization and are now enjoying the fruits of

such growth. Affluence and easy access to higher education influenced changes in the values of younger Malaysians (Hofstede et al., 2010; Kian et al., 2013; Kueh and Voon, 2007). Understanding the change in values among Malaysians has a strategic implication for companies in terms of attracting and recruiting talent. As argued, P-O fit is still important and valid for enhancing the effectiveness of the recruiting process. Therefore, the present study could provide valuable information and act as a guide for developing and implementing effective management strategies and tactics for hiring the right people and properly managing them.

Moreover, the findings may be useful to foreign multinational companies, particularly Japanese companies in Malaysia, for attracting and managing talented employees. HRM in Japanese companies is known worldwide for its distinctiveness and superiority (Ishida, 1986; Jain, 1990; McCormick, 2004), and ingrained in Japanese culture, this managerial system is attractive to many Malaysian employees. While most Japanese companies in Malaysia have been in business for more than three decades, and job security and safety are integral to the HR policies of companies such as Panasonic, Hitachi and Mitsubishi (Abdul et al., 2010), it is claimed that Malaysian employees of Japanese companies are often dissatisfied with discriminative HRM practices that are unequally applied to them and to Japanese expatriates (Foong and Richardson, 2008; Keeley, 2001). Since such dissatisfaction among employees will result in attrition, understanding their needs and devising effective HR practices will help retain talent. This quantitative study reveals that less power distant, highly risk-averse and high-long-term-oriented Malaysians are attracted to Japanese companies. This information can provide practical advice in terms of attracting and retaining them by promoting specific HR practices and benefit packages that could fit their cultural values. Thus, Japanese companies could attract talent by highlighting the organizational and cultural features such as participative organizational structure, open communication channel, people-oriented work culture and training programmes and safety rules in the workplace. Such a strategy will contribute to not only enhancing effectiveness in recruiting but also motivating and elevating work moral among employees and reducing turnover (Lau et al., 2017; Miah and Bird, 2007).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite its contributions, this study had limitations. First, we used a student sample, not actual jobseekers, assuming that after graduation, all survey respondents would pursue employment at a company. Therefore, other career options for the survey respondents were overlooked. Since most university graduates choose to work for companies in fast-growing economies, such as Malaysia's, the possibility of choosing other careers can be downplayed but not eliminated. Taking this into consideration, but nonetheless targeting only those who have decided to join companies, we hope that further research will corroborate this study's principal finding. In a related vein, this study's results were derived from a particular sample, casting doubt on their generalizability. The study targeted science and engineering students only in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, a larger sample would allow for generalizing in future research.

Third, the study did not measure the actual cultural orientation of Japanese companies. Although we assumed that the cultural orientation of Japanese companies would reflect Japan's national culture, the divergence of an organization's culture from its national cultural orientation cannot be negated. By investigating the cultural orientation of Japanese companies operating in Malaysia and determining the possibility of the argument's generalizability, further research should elucidate the results found in this study.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that individual cultural values significantly influence the attractiveness of Japanese companies for jobseekers in Malaysia. It should be noted that because individual cultural values are often identified with national cultures, they are often assumed to be the same. The study clarifies that the difference in cultural values *within* countries should be recognized and investigated separately from generalized national cultural values. It further shows that an individual cultural value fit with a foreign company's COO is an important factor for determining an employer's attractiveness. The study corroborates similarity-attraction theory and P-O fit theory and extends both to the cross-cultural recruiting context.

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