A Bite of Denmark in Japan
Making Sense of Country-of-Origin in Daily Food Evaluations

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Master’s Thesis – Aalborg University – May 2014
Abstract

Globalisation has brought distant food to our local super markets, but as a consequence, Asian countries as Japan is experiencing the lowest food self-sufficiency rate in the history. Japanese consumers are daily faced with enormous amounts of imported food products; including a small variety of products from the distant and small country, like Denmark. This thesis sets out to explore how female consumers in Japan make sense of Denmark as a Country-of Origin in the context of retail food evaluation. Using the concept of Nation Equity as a theoretical basis, the thesis explores how 580 questionnaire participants and 22 interviewees use performance-based images and emotion-based images to make sense of Danish origin in their food evaluation. Findings show how Japanese female consumers use both types of images (performance/emotion) simultaneously. The sense-making process is circumstantial and based and each consumer’s unique life experience and emotions; e.g. product familiarity, product experience, knowledge of the country, knowledge about the region, interest for the country and travel experience in the country.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me make this thesis come true. First of all, I would like to thank all 580 participants, who took the time to complete my questionnaire in December 2013, and 22 interviewees who shared their time, experiences and opinion with me in March and April 2014: thank you for your openness and kind collaboration! A special thanks to my supervisor, Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt, for your professional and constructive guidance throughout the past four months. Finally, to Katja Goodhew and everyone at the Royal Danish Embassy in Tokyo: thank you for all your help and support!
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Chapter 1
Introduction
“The next time you arrive home with a car-load of goods from the supermarket, pause for a minute or two before you start packing them away. Subject one or two of the items to some lateral thinking. Treat them not simply as mass-market consumables, but as small cultural artefacts, each with its own background and biography.” (Cook et al., 1998, p. 162)

... If we were to follow this suggestion by Cook et al. (1998), there is a great chance that we will end up with various cultural artefacts on our kitchen tables; perhaps a bottle of wine from France (Bruwer & Buller, 2012; Maheswaran et al., 2013), a plate of chocolate from Switzerland or exotic spices from Thailand (Assmann, 2011). Today, globalisation and food consumption are inseparable (Nützenadel and Trentmann, 2008), and in most countries, it is impossible to return home from the supermarket without a single global product. Our way of consuming food has brought together the local and global (Cook et al., 1998). Food is moved around in many directions, bringing with it, not only the product itself, but also culture (Srinivas, 2013; Wilk, 2013). Globalisation and global enterprises have changed traditional diets many places in the world (Wilk, 2013; Pilcher, 2013), enhancing the development of a so-called global village (Robertson, 2008).

Problem Formulation

Despite the exiting moments of enjoying an Italian pizza in China or drinking Belgium beer in New Zealand, the globalisation of food consumption does have significant consequences for some countries. In East Asia, several countries struggle with low food self-sufficiency rates, for instance Hong Kong and Singapore are entirely dependent on food imports, while Japan is struggling with the lowest self-sufficiency rate among similar industrialized countries (Assmann, 2013). Despite its geographical area of 377,960 km² (Statistics Japan, 2013), Japan’s self-sufficiency rate has dropped from of 73 pct. in 1965 to 41 pct. in 2007 (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2007). The main reason for this dramatic decline is the changing dietary habits among Japanese consumers. Shifting from a traditional diet based on rice, vegetables and fish to a more Western, the demand for meat and wheat-based products (bread, pasta etc.) has rapidly grown. Hence, globalisation has conquered the Japanese food market, forcing Japan to rely on imported food products (Assmann, 2013). Unfortunate for Japan and fortunate for foreign food exporters, the Japanese import of food and beverage is forecasted to raise 12.9 pct. between 2012 and 2017 (Business Monitor International, 2013). Although the Japanese government is taking initiatives to implement new strategies in order to
increase the food self-sufficiency rate (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2007), market analysts do not estimate it as a realistic development (Business Monitor International, 2013).

The current scenario for Japan and the forecasted increase in imports makes the country an interest target for research. In such a globalised country, where nearly 60 pct. of all food intakes are imported, how do consumers make sense of their foods? Are consumers able to differentiate between global food products? (Robertson, 2008) Several researchers have examined how Japanese consumers make sense of products from various countries, i.e. US (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000; Harrison-Walker, 1995; Johansson et al., 1985 Narayana, 1981; Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Nagashima, 1970; 1977), Great Britain and France (Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Nagashima, 1977; 1977), Germany (Johansson et al., 1985; Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Nagashima, 1977; 1977), India (Harrison-Walker, 1995) and finally, Japan (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000; Johansson et al., 1985 Narayana, 1981; Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Nagashima, 1970; 1977). A review of these studies shows how Japanese consumers find products from certain countries attractive or non-attractive, but the studies do not indicate whether Japanese consumers have difficulties identifying products from the above countries. This may be due to the fact that all studies tend to focus on large industrial countries and not on smaller and less-known countries.

The above observation raises an extremely important question: how would Japanese consumers make sense of food products from a country that is insignificant, both in terms of area, economy and politics (Niss, 1994)? Denmark as a Country-of-Origin has only been examined in few studies (Djursaa et al., 1991; Niss, 1994; 1995; Okamura & Heiberg, 2008). However, none of these studies have examined Denmark as a country-of-origin in the context of food products, in Japan or from consumers’ point of view. Theoretically, this makes Denmark an interesting target for research, yet there is one more argument for initiating a study of Danish origin in the country of the Rising Sun.

In 2012, Denmark exported commodities to Japan for 12 billion DKK, with the export of food- and agricultural products accounting for 4.9 billion DKK. The export of pork alone made up for 3.8 billion DKK. With 40.8 pct. share of the Danish export to Japan, the food- and agriculture sector is the largest export product category to Japan (Appx. 15). Despite the large amount of food export to Japan almost 95 pct. are imported as bulk (pork, dairy) for the processing industry and only a small variety of retail food products are available for the end-consumers (Appx. 11). However, in recent years the demands for retail food products have increased and Japanese importers show interest in importing Danish
retail food product on a frequent basis (Appx. 11), bringing the prospects for growing Danish retail food exports to Japan. These factors make Denmark and Japan even more interesting as the targets for research; with the great amounts of bulk foods and small amounts of retail foods being imported into Japan, how do Japanese consumers consciously make sense of Danish food products? How do ordinary Japanese people makes sense of Denmark as one of many “citizens” in the global village of food (Robertson, 2008)?

Japan’s current and future dependency on imported food products, Denmark’s position as a small and rather insignificant country and the current and future prospects for Danish food exports to Japan have created the basis for the following research question and sub-questions:

**How do Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin, when they evaluate retail food products in their daily lives?**

**Sub-question 1:** How do Japanese female consumers use performance-based image(s) to make sense of Danish origin?

**Sub-question 2:** How do Japanese female consumers use emotion-based image(s) to make sense of Danish origin?

**Elaboration**

The first subject that should be elaborated is the delimitation of the target group. Female consumers are chosen as the target of this study because there is a tendency showing that women hold the power of purchase decisions in the context of grocery shopping (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2010). Recent statistics from Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (2010) shows that the wife alone makes 74.5 pct. of all grocery purchases, while the husband only makes 4.4 pct. of the purchases; the remaining 21.1 pct. of the purchases are made by the wife and husband together. These statistics are furthermore supported by individual market research bureaus, i.e. Onnagokoro (2013) and Herstory (2013). Taking this trend into account, it does make sense to approach the target group that is most likely to evaluate (Danish) food products, in order to get as much insight as possible into the sense making of Danish origin.
The second subject to be elaborated is a specification of the product category under investigation. ‘Retail food products with Danish origin’ refers to all the food products that are available to the Japanese female consumers in retail stores. This includes Danish foods that have been exported as bulk for the processing industry and food products that have been processed in Denmark and exported to Japan. Even though bulk foods are processed in Japan, in most cases, information about the country-of-origin is available because of the Japanese Food Labelling Standards (MAFF, 2014). Hence, excluding bulk foods from the study is not preferred, as it is difficult for consumer to differentiate between products with Danish origin that have been processed in Japan or processed in Denmark.

Finally, the theoretical relevance of this study should be further elaborated. Besides the lack of research on Denmark as a country-of-origin, there are a few more arguments for initiating this study. First of all, the majority of studies on Country-of-Origin (Pappu et al., 2005; Hooley et al, 1988; Nagashima, 1970; 1977; Erickson et al., 1984; Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Schooler, 1971; Bruwer & Buller, 2012; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Samiee et al., 2005; Akaah & Yaprak, 1993; Lee et al., 1992) tend to approach it from a performance point-of-view. Most studies have examined how consumers make sense of a Country-of-Origin, based on the performances of country, e.g. products, brands or other commercial activities (Maheswaran et al., 2013). Only the minority of Country-of-Origin studies (ibid.; Maheswaran & Chen, 2009; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) have examined how consumers use non-performance related emotions to make sense of a Country-of-Origin (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). As this study sets out to investigate consumers’ sense making of a Country-of-Origin, both from a performance- and emotion point of view, the study may provide new knowledge about how emotion-based images (or emotion equity) are used, when making sense of Country-of-Origin. Secondly, majority of studies on Country-of-Origin have mainly used quantitative methods, i.e. psychometric instruments and survey data (Usunier, 2006), creating streams of research that continuously confirms the competitiveness of Country-of-Origin product evaluation (Samiee et al., 2005). However, only few studies have used qualitative methods (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008) by capturing the nuances of the Country-of-Origin effect and providing in-depth understandings of how Country-of-Origin are thought of (Usunier, 2006). With a qualitative approach to the concept of Country-of-Origin, this study may be able to shed light on new aspects of how consumers make sense of Country-of-Origin.
Chapter 2
Methodology
The purpose of this thesis is to generate new knowledge about how Japanese consumers make sense of the Danish origin in their food evaluation. Every research is guided by the fundamental beliefs of the researcher, and his/her perceptions of reality. How the researcher perceives reality has significant consequences for the entire research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Guba, 1990). In scientific terms, these ‘perceptions of reality’ is called a paradigm.

According to Guba (1990), a paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (p. 17). As a researcher, I ascribe to the paradigm of constructivism, because I believe that “all research is interpretive” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) and socially constructed through human interaction (Flick, 2004; Guba 1990). Consequently, I believe that it is impossible to conduct a value free inquiry, as “many constructions are possible”, because every single individual holds his/her own perceptions of reality (Guba, 1990, p. 25). Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge the fact that my paradigm affects all layers of decisions made throughout the research design (Maxwell, 2009); the way I formulate my research question, the methods I choose for my data collection, the method I choose for analysing and validating my data.

Ontology and Epistemology

In the process of defining constructivism, it is relevant to consider the characteristics of the paradigm; namely, ontological and epistemological stances. Ontology is concerned with the inquirer’s assumptions about the nature of truth and realities, whereas epistemology is concerned with the nature of relationships between the inquirer and the ‘known’ (Lincoln et al., 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Guba, 1990). As a constructivist, I am a relativist, who recognises the existence of multiple realities (ontology) and a subjectivist, who believes that social interaction is a necessity in constructing knowledge (epistemology) (Lincoln et al., 2011; Hesse-Biber 2010; Guba 1990; Flick, 2004).

On a more substantive level, I believe that “there is no ‘objective’ social reality ‘out there’” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 455) because every individual holds his/her own constructed realities, based on his/her interpretations of the world. Individuals develop a mental picture of realities based on their gender, sexuality, culture, education, social class etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); their entire life history determines how they experience and interpret realities. Consequently, there is no ultimate reality, because there are multiple explanations of ‘what reality is’ (Lincoln et al., 2011; Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2004). The objective with this thesis is not to uncover an absolute ‘truth’ about consumption of Danish
food in Japan, but to explore how Japanese female consumers interpret and make sense of the Danish origin in their daily lives. I believe that “knowledge is constructed in processes of social interchange” (Flick, 2004, p. 90), which is why human interaction is vital, if the purpose is to understand individual’s interpretations of the world (Lincoln et al., 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Creswell, 2009). In the process of interaction, I believe that it is impossible to separate myself from ‘what I know’, because “who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 104). Hence, as a constructivist, it is crucial for me to be transparent about my subjectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In the context of this thesis, it is relevant to acknowledge that my Japanese and Danish heritage will influence many steps in this study; it has not only affected my choice of topic, but also how I conduct and interpret my data. In the process of interpreting the ‘realities’ of Japanese consumers, it is impossible to avoid drawing on my cultural and linguistic knowledge about Japan (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998).

Methods

Methodology is concerned with how the inquirer gathers knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba, 1990). Following the literature of Guba (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the constructivist researcher has a hermeneutic and dialectic approach to methodology. On a practical level, hermeneutics is used in the process of interpreting the text and dialectics is then used to compare these interpretations through rational analysis and discussions (Guba, 1990; Guba, 1996; Lincoln et al., 2011).

Hermeneutics is an ancient method of interpretation (Højberg, 2004), and defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as “an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process” (p. 16). The process of interpretation is called the hermeneutical circle, where the inquirer achieves new understanding of the text, for each time the text is re-read (Kvale, 2007; Pahuus, 2003). Hence, new interpretations are built on the inquirer’s pre-understandings. In the context of this thesis, I apply hermeneutics through continuous reflection and reporting on these reflections; before even designing the questionnaire and interview guide, during the data gathering process, in the coding phase, analysing phase and even after completing the research. By constantly being aware of my changing pre-understanding and act upon my new stage of ‘understanding’, e.g. by changing the research design to ‘fit’ my newly acquired understanding, it will raise my ability to achieve an even better and deeper understanding of how participants and
interviewees interpret Danish origin. In theory, the hermeneutic interpretation process is infinite, however “in practice, it ends when a sensible coherent meaning has been arrived at” (Kvale, 2007, p. 109). As a constructivist, holding the belief of multiple realities, it is important to recognise that it is difficult, if not impossible to reach “a sensible coherent meaning” and understanding of Japanese female consumers’ sense-making of Danish origin. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that this thesis will only shed light on a tiny fragment of the phenomena. However, as a researcher, it is my mission to do my best in achieving “a sensible coherent meaning” within the scope of the inquiry. In order to strive for this, I will avoid making any prior decisions about the final number of participants/interviewees, or final number of times of listening to the recordings and reading the questionnaire responses, but try to ‘feel my way forward’ and on-going evaluate the richness of my data (Maxwell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Contrary to the positivist researcher, the constructivist researcher prefers to move out of the laboratory and to conduct inquiry in natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba, 1990). Drawing on my constructivist beliefs, my objective is to get ‘as close as possible’ to Japanese female consumers, in order to understand how they make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their daily lives (Creswell, 2009). Acquiring data in natural settings means that I recognise the necessity to conduct my data interpersonally (in Japan) in a natural location, where interviewees can be confident (local café of their choice). That being said, methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Mathison, 1988) is seen as a solid “strategy for justifying and underpinning knowledge by gaining additional knowledge” (Flick, 2004, p. 179), hence, it is my intention to apply triangulation within the frame of constructivism.

The Constructivist Researcher

There is no doubt that the constructivist researcher remain faithful to his/her paradigm by applying qualitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), but major differences in basic assumptions makes it difficult for the constructivist researcher to apply quantitative methods (Flick et al., 2004; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Bryman, 2012; Lincoln et al., 2011). Scholars have pointed out the advantage of triangulation in terms of methods (Creswell, 2011; Denzin, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Researchers suggest that a mixed method approach strengthens the inquiry in terms of developing a deeper understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2004) and validity (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Mathison, 1988). Methodological triangulation can provide convergence to the inquiry by comparing
and ‘cross checking’ the results (Hesse-Biber, 2010), uncover contradictions in the inquiry (Mathison, 1988) and increase generalisability (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The scholarly description of methodological triangulation, or mixed methods approach however tends to be influenced by the positivist paradigm and raises the question of its applicability in a constructivist inquiry (Creswell, 2011). I strongly agree with Creswell (2011) that a ‘delinking’ of paradigm and methods should take place, as “many different research methods would be linked to certain paradigms, and paradigm justification did not dictate specific data collection and analysis methods” (p. 275). In my view, ‘being true to my paradigm’ is not about applying qualitative methods, but about applying data collection and analysis methods that are suitable for my inquiry in a ‘constructivist way’. This thesis will thus draw on two sets of methods:

1) Online Questionnaire
2) Qualitative In-Depth Interviews

The application of both methods is based on the basic assumptions of constructivism and the majority of the data sets are analysed qualitatively. A detailed explanation and justification of the application of these methods can be found later in this chapter.

Research Design

In this inquiry, the purpose (Flick et al., 2004) is to both explore and describe how Japanese female consumers make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in food consumption. As the topic under investigation is very new and considered as an unexplored field, an explorative approach is valuable (Neuman, 2011), but at the same time, it is also important to describe the phenomena, as the study sets out to understand the ‘how’ of social construction (ibid.). It is furthermore important to highlight the fact that this study is a cross-sectional (Neuman, 2011) or snapshot (Flick, 2014; Flick et al., 2004) research, even though the entire research lasts for six months. The research sets out to take a snapshot of social constructions at the time of the research (Neuman, 2011; Flick et al., 2004).

Capturing how ‘Japanese female consumers’ make sense of Danish origin is a challenging task, as the segment, ‘Japanese female consumers’ is a very complex group of people from different geographical locations, social/economical backgrounds, sub cultures and ages. In 2012, there were 65 million Japanese female citizens in Japan (Ministry of Internal Affaires and Communications, 2013), spread out on 47 prefectures. When it comes to food consumption and preferences, the taste palate differ significantly from prefecture to prefecture, for instance, consumers from the Kanto-area prefer spicier
and saltier food than consumers from the Kansai-area. (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2010; Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998).

As a constructivist inquirer, it is my intention to capture the nuances in the group requiring me reporting on “(...) multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). Even though it is not in my interest to generalise ‘Japanese female consumers’ as one single group, I still have certain concerns whether interviews alone will shed light on the nuances within the segment. With an exploratory spirit, it is thus my preference to draw on a more quantitative inspired method (questionnaire), in order to explore how ‘Japanese female consumers’ make sense of Danish origin in their food evaluation. A questionnaire will help me test the waters and identify key themes that will be vital for the focused qualitative interviews (Neuman, 2006). Yet, it is important to acknowledge, that even a quantitative approach will not allow me to capture all nuances in the segment.

Applying a multi-method approach is thus “an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincon, 2011, p. 5) and not to validate the inquiry (Flick, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By applying an exploratory questionnaire, prior to the focused qualitative interviews, I believe that it will raise the probabilities of understanding how Japanese female consumers construct their realities (Fontana & Frey, 2008). The data derived from the questionnaire should be viewed as “additional knowledge” (Flick, 2004, p. 179) to the qualitative interviews. Thus, the qualitative interviews will act as the primary data for the analysis, while the questionnaire is primarily used as a tool for leading the interviews in the right direction, and secondarily to support and complement the interpretations in the analysis.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that I am not an expert on quantitative research. Due to my educational background, the emphasis has always been on qualitative research; hence, the design, coding and analysis of the quantitative data are simplified radically. Furthermore, the quantitative approach in this data has been profoundly influenced by qualitative research design.

A Qualitative-Inspired Questionnaire
Most often, questionnaires are applied for quantitative purposes (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Phellas et al., 2012). The quantitative researcher will most probably ask participants the same sets of ques-
tions (Neuman, 2006), in order to gather comparable data (Berg & Lune, 2012) that can be generated into statistics, models and graphs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is important for the quantitative researcher to gather a large sample that can provide knowledge that is generalisable for the group/society under investigation (Byrne, 2012), and participants will often be sampled randomly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2009). Finally, responses in a quantitative questionnaire are most likely to be fixed categories that have been created by the researcher, as responses to open-ended questions are fairly difficult to cope with, especially when converting data into statistics (Neuman, 2006). In order to apply a questionnaire for this thesis and at the same time stay loyal to my constructivist paradigm, these traditional characteristics of a questionnaire require some adjustments.

While the traditional questionnaire most often give participants the pre-fixed categories of responses, I do consider that it is highly important to let the participants speak for themselves (Neuman, 2006). The main questions will thus consist of open-ended questions, where participants can freely express whatever comes into her mind. For example, the question “What do you associate with Danish food?” could give the participant the opportunities to choose between different associations, such as cheese, ham or bread. But, providing the responses on behalf of the participants will prevent them from using their own imagination and consequently, subjectivity is lost in the entire inquiry. By applying open-ended questions, the researcher is thus able to collect qualitative data that represents participants’ own associations, interpretation of events, understandings and feelings (Byrne, 2012; Schiffman et al., 2008). In the actual responses in the questionnaire, there is quite a significant difference in the length of the responses to the open-ended questions. Some participants embraced the opportunity of ‘speaking freely’, while others were rather brief in their responses e.g. by listing up main points. Unfortunately, only a minority of the participants gave long, descriptive responses. This however only supports the strategy of a mixed-method design, as qualitative interviews compensate for the loss of descriptive responses.

Because of the design of the questionnaire (mainly containing open-ended questions), the majority of the gathered data is considered as qualitative, and it is therefore a necessity to treat the data qualitatively. This means that the open-ended questions are analysed in accordance with the data from the qualitative interviews, applying thematic analysis techniques (cf. Data Analysis). The quantitative data from the questionnaire have been treated in the online survey analysis tool (Survey Xact), where data
have both been treated independently and crossed with different variables. For the quantitative data applied in this thesis, please see appendix 2 and 9.

It should also be noted that the questionnaire was designed and conducted, while I was undertaking my internship at the Royal Danish Embassy in Tokyo. The questionnaire therefore contains responses to questions that are not applicable for the purpose of this thesis, but have been used for other purposes at the Embassy. It is important to acknowledge that this may have negative consequences for this thesis; the extra number of questions may have kept participants from completing the questionnaire and it provides a large body of data that is not applicable for the thesis.

**Designing the Questionnaire**

The online self-completion format is preferred, because they are extremely fast, if distributed through attractive websites, and as it has been proven that participants give longer responses to open-ended questions in online questionnaires than in other questionnaire formats (Phellas et al., 2012). An online questionnaire may also be an advantage, as it is possible to reach consumers in far-away locations without any concerns about travel costs or time (ibid.). Yet, online self-completion questionnaire does eliminate interpersonal interaction, resulting in a lack of “establishing an interviewer-interviewee ‘relationship’ and ‘living the moment’” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 150). Furthermore, the method does not give the inquirer the possibility of probing (Phellas et al., 2012).

All communication with participants, including the questionnaire, cover letter and thank you message (posts of Facebook and Twitter) have been translated into Japanese, in order to overcome language barriers and reduce cultural misunderstandings (Kvale, 2007). To secure a high translation quality, the translations have been completed by a native Japanese and been proof read by two other native Japanese. Finally, the questionnaire is beta-tested by three test-participants in the target group (Japanese female consumers), in order to identify communication (language) mistakes, unclear questions and technical errors (Bryman, 2012). The English version of the questionnaire can be found in appx. 4, and the Japanese translation in appx. 5.

**Sampling and Distribution**

Considering the limited amount of Danish retail food in the Japanese market (Appx. 11), a random sampling will most probably lead me to participants with no knowledge of Denmark or Danish food rather than participants who hold opinions, feelings and perceptions towards the phenomena. It is
therefore highly important to carefully consider whom to ‘recruit’ as participants for the questionnaire (Byrne, 2012; Creswell, 2009).

In the process of finding appropriate interviewees, Byrne (2012) suggests that, “sometimes getting access to interviewees requires going through intermediaries or gatekeepers” (p. 218). Considering the other options for ‘recruiting’ participants for the questionnaire, e.g. random sampling on the internet/on the streets or snowballing through my network, Byrne’s (2012) suggestion is preferred, especially as I, at the time of the data conduction, had access to a very important gatekeeper; the Royal Danish Embassy in Japan. It is assumed that people who follow the Embassy’s communication platforms have some kind of an interest in Denmark and probably some prior knowledge of Denmark and Danish food. Most importantly, these people may have visited Denmark themselves, know people from Denmark or have an interest in Denmark. This means that these people may have experienced Danish retail food products themselves and may consequently have opinions/feelings towards it. How these people create meaning and make sense of Danish food and Danish origin is what is interesting for this thesis.

Getting insight into these Denmark-followers and their sense-making of Danish origin is highly valuable for this study. Yet, it is vital to bear in mind that these consumers are very likely to be biased and to hold positive feelings and perceptions towards Denmark, since they have individually chosen to receive communication from the Embassy. There is therefore a great probability that the results from this questionnaire will turn out to be highly positive. In order to shed light on the nuances among ‘Japanese female consumers’ and try to gain access to as many mental realities as possible (Creswell, 2009), it is crucial to also understand how non-Denmark-followers make sense of Danish origin, especially since the phenomena under investigation are still ‘Japanese female consumers’. This is the main reason why I strongly encourage the Denmark-followers on Facebook and Twitter to share posts and re-tweet my questionnaire, in order to ‘recruit’ participants without relations to Denmark, as illustrated in fig. 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of Facebook
The data was collected in December 2013 and was distributed through the Embassy's social media platforms, respectively Facebook and Twitter (fig. 1). At the time of data collection, the Embassy had 1851 likes on Facebook and 10,724 followers on Twitter. In the hope of attracting participants, a draw was initiated. A total of 580 participants completed the questionnaire.

As a constructivist researcher, the dream scenario would be to provide descriptive background information about each participant in the questionnaire. Considering the scope of the thesis, this is however not possible. Yet, a statistical overview of the participant is illustrated in the enclosed pamphlet (or Appx. 12), in order to give the reader a general impression of the involved participants.

**Getting from the Questionnaire to the Interviews**

In the very end of the questionnaire, participants were asked about their consent to be contacted in spring 2014 regarding their participation in follow up interviews (appx. 4). Out of the total 580 participants in the questionnaire, 507 gave their consent to be contacted.

In the process of sampling participants for the interview, the participants were divided in geographical locations (prefecture) and their relations to Denmark (appx. 13). The idea behind this was to recruit interviewees from different parts of Japan and interviewees who went under the categories; “I have visited Denmark”, “I am interested in Denmark” and “I do not have any relations to Denmark” (appx. 4). In order to interview consumers in different geographical locations, Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto were chosen as the geographical locations in the sampling of interviewees. Tokyo is chosen because it is the most represented city in the questionnaire, while Osaka is chosen because it was the most represented city outside of the Kanto-region. Finally, for the third geographical location, Kyoto was chosen, in order to represent a minority group among the participants (appx. 9g).

Out of the 507 participants, who gave their consent to be contacted for follow up interviews, 151 (30 pct.) participants had travelled to Denmark, 46 (9 pct.) had acquaintances in Denmark, 165 (33 pct.) were interested in Denmark and 91 (18 pct.) did not have any relations to Denmark (appx. 9f). In total, 97 participants were contacted, being asked to participate in follow up interviews. After spending surprisingly amount of time, communicating back and forth with potential interviewees, a total number of 24 interviewees agreed to meet with me.
Two of the interviews took an unexpected turn of event, as interviewees turned out to be male and not female as expected. Because of a Japanese custom of using a person’s last name when referring to them (and referring to one self), I had no chance of discovering this ‘mistake’ prior to the actual interview. This incident made me realise that other male consumers may have participated in the questionnaire as well, even though it was clearly underlined in the ‘recruitment’ message that the questionnaire was for women only. Based on this experience, it has to be admitted that this ‘problem’ is a source of error, and as I did not question the gender of the participant in the questionnaire, there are no ways of uncovering the mystery of the number of men who participated in the questionnaire. Instead of revealing the truth to the interviewees, I acted naturally and decided to conduct both interviews, as I was curious about how male consumers would respond to my questions. My impression of both interviews was clear; both interviewees were surprisingly brief in their responses and reluctant to talk about their experiences, opinions, perceptions etc. Leaving out these two ‘failures’ from my data collection, a total number of 22 interviews (with female consumers) were conducted during March/April, 2014. For a detailed overview of all interviewees (background information and biographies), please see the enclosed pamphlet. When interviewees are referred to in the analysis, fictional names are used.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most common methods applied in constructivist inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2011). Interviews can help the researcher gain a deeper understanding and explore experiences (Kapaulas & Mitic, 2012; Berg & Lune, 2012). As Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) state, “by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (p. 529). The intention of using interviews is to gain an even deeper insight into participants’ interpretation of ‘Danish origin’, by relying on “power of words and images” (Gummersson, 2005, p. 311). The interview will give me the opportunity to ask participants to elaborate on the responses/themes that became visible throughout the questionnaire.

In line with the constructivist paradigm, it is important to acknowledge the fact that interview inquiry is not possible without the active involvement of the researcher. The interview is not just about asking questions and receiving answers, but “active interaction between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 119). Meaning is co-constructed by the interviewer and the interviewees (Silverman, 2011) through social interaction (Warren, 2002).
Consequently, it is the researcher’s responsibility to squeeze as much juice (information) out of the orange (interviewee) as possible, which is why it is crucial to consider every step of the interview design (Fontana & Frey, 2008).

**Type of Interview**

The individual in-depth interview (Kvale, 2007) is preferred, as interviewing people individually may produce more ideas and process more topics, than interviewing groups (Neuman, 2011). Concerning the structure of the interview, semi-structured interview is preferred, as it leaves space for both the interviewer and interviewee to go beyond the path of the “script” and “pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 114), and at the same time ask pre-formulated questions, enabling the researcher to gain some degree of comparability across the interviews (Berg & Lune, 2012). As each interviewee understand the world (and the interviewing context) in different ways (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008), the semi-structured interview also gives the interviewer the freedom to adapt each interview to the interviewee, both in terms of wording, non-verbal communication and the sequence of the questions (Berg & Lune, 2012). Finally, the semi-structured interview enables the interviewer to probe, and ask the interviewee to elaborate her response (Berg & Lune, 2012; Kvale, 2007). In conducting the actual interviews, it has shown that the structure of the interview did turn out to be advantage. For instance, some interviewees were older in age; therefore being able to adapt my style of language (wording) to a more polite tone was highly important, in order to show the interviewee respect, and thereby making her feel comfortable and appreciated. Another case, where the strategy showed to be an advantage was in interviews with interviewees who had not explicit mentioned their (strong) relationship to Denmark, neither in the questionnaire nor in the beginning of the interview. In these cases, it was crucial to have the opportunity of changing the order of the questions, in order to ask the interviewee about their experiences with Denmark/Danish food or have them elaborate their statements.

**Squeezing Juice (information) out of the Orange (interviewee)**

In an interviewing situation, many factors influence the outcome: the format of the interview, the sequencing of the questions, phrasing and wording, level of language, the setting, the timing and the duration (Byrne, 2012; Berg & Lune, 2012; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Kvale, 2007).

It is preferred to meet with the interviewees face-to-face (Fontana & Frey, 2008), in the hope of minimizing any misunderstandings or problems that may occur in the absence of interpersonal
communication (Creswell, 2009). As meaning is mutually created between the interviewer and interviewee, it is important to create an atmosphere, where both parties feel naturally comfortable (Byrne, 2012) in order to develop a close relationship that can lead to meaning creation (Fontana & Frey, 2008).

Phrasing, wording and the level of language should be adapted to the interviewees, in order to fit their social backgrounds, educational level and age. Especially in an intercultural context (between a Danish interviewer and a Japanese interviewee), it is of critical importance to phrase the questions and use a style of language that is inoffensive (Berg & Lune, 2012). In order to try to speak at the same level of language as the interviewees, inspiration for wording was found in the questionnaire responses, trying to use the same words that are familiar to the interviewees.

The interview guide was first created in English and later translated into Japanese by a native Japanese, with the same intentions as the questionnaire. As suggested by Byrne (2012) and Berg and Lune (2012), the interview guide is pre-tested by two people within the target group and adjusted to the criticisms that were given at the pre-test. Even after starting to conduct the interviews, I did continue to adjust the phrasing of the questions and the language in order to optimize the interview guide.

Many of the interviews were conducted late in the evening, as many interviewees could only meet after work. In those cases, flexibility (Berg and Lune, 2012) showed to be of critical importance, when recruiting interviewees. In general, I did not suggest any specific length of time for the interview, as I wanted to see how the interaction and meaning creation developed throughout the interview (ibid.). The duration of the shortest interviews was 20 minutes, whereas the duration of the longest interview was 52 minutes. The average length was approx. 30 minutes. The length of the interview generally was highly influenced by the interviewee’s experiences with Denmark: the more they had personally experienced Denmark and Danish food, the more they would talk about these experiences. It should be acknowledged that interviews with a duration of 20 to 52 minutes most likely do not allow the interviewer to ‘get close to the interviewee’ and develop strong relationships and it is not ‘enough’ to uncover the entire picture of each interviewee make sense of Danish origin in their daily lives. The interviews only show us a fragment of interviewees’ sense making in their daily lives, and therefore the
richness of the data (Maxwell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) should, again, be evaluated in consideration to the scope of this thesis (time limitation etc.).

Finally, it is important to conduct the interviews in a surrounding that is safe, comfortable and relaxing for both the interviewer and the interviewee, and where the interview can take place undisturbed (Byrne, 2012; Berg & Lune, 2012). In the contact e-mail for the interviews, participants were asked to pick any café near their house/nearest train station for the interview location. The intention with this strategy was, first of all to show flexibility as an interviewer (Berg & Lune, 2012), but also to make sure to choose a setting that interviewees were comfortable with. The method turned out to be a success in most cases, yet there were two minor problems. In few cases, interviewees had gone through trouble to find a fashionable café, spending much time on looking up ratings on the Internet (which was not the intention), and in other cases, the café turned out to be very noisy or to have a bad acoustic, which had a negative impact on the recordings. With some effort (re-listening, use of headphones, high volume), I was however able to listen to and transcribe the interviews successfully.

**The Role of the Interviewer**

In the context of this thesis, it is relevant to consider the cultural circumstances of the interviews. The fact that all interviewees are Japanese, and the interviewer Danish/Japanese may have had a great impact on the outcome. Many scholars agree that cultural background and ethnicity has an impact on the interviewing situation (Lincoln et al, 2011; Byrne, 2012; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Clausen, 2004). In an unpublished paper about fieldwork in Japan, Clausen (2004) argues that when doing research in Japan, it is an advantage to be a foreigner stating that, “they will gladly explain anything to a foreigner” (p. 19). Yet, in many of my interviews, I experienced that interviewees were relieved when they found out, that I was capable of speaking Japanese. In fact, almost all interviewees were very curious about my ethnicity and they would usually ask me about my cultural background in the very beginning of our meeting, even before starting the actual interview. The fact that my name is partly Danish/Japanese, my e-mails formulated in Japanese and that I had been contacting them through the Embassy had somehow created an enormous curiosity among the interviewees. Retrospectively, I do think that being a “foreigner”, as Clausen (2004) states, is an advantage as it creates curiosity, yet in the actual interviewing situation, I am certain that being a ‘normal Japanese’ is an advantage as it makes the interviewees feel more comfortable without concerns about language barriers. On the contrary, being partly ‘Danish’ and having the Embassy-tag on my identity, it may have retrained
interviewees from presenting criticism or negative feelings towards Denmark and Danish products (cf. Reflection).

In most cases, I felt that I succeeded in creating a close relationship to the interviewee and to make her feel comfortable (Fontana & Frey, 2008). Even though I tried to do my best to minimize the risk of creating *hierarchical pitfalls* (ibid.), I did experience that I had a far better “*connection*” to some interviewees than others. In the end, it can be concluded that all individuals are different and for some interviewees, it may require several rounds of interviewing before they feel confident enough to speak freely, whereas others already start chatting about their private life before even entering the café. This observation truly highlights the importance of flexibility in adapting each interview situation to each interviewee (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

*Ethical considerations*

To secure full consent and to protect the identity of the interviewees, an informed consent and right to privacy has been given to all interviewees (Fontana & Frey, 2008), through a written contract (Byrne, 2012). In the contract, interviewees have been promised anonymity, restraining me from using their real names in the thesis (Berg & Lune, 2012). The contract is available in appx. 13.

*Expert interview*

With the purpose of exploring the field of Danish food export to the Japanese food market and to get contextual information about the phenomena (Bogner et al., 2009), an expert interview has been conducted in the same period as the other interviews. The interview is not used directly as data in the analysis, but rather as a complement to theories and market data, to gather information about the context of the study (Flick, 2014). Counsellor (Food, Agriculture and Fisheries) Katja Goodhew, from the Royal Danish Embassy in Japan contributed with an interview in March. Similar to the other interviews, the expert interview was conducted face-to-face and the statements used in the thesis have been transcribed. For the interview guide and origin recordings of the interview, please see appx. 16 and 11.

*Data Analysis*

As the main objective of this thesis is to explore/describe how Japanese female consumers make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their food evaluation, the attention is drawn to how participants and interviewees *create meaning* and to *understand* their interpretations of the phenomena. Hence, with reference to
the research question, the main interest in the data is content. Content can be analysed in various ways (Krippendorff, 2004; Holsti, 1969), yet a thematic analysis approach is preferred, as it is a simple method of analysing (Flick, 2014) and is “accessible to the inexperienced researcher” (Riva, 2011). Thematic analysis is also a well-applied tool in qualitative inquiry, where “the researcher review all of the data, make sense of it, and organize it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data source” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). With inspiration from Riva (2011), Flick (2014) and Miles and Huberman (1994), the framework for thematic analysis applied in this thesis is explained.

In figure 2, the research design is illustrated as two wheels: the interpretation wheel and the data gathering wheel. The interpretation wheel should be understood as a hermeneutic circle (Pahuus, 2003), illustrating all the different phases of interpretation throughout the research phase.

As illustrated in the figure, as soon as the data gathering has been initiated, a preliminary coding of the questionnaire responses and interviews finds place. In line with hermeneutics, it is the intention to continuously develop and review new codes/themes, and spending time on such reflections, even
before finalizing the interviews, as it is vital for the quality of the analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This is the main reason why I, immediately after each interview, spent approx. one hour reflecting upon the interviews, taking memos (Riva, 2011) and writing down short summaries (appx. 14). The questionnaire responses on the other hand were first reviewed after all data was conducted.

After conducting all interviews, I listened to all interviews in order to get familiar with the data and to complete the final summaries. The responses from the questionnaires were similarly familiarized carefully. Because of the scope of time for the thesis, the interviews were not all transcribed. Even though transcribing would have been the ultimate method for the preparation of data (Berg & Lune, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), as all interviews were conducted in Japanese, and transcriptions would require translation, only relevant quotes in the interviews, have been transcribed and interpreted.

The data from both the questionnaire and interviews were then coded (Riva, 2011; Flick, 2014). In this stage, an open coding (Riva, 2011) was applied. All sentences relevant for the research question were coded systematically (appx. 1 & 3). Finally, the themes were developed, reviewed and defined. The final themes were placed in a Thematic Conceptual Matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1994), in order to create an overview of all themes, codes and statements (transcripts/questionnaire responses). The matrix is used as the basis for the analysis. For the matrix, see appx. 1 and 3.
Chapter 3
Theoretical Framework
The purpose with this theoretical framework is to structure and guide the study (Silverman, 2013). Consequently, the choice of theories determines the conceptual direction and outcome of the study. Japanese consumers’ sense making of Danish origin could be approached from various theoretical aspects, e.g. psychological, sociological and cultural theories. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the theoretical direction of this thesis is one among other (equally relevant) potential theoretical paths. Another purpose with this theoretical framework is to guide the empirical work (Flick, 2014). Without any prior knowledge about the research fields, it is difficult (if not impossible) to create new knowledge that fills out theoretical gaps and to contextualize and compare empirical findings (Flick, 2014). Hence, it should be emphasized that the theoretical framework of this thesis also guides the more distinct elements of this study, i.e. conduction of empirical data and analysis.

Taking a closer look at the actual research question, it is possible to break it into several pieces of social phenomena: making sense of country of origin, Danish origin, Japanese female consumers and finally, food evaluation/consumption. In order to fully understand the social phenomena of “how Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin, when they evaluate retail food products in their daily lives”, it is necessary to translate these phenomena into concepts. The above four phenomena can be translated into three concepts, as illustrated in a preliminary theoretical framework below (fig. 3): Country of Origin, Danish Origin and Culture and Food Consumption in Japan.

![Figure 3: Preliminary Model of the Theoretical Framework (own creation)](Image)
In this chapter, the relevance of each concept is justified and selected elements are subsequently described. It is important to emphasize that the section does not include comprehensive and detailed descriptions of each concept, but it is rather a mixture of ‘ingredients’ from various concepts that are put together in a ‘bowl’ that will eventually guide this entire study towards the conclusion (the cake). However, with a hermeneutic approach it is important to consider to ‘taste the dough’ once in a while, to make sure to be on the right track. This is why the above model (fig. 3) is revised throughout this chapter, in order to create a final ‘recipe’, that embraces the complexity of the concepts under investigation.

Country of Origin
What thoughts go through a consumer’s mind, when she is standing in the supermarket in Tokyo, evaluating a Danish retail food product? Perhaps she is more concerned about the price or quality of the product rather than the Country-of-Origin (from now on referred to as COO)? Perhaps she remembers lessons from her history classes about Vikings and Danish agriculture? Or perhaps, she instantly associates Denmark with specific food products or brands? In order to understand how Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin in the context of food evaluation, it is relevant to identify previous research that have dealt with similar questions.

Country of Origin in a Globalised World
Growing global trade has not only made foreign products available for consumers, but it has also given companies the choice of purchasing product components from foreign countries (Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). Today, it is very common to find products with multiple COOs; products are thus designed in one country, assembled in a second country with parts from a third country and finally ‘made’ in a forth country (ibid.; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). Such products are called hybrid products, and have changed the entire course of COO research in the past decades (Koubaa, 2008; Lim & O’Cass, 2001; Han and Terpstra, 1998). For Danish retail food products in the Japanese market, Food Labelling Standards only requires companies to specify one COO, i.e. the country of manufacturer, even though the product includes ingredients from more countries (MAFF, 2014). Seen from the consumers point of view, the only information available is “Made in Denmark”, even though the products may be hybrid. Despite increased complexity of COO, in the minds of the Japanese consumers, ‘Danish origin’ may not be perceived as a complex and indefinable phenomenon as they only are informed about the Danish origin, and not about the hybrid aspect of these products. With only one COO cue, the consumers are
likely to evaluate the products based on their image of the country (Maheswaran & Chen, 2009).

Kotler (1997) defines image as “the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds regarding an object” (p. 607). Such image(s) are not necessarily coherent with the actual attributes of the country (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001), but rather their own, individual mental construction(s).

**Multiple Dimensions of Country of Origin Effects: Nation Equity**

Japanese female consumers may use their image(s) of products from Denmark to make sense of Danish origin. This could be strong image(s) acquired through personal experiences with specific products, but it could also be distant image(s) of product categories. Yet, these consumers may also use their emotions to make sense of Danish origin, i.e. emotions towards the country in general. A recently developed framework by Maheswaran and Chen (2009) and Maheswaran et al. (2013) illustrates such a distinction and criticizes the large body of previous COO literature for being too focused on product-based images, neglecting nation-based and emotional images. Under the name *Nation Equity*, Maheswaran et al. (2013) have re-conceptualised the traditional area of COO research, capturing the complexity of the COO effects. As illustrated in fig. 4, the emphasize is both on image(s) related to a country’s commercial performances, e.g. brands, products, companies (*performance equity*) and the general emotions towards a country, e.g. emotions generated by military, political cultural or religious events (*emotion equity*) (ibid.).

![Figure 4: Multiple Dimensions of Nation Equity (own creation)](image)

Nation equity is defined as “equity or goodwill associated with a country” (Maheswaran et al., 2013, p. 155). The level of equity is determined by the images held by consumers outside the Made-In Country (ibid.). Transferred to the context of this thesis, the nation equity of Denmark is determined by the images that Japanese female consumers hold towards ‘Danish origin’. Therefore, by understanding these images, one may be able to fully understand how consumers make sense of a country’s equity.
With inspiration from the multi-dimensional framework (ibid.) the overall theoretical framework for this thesis is revised (fig. 5). In the revised model, the concept of COO is divided in two separate sections, i.e. Performance Equity and Emotion Equity.

![Figure 5: Revised Model of the Theoretical Framework (own creation)](image)

By dividing the concept of COO in two distinct categories, it enables me to break down different elements and images that are involved in the sense-making process, providing a better structure and overview. Performance equity and emotion equity will accordingly provide the necessarily knowledge to respond conceptually to sub-questions 1 and 2.

**Performance Equity**

In a global market place, consumers are used to relate products to countries; wine from France, whisky from Scotland, watches from Switzerland and coffee from Columbia (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Dinnie, 2008). What make consumers associate certain products to certain countries? And to ask a more specific question: do Japanese have any product-based images of Denmark? And does ‘food’ appear in the minds of the consumers as a product category that is related to Denmark? A large number of studies have asked similar questions, investigating the effects of COO in the context of products. To name a few, researchers have studied the COO effect:

1) Across different product categories (Pappu et al., 2005; Hooley et al, 1988; Nagashima, 1970; 1977)

2) Of same products, across different countries (Erickson et al., 1984; Lillis & Narayana, 1974; Schooler, 1971; Nagashima, 1970)
3) In relation to brand/product awareness (Bruwer & Buller, 2012; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Samiee et al., 2005)
4) In comparison with other product evaluation cues (Akaah & Yaprak, 1993; Lee et al., 1992) and
5) In the different phases of the product life circle (Niss, 1966)

Many of these studies examine how COO affects product evaluation and purchase decisions. Even though the majority of researchers agree that COO does affect product evaluation and purchase decisions, researchers do not agree about the degree of influence (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Usunier, 2006; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). The large body of research has proved that COO effect is circumstantial; it depends entirely on the setting, e.g. the source country, the market, the product category and the specific product/brand (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Niss, 1994). Consequently, Japanese consumers may make sense of ‘Danish origin’ differently if they are asked about a different product category, just as they would evaluate French or Italian food differently than Danish food. Conversely, consumers from other markets will most probably have a different image of retail foods originating from Denmark.

Product Familiarity and Experience in Country Image Construction

As mentioned in the methodology, the sampling of participants and interviewees has been a rather strategic process of ‘recruiting’ consumers with different levels of relations to Denmark. Some of these consumers may have extensive experience with Danish retail food products, while others may not even have noticed Danish retail food products in the supermarkets. Consumers’ familiarity and experience with Danish food products (or absence of it) may have great influence on how they construct images of Denmark and make sense of Danish origin (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001).

Several researchers (Erickson et al, 1984; Han, 1989; Shimp et al. 1993) have suggested that relationships between the country image and the actual purchase decision (the COO effect) could be described as a halo or summary construct (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). Country image may on one hand act as the overall halo, affecting consumers’ perceptions towards a product’s attributes, further affecting brand attitude and purchase decision (Han, 1989). On the other hand, consumers may construct a country image based on a summary of their experiences with a country’s products and brands (ibid.). Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) revised the concept of halo/summary constructs as a static model and developed a multi-stage dynamic model, combining both constructs in one model (see fig. 6):
Jaffe and Nebenzahl (1988) found that product familiarity was the key to halo/summary construct. Hence, the above figure illustrates how consumers use the country image as a halo in forming brand attitudes, when they do not have prior experience or familiarity with products (halo constructs). Once consumers have achieved experience or gained familiarity with a country’s products, the country image is revised in accordance with the newly acquired knowledge (summary construct) (ibid.). The development of a country image is hence dynamic and may therefore change over time, as consumers acquire experiences with a country’s products/brands. Finally, if a consumer has positive or negative experiences or is familiar with a product category in a certain country, the consumer may use these product experiences to evaluate other product categories from the same country. Such an act is based on the summary construct and is called a ‘carry-over effect’ (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Niss, 1994).

A critical question would be: do consumers go through all steps in fig. 6, each time they evaluate an imported food product in the supermarket? Perhaps consumers may not be consciously aware of some of the steps, e.g. believes and attitudes? In the questionnaire/interviews, participants/interviewees are asked about their familiarity to/experiences with Danish retail foods, enabling me to analyse how they construct images of Denmark, and also to examine if halo/summary constructs or the carry-over effect finds place for these consumers.
Country-of Origin Effects in Developed and Underdeveloped Countries

Does Denmark’s position as a *developed country* influence how consumers make sense of Danish origin? Already the very first COO researchers (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Nagashima, 1970; Schooler & Wildt, 1968) were curious about how products from developed countries were evaluated, compared to products from underdeveloped countries. They observed a significant difference in attitudes towards products from developed and underdeveloped countries (Maheswaran et al., 2013). Especially Western consumers tend to evaluate products from underdeveloped countries as low-quality products, while recognising products from developed counties as high-quality products (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Shooter (1971) and Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) argue that consumers tend to trust the quality of products from developed countries, as it is perceived that these countries have stringent controls and a well-educated workforce.

Country-of Origin as a Cue in Product Evaluation

One of the major discussions in COO research is whether or not COO has an effect on product evaluation. Several studies (Ahmed et al., 2004; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) have shown that COO is evaluated as a much more favourable cue, when examined as a single-cue. A number of studies (Wall et al., 1991; Han, 1989; Johansson & Nebenzahl, 1987; Schooler, 1971) have therefore examined the effects of COO as a cue among other information cues, also called *multi-cue* studies (Wall et al., 1991). Most of these studies used surveys or experimental manipulation to investigate how consumers evaluate products descriptions (Wall et al., 1991). The multi-cue studies have shown that COO does influence product evaluation to some degree (Bilkey and Nes, 1982), but is far from the superior cue. In an experimental study investigating Canadian consumers, Wall et al., (1991) found that the COO-cue was often used when assessing product quality, rather than the actual purchase evaluation. In a survey-based study, investigating the COO-cue in wine consumption in Japan, Bruwer and Buler (2012) found that intrinsic cues such as taste, style, colour, price and recommendations from friends and family ranked higher than the COO-cue, in the actual purchase decisions.

These studies imply that the COO-cue affects both quality evaluation and purchase decisions to a certain degree, but in comparison with other information cues, the COO cue is not necessarily influential. The studies also indicate that the application of information cues is circumstantial; consumers use different cues depending on the product category and their prior knowledge about the product category (Bruwer and Buler, 2012). Even though the main focus in this thesis is COO (as a
single cue), it does make sense to observe what other information cues (e.g. quality, price) are mentioned, when Japanese female consumers speak about their perception of ‘Danish origin’. To gain an even deeper understanding of the influence of other information cues in the sense-making process, the interviewees who mention other cues will be asked to elaborate its relevance for their overall perception of Danish origin (Appx. 7 & 8).

**Emotion Equity**

It has now been highlighted that consumers use specific products and product categories to create mental images of a country. However, Japanese consumers may also try to make sense of Danish origin by using their emotions or attitudes towards Denmark as a country. According to Maheswaran et al. (2013), emotion equity has been neglected in the large body of COO research. Few studies have found evidence indicating that consumers may hold strong feelings towards a country: feelings that have been developed directly or indirectly through their encounter with a country (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Maheswaran et al. (2013) argue, “even though these emotions and affective reactions are not directly related to product quality or performances, it could influence consumers’ reactions towards products from the related country” (p. 161). For instance, consumers from Nanjing (China) evaluate Japanese products badly because they hold rage towards Japan for committing a massacre during World War II (ibid.). Emotion equity can be positive as well as negative. It includes emotions towards specific products, e.g. *emotional values or attachment for products from certain country*, as well as product-unrelated emotions, e.g. *political, military, religious, historical or cultural factors* (ibid.).

**The Travel Effect**

The halo/summary construct provided a framework to understand how product familiarity and product experience affects evaluation of COO. However, as many of the participants/interviewees have experiences with Denmark that goes beyond product-experience, it makes sense to take a closer look at how travel experiences affects the sense-making process. Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) and Elliot et al. (2011) identify the topic of ‘travel and COO’ as a neglected research area. Elliot et al. (2011) suggest that further empirical research is needed in order to understand the role of travel in relation to the COO effects. Only few conceptual studies (Kleppe et al., 2002; Holmefjord, 2000; Hallberg, 1998; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1986) have attempted to examine the link between travel/tourism and COO effects (Elliot et al., 2011; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). These studies have all conceptually postulated
that travel experiences have a positive effect on consumers’ product evaluation, once they return home and evaluate imported products from the destination (Elliot et al., 2011). Within the existing literature, it is acknowledged that countries with a good tourist industry have a great opportunity of promoting products and services in the tourists’ home country (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001), however, a successful tourist industry may not necessarily be enough to create a positive country image. For instance, the image of Egypt as a tourist destination has overshadowed export activities of the country (Dinnie, 2008), making the success of tourism a disadvantage for Egyptian exporting companies.

These studies imply that tourism (in most cases) has a positive influence on consumers’ evaluation of the destination and products from their travel destination after their return. Because of the lack of empirical evidence proving this, it is highly relevant to observe and analyse any differences in perceptions among consumers who have/have not visited Denmark. Such findings may shed light on how consumers use emotions/feelings from their travel experiences to make sense of COO in product evaluation.

**The Foreignness Effect**

Some Japanese female consumers may favour Danish products above domestic products, not because it is ‘Danish’ but simply because it is ‘foreign’. Such a COO effect is called the ‘*foreignness effect*’, and is often observed in underdeveloped countries, where consumers may favour products from developed countries due to their admiration with lifestyles in these countries (Maheswaran et al., 2013). Yet, the foreignness effect has also been observed in developed countries, e.g. Japan, where local brands dominate the skin-care market while foreign brands dominate the beauty-care market (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). Consumers may be attracted to certain characteristics of foreign country/countries, and because of the “emotional or symbolic meaning embedded in foreign-made products, consumers who are more susceptible to the social norm influences tend to evaluate foreign products better and demonstrate the foreignness effect” (p. 162).

Japanese consumers may also favour Danish retail foods, simply because it is ‘Danish’. Similar to the foreignness effect, Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) identify a consumer group called ‘friends’. While the foreignness effect is directed towards non-specific countries (e.g. Western countries), “friends-effect” is based on affective emotions towards one specific country. *Friends* tend to continuously purchase
products from a particular country “even when s/he realized that the products are not superior to other offerings” (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001, p. 79).

The Ethnocentrism Effect

Some consumers may have preferences towards products from their own country rather than foreign countries (Dinnie, 2008). This goes by the terminology, ethnocentrism, and in some markets, it is identified as a significant barrier for exporting companies (Niss, 1994), and may also highly influence how Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin. The ethnocentrism effect has been under academic investigation for many years (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). Most research has been focussed on the economic perspective of ethnocentrism, e.g. by developing scales to measure ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), yet the cultural aspects of consumer ethnocentrism remain relatively undiscovered (Maheswaran et al., 2013).

Some ethnocentric consumers favour domestic products because they believe that products from their home country have better quality standards than imported products. Other ethnocentric consumers tend to believe that purchasing imported products have crucial consequences for the economy of their home country, e.g. by contributing to employees losing their jobs (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). In some extreme cases, consumers may fear that their purchase behaviour directly harm the national economy and feels that it is “inappropriate, immoral, or even unpatriotic to buy products from foreign countries” (Maheswaran et al., 2013, p. 163). In a study examining US and Japanese consumers’ attitudes towards domestic products, Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000) found that Japanese consumers had preferences towards domestic products regardless of the price differences, whereas American consumers use both COO-cues and price-cues to evaluate products. These findings indicate that different ethnocentrism effect can be found across (developed) countries and that “ethnocentrism towards home country products is more likely to occur in collectivist countries like Japan” (Mahesawan, & Chen, 2009, p. 104). It is important to underline, that ethnocentric consumers do not reject imported products from specific countries, but treat all foreign products the same way (ibid.).

In order to learn more about how Japanese female consumers use emotions towards Denmark to make sense of Danish origin, participants/interviewees will be asked about both positive and negative feelings towards Denmark (Appx. 4 & 7). The interviewees will furthermore be asked to compare their attitudes towards Danish food to other foreign food products as well as domestic food products (Appx. 7). Responses to such questions may reveal if and how foreignness-effect, friends-effect and ethno-
centrism-effect influence the sense-making process. However, the questions may also reveal new emotional effects that are not covered by these three conceptualized effects.

**Danish Origin**

As mentioned previously, the effect of COO is circumstantial, and determined by the source country (Jaffe & Nezenzahl, 2001). So, in order to understand how Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin, it is essential to understand what ‘Danish origin’ is. A few researchers (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008; Niss, 1995, 1994; Djursaa et al., 1991; Djursaa, 1989) have tried to explore the images of Denmark and Danish origin in foreign countries. These studies may provide some findings enabling me to gain a better understanding of the social phenomena, ‘Danish origin’.

**The Representation of Danish Origin in International Marketing Communications**

In a pilot study, Djursaa et al. (1991) interviewed elites from 12 Danish companies exporting to the British market about their attitudes towards applying ‘Danish origin’ in their marketing. The findings showed that almost all companies use the same image components, such as: *design, environment, agriculture, fisheries, Vikings, The Little Mermaid, The Great Dane, Tivoli, ‘well-organized’ and ‘stability’* (Djursaa et al., 1991, p. 128).

With inspiration from Djursaa et al. (1991), Niss (1994; 1995) conducted a comprehensive empirical study, based on 58 questionnaire responses and 20 interviews, representing 9 different industries (incl. the food industry) operating in different export markets (incl. Japan). Exploring the use of national image components across different product groups and export markets, Niss (1994; 1995) found that only companies within the *agriculture- and food industry, environment industry and design industry* had advantages of using ‘Danish origin’ in their marketing strategies. While Denmark has a well-established image as an environmental, agricultural, food producing country with a sense for design, consumers do not associate Denmark with advanced technology and industrial production (Niss, 1994). Her findings indicated that the image(s) of Denmark are more fairy tale-like in distant markets (e.g. Asia), compared to European markets, where consumers tend to hold more ‘realistic’ images of Denmark. Results also showed that knowledge of Denmark was far more prevalent in the neighbour countries (West Europe and Scandinavia), hence in the most distant countries, consumers tend to have very little knowledge about Denmark (ibid.).
Images of Danish Origin in Japan

Few Danish studies have investigated image(s) of Danish origin in Japan (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008; Clausen, 2006a; 2006b). In their thesis, Okamura and Heiberg (2008) explored how Danish origin was perceived in the design furniture market. They concluded that Danish furniture exporters should take advantage of the positive image(s) connected to ‘Made-in Denmark’, in order to “communicate the values of high quality, timeless design and fascinating lifestyle to the Japanese consumer” (p. 86). Their findings showed that Japanese consumers (who consume Danish design/furniture) were fascinated by aspects of the Danish culture/lifestyle, such as the welfare state, work-life balance, family life, relationship with the nature and the fact that Denmark is the happiest nation in the world (Asklund, 2014; Okamura & Heiberg, 2008). Meanwhile, findings implied that Danish design/furniture also appealed to traditional Japanese values, e.g. traditional art/craftsmanship, the feeling of nostalgia (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008). According to Clausen (2006a, 2006b), some Japanese consumers are fascinated by Denmark, because of cultural differences as well as cultural similarities. In her research, she found that the Danish image of ‘slow life’ is appealing to Japanese consumers, because it is the exact opposite way of life, compared to the busy lives of Japanese cosmopolitans (Clausen, 2006b). At the same time, ‘slow life’ appeals to the Japanese’ appreciation for simplicity that is traditionally grounded in their Zen philosophy (Clausen, 2006a).

While Clausen (2006a, 2006b), Okamura and Heiberg (2008) provide a picture of some Japanese images of ‘Danish origin’ they do not mention any images related to food products. However, their results are very interesting for this thesis, as it opens up for the opportunity to compare the findings and thereby provide an even deeper understanding of how Japanese consumers make sense of ‘Danish origin’.

Culture and Food Consumption in Japan

Several COO researchers (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Chasin et al., 1989) point out the importance of understanding the home country in order to fully understand the effects of COO. The home country has “cultural and social impact on the consumer, both in reference to consumption patterns and in shaping his attitudes towards products made in different countries” (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001, p. 26). The nationality and culture of the consumer affect how the consumer perceives products and countries (Chasin et al., 1989). Hence, ‘Danish origin’ is most likely to be perceived different by consumers from different cultures, as “there are cultural differences in the
ability to perceive certain stimuli as well as in the feelings and images they evoke” (Schütte and Ciarlante, 1998, p. 63).

Many researchers (e.g. Hofstede, 1991; Hall, 1959) have tried to explain aspects of Japanese culture through generalisations and descriptions of dominant behavioural patterns and specific cultural characteristics (Askehave et al., 2006). These researchers tend to understand culture as something predetermined and static (Clausen, 2011) and such an approach to culture is not considered as being consistent with a constructivist inquiry. In accordance with the constructivist beliefs, culture is, however, based on individual’s subjective interpretations and should be understood as a result of social interaction (ibid.; Clausen, 2006). Based on such a belief, it has to be acknowledged that it is impossible to conceptualize an entire culture; hence, the aim is to only explain aspects of a cultural phenomenon (Osland & Bird, 2000). In this section, some aspects of the social phenomena, ‘Culture and Food Consumption in Japan’ are emphasized, in order to guide the researcher in understanding the cultural and behavioural processes, in order to examine why Japanese consumers make sense of Danish origin, the way they do.

Nihonjin-ron: The Uniqueness of Japanese Culture

The cultural term, ‘nihonjin-ron’ (feeling of Japanese) refers to the uniqueness of Japanese culture. It is a sense of feeling that many Japanese people hold, emphasizing the nature of Japanese culture as “an almost mystical, unique, spiritual identity” (Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000, p. 61). Many Japanese tend to feel that they are fundamentally different from people in other nations and cultures, in terms of culture, race and mentality (ibid.). Researchers explain that the nihonjin-ron is one of the reasons behind the unique consumption patterns of Japanese consumers (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008; Knight and Kim, 2007; Befu, 2001). As Japanese consumers tend to “think deeply on their food” (Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000, p. 213), they also use nihonjin-ron to make sense of food consumption. For instance, nihonjin-ron is believed to be one of the main drivers behind ethnocentrism (ibid.). Nihonjin-ron is also visible in other aspects of (food) consumption, e.g. extreme perfection in the aesthetics of food (Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998) as well as the attraction to cuteness and simplicity (Clausen, 2006). This indicates that nihonjin-ron may affect Japanese female consumers’ sense-making of Danish origin the context of food evaluation.
Japanese (Female) Consumers and The Context of Food Consumption

The context of the food consumption and evaluation may impact consumer’s sense-making process; for instance, Japanese female consumers may make sense of Danish origin in one way during their stay in Denmark, while making sense in a different way after returning to Japan. Contextual factors such as location, timing, purpose and companion may influence how food is being evaluated (White, 2001). Food plays a vital role for Japanese female consumers in their relationships with their female friends (ibid.). Through ethnographic observations and interviews, White (2001) found that Japanese female consumers “use food as a means for engaging in relationships, organising their participation in consumption and expressing themselves creatively” (p. 63). Female consumers use food as an activity; pursuing new culinary trends, learning about new food cultures, exchange information about food and give food-related gifts. Food has become a source of entertainment, replacing former popular entertainment activities, such as shopping and going to the movies (ibid.).

Japanese Food Consumption in Times of Globalisation

Japanese food consumption has undergone changes due to the recession, economic crisis of 2008 (Haghirian, 2011) as well as earthquake/tsunami/Hiroshima-Daiichi disaster in 2011 (Assmann, 2013). Demographic changes, such as a growing elderly population and rising labour participation of women have changed the lifestyles of Japanese consumers and their consumption behaviour (Assmann, 2011). These changes should be considered, as these factors are likely to influence how Japanese female consumers evaluate retail food products in their daily lives.

Foreign Influences

As a result of the globalisation, Japanese food culture has been highly influenced by foreign countries (Assmann, 2011). As Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000) point out, Japanese consumers are experts in “borrowing” from other cultures; hence much ‘foreign food’ has been adjusted to the Japanese taste preferences and incorporated into their daily repertoire of food, e.g. Japanese-style spaghetti with seaweed, fish roe and soy-favour. It is further claimed that some Japanese consumers have an “intense interest in things foreign (...) interested in other possibilities and are more intent on keeping their eyes on the Joneses, even foreign ones” (Ashkenazi & Jacob, 2000, p. 215). Imported retail foods are therefore very accessible for Japanese consumers, especially in urban areas (Assman, 2011).
Obsessed with Quality

For many years, quality has been emphasized as the superior feature for Japanese consumers (Jonke & Takahashi, 2002; Martin & Herbig, 2002), and despite economic crises, quality is still considered the king of all product attributes (Haghirian, 2011). Japanese consumers’ feelings towards quality can be traced back to the “ritualistic perfectionism and precision of the purification rites of Shinto worship” and is closely related to other attributes, such as food safety and cleanliness (Schütte and Ciarlante, 1998, p. 80). As long as quality is in place, consumers tend to not show sensitivity to prices, and in many cases, price acts as an indicator for quality; the higher the price, the better the quality (Hagrian, 2011). However, as the result of the economic crises, consumers have become price-conscious and have accepted the qualities of cheaper brands (ibid.).

New is Always Better

Japanese consumers, and female consumers in particular (White, 2001) are attracted to new products. Japanese marketers have responded to this demand, providing consumers with ‘shin-hatsubai’ (new and improved products) and gentei (special editions). Within food products, shin-hatsubai products can be as simple as a new flavour or packaging, whereas gentei products tend to follow the seasons, e.g. pink kitkats for the cherry blossom season. This attraction towards everything ‘new’ stresses Japanese consumers’ fascination towards innovation. (Haghirian, 2011)

Food Safety and Ethnocentrism

Some Japanese consumers hold much concern about safety, making the rhetoric of abunai (dangerous) and kiotsukette (be careful) part of daily conversation. This ‘fear for danger’ is also present in food consumption, where food safety is considered equal as to national security (Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000). In a recent study, based on 616 qualitative interviews with Japanese consumers, examining several product evaluation cues, Haddock-Fraser et al. (2009) found that intrinsic cues, such as freshness, food safety, hygiene and taste acted as indicators for product quality. This study confirms previous hypotheses about the importance of food safety (anzen) and peace of mind (anshin) in Japanese food consumption. As a consequence to numerous food scandals in recent years (Morinaga milk incident in 1955, Snow Brand incident in 2000, Chinese dumpling incident in 2008, and Hiroshima-Daiichi incident in 2011), Japanese consumers have become alert towards food safety (Assmann, 2013; 2011).
Several researchers (Assmann, 2013, 2011; Haghirian, 2011; Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000) argue that concerns about food safety are one of the major triggers behind ethnocentrism. Some Japanese consumers consider domestic products as safe, as it has high traceability and transparency (Assmann, 2011). Ethnocentric consumers in Japan also tend to consider Japanese food as being healthier and more ‘natural’ than imported foods (Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000). However, according to Haghirian (2011), “necessity trumps ethnocentrism” (p. 27), hence products that are not domestically produced (e.g. wine or cheese) are largely accepted in Japan, also among ethnocentric consumers.

A Final Model of Theoretical Framework

The four concepts (performance equity, emotion equity, Danish origin and food consumption in Japan) have now been presented, justified, discussed and described. The different ‘ingredients’ have been mixed together, and it is now time to for the final ‘tasting’. In the below figure (fig. 7), all the different elements of the four main concepts are illustrated:

![Figure 7: Final Model of the Theoretical Framework (own creation)](image)

While the concepts of Performance Equity and Emotion Equity will guide me in responding to sub-question 1 and 2, the concepts of Danish Origin and Culture and Food Consumption in Japan will provide some of explanations for why Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin the
way they do. The purpose with the two latter concepts is thus to provide support, in the interpretation process.

All these components together form the final theoretical framework that guides the research from this point. This theoretical framework is also the foundation of the questionnaire and interview guides (appx. 4 & 7). Each question in the questionnaire and interview guides is theoretically justified in the theoretical versions of the questionnaire and interview guide (Kvale, 2009) that can be found in appx. 6 and 8.
Chapter 4
Analysis
This analysis sets out to explore how Japanese female consumers make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their every-day food evaluation, through performance-based and emotion-based images. The theoretical concept of Performance Equity will guide the analysis of ‘Performance Based-Images’ in responding to sub-question 1, while the theoretical concept of Emotion Equity will guide the analysis of ‘Emotion-Based Images’ in responding to sub-question 2. These two analyses will all together provide a response for the overall research question, as illustrated in fig. 8:

As an introductory comment to the analysis, it should be emphasized that it is not the purpose of this analysis to generalise certain consumer behavioural patterns on behalf of all Japanese female consumers. This analysis however, represents nuanced images, associations and perceptions shared by the participants and interviewees who participated in the survey and follow-up interviews. It should be acknowledged that, even though words as ‘Japanese female consumers’ and ‘consumers’ are used when referring to the target group, the findings do not account for every single consumer/female consumer in Japan. Besides acquiring new knowledge about sense-making of Danish origin, the finding in this analysis should also, hopefully, provide us with new knowledge about how consumers draw on different images to make sense of a COO.
Performance-Based Images

When participants/interviewees were asked to put words on their images of Danish origin and Danish retail foods, they responded with answers relating to the performances of Denmark. This analysis captures major themes in these nuanced responses:

1) The lack of images of Denmark as an food-producing nation
2) Images of a dairy, pork and pastry-producing nation
3) The rareness of Danish food products
4) Price, taste and context of Danish food products
5) Images of food packaging

Denmark: Not a Food-Producing Nation

A minority of the interviewees (Kokona, Koharu, Anna and Akari) have difficulties connecting Denmark to food products. One of the interviewees, Kokona, who is a housewife from Tokyo, emphasise the lack of connection between Denmark and food by comparing ‘Danish origin’ with food from neighbouring European countries. As she expresses herself:

*Salmon is Norway! That kind of a ‘strong point’ is not there. There’s no direct connection to something Danish (…) there’s nothing like, “Denmark is famous for xxx”, e.g. the Norwegian Salmon or cheese from Holland.* (Kokona)

The same issue is highlighted in the questionnaire, where a minority of the participants (66 people, 11 pct.) responded that they had “no image” and “cannot think of anything”, when asked about their images of Danish food (Appx. 3). These observations could imply that, for some consumers there is not a clear initial country image of Denmark as a food-producing country (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Han, 1989). Some consumers do simply not think about food as a product category, when they make sense on ‘Danish origin’. According to some participants/interviewees, this lack of connection between ‘Denmark’ and ‘food products’ does have a negative impact on their evaluation of Danish food products. A participant relates to this as follows:

*If only there is a product, where you could say, “This is Denmark!” just like the simple images of British tea and German sausage or beer. Then I think the Japanese people would purchase the products even more.* (Age group 25-34, Hyogo Prefecture, Appx. 9a)
According to this participant from Hyogo prefecture, Japanese consumers are reluctant to choose Danish food products, because they have a hard time connecting specific food products to the country. Based on this quote, it can be argued that some consumers may evaluate Danish food products negatively, as a result of lacking knowledge or simply because other product categories (e.g. design goods) tend to overshadow food as a product category of Denmark (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008; Niss, 1994). Even though only a minority of the participants/interviewees hold such an image of Danish origin, it is an important observation, as it shows that some consumers perceive ‘Danish origin’ negatively, when they evaluate food products. Bearing in mind the sampling and distribution methods for this thesis, and consequently the number of participants/interviewees with a relation to Denmark, it is worth considering that the more ‘general’ Japanese consumer may tend to share such image of Danish origin. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants/interviewees do actually see a connection between Denmark and food in different ways, i.e. dairy, pork and bakery.

The Kingdom of Dairy, Pork and “Danish”

In the questionnaire, 57 pct. of all participants (333 participants) responded that they associate Denmark with dairy products (Appx. 3). This quantitative observation is furthermore confirmed by a number of interviewees (e.g. Ayaka, Shiori, Ichika and Sara), who all identify dairy products as the most important product type among Danish food products. For some interviewees, dairy is a part of their mental images of Denmark, as Shiori, a graduate from Tokyo, puts it,

If I think about dairy products like cheese, I think that the Danish ones are better considering the long history of dairy. (Shiori)

As expressed by Shiori in this quote, she recognises Denmark as a dairy-producing country in a historical perspective. Shiori’s statement may imply that a certain degree of authenticity can be ascribed to Danish dairy, because of the long history. This interpretation can further be exemplified by Himari, a Danish language student, who prefers Danish cheese because of the authentic taste:

What I think about instantly is: dairy. For cheese and processed food I think it’s better to eat the authentic ones instead of the ones from Japan. It is from the “Kingdom of Dairy”, so I’m guessing that it also tastes properly. (Himari)

For Himari, the authenticity of the Danish cheese makes it more attractive and tasty than the Japanese variety, and she furthermore emphasise that Denmark is the “Kingdom of Dairy”, indicating that dairy
as a product category is an integrated part of the Danish nation image. Hence, it can be argued that both Shiori and Himari use initial images of Denmark (Kingdom of Dairy) to create believes about attributes (tasty, authentic). In other words, Shiori and Himari use ‘Denmark’ as a halo, to make sense of dairy as a product category (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Han, 1989).

Besides dairy, 33 pct. (193) of the participants associated pork and processed meat products with Denmark. It has been observed throughout the responses is the questionnaire and interviews, that many consumers hold positive images towards Danish pork (Appx. 1 & 9b) and some even prefer it to domestic pork (e.g. Momoka). Compared to dairy, participants/interviewees do not emphasize much on authenticity in regards to pork as a product category. When participants/interviewees speak of their images of Danish pork, they tend to highlight issues such as safety and quality. Rin for instance emphasises on food safety, while a participant from Tokyo emphasises on quality:

*I think rather than buying pork from other foreign countries, I do feel more ‘safe’ with the Danish choice.* (Rin)

*I think pork with Danish origin has a good quality, so I feel like buying it*

(35-44 years old, Tokyo Prefecture, Appx. 9b)

Rin and the participant from Tokyo both rationalize their positive images of Danish pork by pointing out issues that relates to the condition of the product: safety and quality. This is an interesting observation compared to the attraction towards ‘authentic’ Danish dairy, because it clearly shows how different product types (dairy and pork) within the same product category (food) appeals to consumers in different ways. This may imply that performance-based images do not only differ from category to category, but each product type appeals to consumers in its very own unique way. In previous COO research where several product categories have been involved (Pappu et al., 2005; Hooley et al, 1988; Nagashima, 1970; 1977), researchers tend to compare one product category with another regardless of differences among the product categories. For instance, Niss (1994; 1995) investigated Danish food as one product category, without defining the exact product type. Based on the different images of Danish dairy and pork, it could be argued that generalising images of one single product category may be a dangerous move, as performance of a nation may be rated differently even across specific product types.
While images of dairy and pork were identified across the majority of participants/interviewees (57 pct. and 33 pct.), a smaller group of participants (17 pct.) and interviewees (Mei, Kokona, Ayaka, Yui and Yuna) identifies bakery products with Danish origin. Especially the fact that “Danish” in Japan is used as a name for (Danish) pastry may have created a connection between baked products and Denmark. Ayaka, a Danish design enthusiast exemplifies this:

What about “Danish”? Isn’t it something from Denmark? Because of the name, I really have strong image of Denmark. But I’ve never been there, so I really wonder how Danish people consume “Danish”… (Ayaka)

For Ayaka, the name “Danish” is confusing, as she is not sure whether or not it relates to the nation, Denmark. Her confusion may however, come from the fact that Japanese food culture has been experiencing much foreign influence in recent decades (Assmann, 2011). Foreign products have been taken into the country and presented to the consumers after a cultural adjustment (Assmann, 2011). This development may therefore be confusing for the consumers, as they are not sure about the origin of the product/idea; in the same way as Ayaka is confused about the origin of “Danish”.

Andersen Bakery and Fukushima Dairy are two examples of Japanese companies who have borrowed ideas from Danish food culture and used it in the Japanese market. Andersen Bakery (Picture 9) has branded themselves as a Danish bakery with products such as Danish pastry and rye bread (Andersen, 2014). A few participants/interviewees refer specifically to the Andersen brand, when asked about Danish origin and food, which indicates that Andersen Bakery has become an integrated part of their images of Denmark. The same can be said about the Japanese company, Fukushima Dairy (Picture 10), where participants/interviewees (e.g. Misa) refers to the product range, “Danish Yoghurt” from Fukushima Dairy (Appx. 1 & 9a). Danish Yoghurt is produced with Danish yoghurt cultures and thereby marked as yoghurt with Danish origin, even though the product is produced in Japan (Fukushima Dairy, 2014).
These observations show that consumers not only use imported Danish food products to make sense of Danish origin, but also relate domestically produced (Danish-inspired) products to Denmark. This is an important finding in the context of previous COO research, as research only tends to focus on products that are imported into the market and not products that are produced domestically. In a globalised world, where national food cultures inspire foreign food producers and become an integrated part of foreign consumers’ daily lives, it is perhaps highly relevant to re-conceptualize the notion of origin?

Despite the limited variety of Danish retail food products in Japan, majority of the participants and interviewees seem to make a connection to foods (dairy, pork and baked products) as products of Denmark. However, an interesting observation is that participants/interviewees associate ‘Danish food products’ with various food product types and not specific brands or names of products (Appx. 3). In the light of the halo/summary construct (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Han, 1989) it can be argued that the participants and interviewees construct their image of ‘Danish origin’ based on blurred and unspecified images of Denmark and a small number of Danish food product types (dairy, pork and bakery). This could imply that some consumers use their initial country image as a halo-construct to make sense of the Danish products they see in their supermarkets, rather than using concrete images of Danish products (i.e. brand attitudes) to define the country image (summary-construct). This interpretation can be explained by the fact that only a limited variety and amount of Danish retail food products are available for the Japanese consumer. Hence, consumers may not have the information and the brand/product awareness it takes to create a basis for a summary-construct.
Rareness of Danish Food: Attraction versus Rejection

For many participants, the notion of ‘rareness’ is used continuously, when making sense of food with Danish origin (Appx. 9a, 9b & 9c). For some participants/interviewees (e.g. Rio, Saki, Sakura), the rareness of Danish food is perceived as an attractive attribute, whereas for other participants/interviewees (e.g. Yuna), rareness leads to a total rejection of Danish food products. According to White (2000) and Hagrian (2012), Japanese female consumers are fascinated by all things new. Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000) furthermore argue that Japanese consumers are keen on keeping themselves updated with new foreign products. Perhaps this consumption trend is what is reflected in the observations of the participants/interviewees’ attraction towards rare food products. For some interviewees, ‘rareness’ is the driving force behind purchase decision, as expressed by Sakura who is currently studying to be a primary school teacher,

*I always tend to buy things that are rare, so I think the fact that Danish food is rare makes it very attractive, for me at least.* (Sakura)

For Sakura, the rareness-dimension brings up a curiosity, leading to attraction and finally, purchase. Meanwhile, other interviewees perceive ‘rareness’ as a quality stamp of products, thereby finding it attracting for its perceived quality. For instance, Misa believes that Danish products in Japan have an extraordinary quality because they are rare (Appx. 1). In other words, if a product from a rare country has been imported, it is believed that the product must have a special feature, perhaps a feature that cannot otherwise be found in Japan. This can be backed up by Aakari’s statement:

*When I look at the country of origin, and if I see food from a rare country, I would think that the product is taken as a specialty, and that the quality must be high.* (Aakari)

When Akari sees food products from rare countries, she instantly believes that the product is a specialty. For Akari, a specialty product equals high quality and she thereby perceives rare products as high-quality products. The fact that products are rare may therefore bring up positive feelings, not only towards quality, but also towards the desire for perfection that is fundamental for the Japanese consumer (Schütte and Ciarlante, 1998)

When asked about the impact of ‘Danish origin’ in the context of food consumption, a number of participants in the questionnaire responded that the ‘rareness’ of Danish food products made them
reject the products completely (Appx. 9a). The ‘rareness’ takes up resources in finding the products, as expressed by a participant from Kanagawa:

Danish fish, confectionary and dairy products are tasty but there is a larger variety among Japanese products and it is easy to get hold of it. Therefore, I have decided not to care much for imported food products. (34-43 years old, Kanagawa Prefecture, Appx. 9c)

This participant has decided to reject imported food product, because of the lack of availability of Danish food products. Despite Japanese consumers’ obsession with trying new products (Hagrian, 2012), some consumers are not that interested in spending resources on exploring unfamiliar products, such as Danish food products. This observation implies that some Japanese female consumers prefer convenience rather than following their curiosity. With the growing participation of women in the Japanese labour market (Assmann, 2011), it may not be all Japanese female consumers who have the time and resources it takes to hunt down rare Danish food products.

To sum up, some Japanese female consumers hold an image of Danish food products being very rare; for some consumers the rareness is an attractive attribute, whereas for other consumers, rareness is a reason for rejecting the products. As a final note, it is relevant to highlight that previous multi-cue COO research does not include ‘rareness’ as a cue in product evaluation (Akaah & Yaprak, 1993; Lee et al., 1992). Even though an attraction/rejection based on ‘rareness’ may be a culturally determined cue in Japan, it may be worth including it as a cue in future research to see if similar trend can be observed outside of Japan.

Price, Taste and Context: Danish Food Products as a Luxury

When the participants/interviewees describe their images of Danish origin and Danish food, they tend to mention the expensive price (Appx. 1 & 3). For some participants/interviewees, the high price is an actual observation, whereas for others it is a perceived image.

Rationalising the High Price

When interviewees were asked to elaborate on their statements about the high prices, the majority rationalised the issue, concluding that the prices are ‘reasonable’ considering the circumstances. Following the latter theme, some interviewees (Yui, Hina and Akari) justify the high price with the ‘rareness’ of the Danish products, as exemplified by Akari, a young accountant without any relations to Denmark:
I also have an image of it being expensive. You don’t really see it, so I think maybe food from rare countries may be expensive. (Akari)

According to Akari, foods with COO that are rare in Japan are also expensive; hence she uses the ‘rareness’ dimension as an explanation for the high prices. Other interviewees (e.g. Anna and Yui), however, justify the high price by emphasizing the import and transportation expenses, as expressed by Misa, a working mother with a slight interest for Denmark:

But it’s imported and brought into Japan, so I guess it’s not necessarily a bad thing. So it’s acceptable, I guess. (Misa)

In this quote, Misa not only rationalized the high prices of Danish food products but she also accepts them. Other interviewees, e.g. Momoka and Yui, also share this feeling of acceptance. Misa also acknowledges that the high price is not a “bad thing”, which could imply that a high price does not necessarily lead to rejection. As mentioned previously, price can be an indicator for quality (Hagrian, 2011) hence Japanese consumers are willing to accept expensive products in return for quality (Jonke & Takahashi, 2002; Martin & Herbig, 2002), innovation and rareness (Hagrian, 2011; White, 2001). If the price is too low, it may affect the perceived quality and perceived ‘rareness’ of the product and may lead to a much more negative evaluation of the products. As nation image is also created based on a country’s commercial performances, a negative product evaluation could eventually influence the overall image of a nation (Maheswaran et al., 2013). This link between quality, price and COO is exemplified by Rin, a teacher who teaches Danish gymnastics in Tokyo:

If there were let’s say onions and carrots with Danish origin and Japanese origin, same prices and beside each other – then I’d choose the Japanese one. Because I would be concerned about the fact that the prices are the same. Considering the transport expenses and everything, if the prices are the same, I would assume that the quality is then worse.

(Rin)

For Rin, it brings up certain concerns about product quality if the price for the Danish product is equal to a similar Japanese product, because of the additional transport and import expenses related to the Danish product. Accordingly, Rin assumes that the Danish product has a lower quality. Consequently, it can be argued, that in the minds of the consumers, the distance of the COO also determines the price of the product; the longer the distance to the COO, the higher the prices should be. Price is therefore
not only a cue among other product evaluation cues, but it also acts as an indicator for product quality and the overall evaluation of the performance equity of a nation.

Based on above analysis, it can be said that Japanese female consumers perceive Danish food products as being expensive. Consequently, they tend to rationalize the high price by using logical explanations such as rarity, transportation expenses, distance and quality. On the contrary, this could also imply that some Japanese female consumers use the price as a cue to make sense of the COO; hence, if they see an expensive product, they might associate it with a rare country with a far distance, e.g. Denmark. The multi-cue studies however, only tend to compare the product evaluations cues (e.g. COO, price and quality) independently (Maheswaran et al., 2013). Based on the above findings, it would therefore be interesting to discover how different cues affect each other in the product evaluation situation, as the findings clearly indicate a connection between the different cues.

Only for Special Occasions

The high price of the Danish food products does influence how the products are used among participants and interviewees. According to some interviewees, because of the high price, Danish food products can only be used for special occasions, as emphasised by Haruka, who visited Denmark last year:

Compared to Japanese products, Danish products are very expensive. So thinking about the daily life, I don’t think that you can afford to use it, unless it’s for a special occasion.

(Haruka)

For Haruka, the high price of the Danish food products means that she cannot imagine using the products for daily use (Appx. 1). Other interviewees also share same thoughts about the context of consuming Danish food products. Misa, Ichika and Anna for instance, would buy Danish food products, when celebrating birthdays with friends (Appx. 1). These observations show that the price of a product also influences the use of it, hence the more expensive the product is the less it is used in daily life. However, according to some of the interviewees, price is not the only factor in using Danish food for ‘special occasions’; taste also plays an influential role. Misa and Ichika both think that the taste of Danish food is not fitted for everyday use, but rather for special occasions. They both prefer to use Japanese food products in their daily lives and for them eating ‘Danish’ is perceived as a an activity of trying something new, as exemplified by Misa:
I think the food culture is very different from the Japanese one, so I guess the tastes are very different from what we are used to in our daily lives (...) In my daily life, I eat Japanese food, but I guess sometimes; the same feeling as when I want to try out Korean or Indian food. (Misa)

In this quote, Misa compares eating ‘Danish’ with eating other exotic cuisines (Korean and Indian), which have different tastes that are not fitted for her daily life. As mentioned in the theory section, food consumption has become an important activity for engaging in relationships among Japanese women, where food is used as an activity replacing activities such as shopping and going to the movies (White, 2001). The fact that ‘Danish food’ is used for special occasions (i.e. parties, birthdays and trying out something new) indicates that ‘Danish food’ products may be used for social occasions. On the contrary, this also means that ‘Danish food’ is not a part of Japanese female consumers’ daily lives. This is an interesting observation, especially seen in the light of the recent foreign influence on Japanese food consumption (Assmann, 2011). Foods with Italian and French origin has been deeply incorporated to the daily repertoire of Japanese food consumption (Ashkenazi & Jacob, 2000), however, this does not seems to the case for Danish food products. The limited product variety and quantity (Appx. 11) of Danish products or the lack of knowledge/information about Danish cuisine may be the reason behind this situation. Consequently, it can be concluded that Danish food products are not an integrated part of the consumers’ daily lives; however, the fact that it is used for ‘special occasions’ supports the image of Danish food products as high quality, rare and expensive products. According to Rin, a purchase of a Danish food product is a luxurious purchase, which brings up positive feelings:

I feel like I’ve made a luxurious purchase [when she buys Danish food]. In my daily life, I think the majority is domestic food. So when I buy [Danish] cheese, I kind of feel like buying something good, something special... (Rin)

These above interpretations highlight the fact that consumers use food products differently depending on the origin, price and taste of the product. Hence, in another country than Japan, Danish food products may be consumed in a different context. Finally, this analysis section has shed light on an important finding; that different product evaluations cues (i.e. price, quality, rareness, taste and purpose/context of consumption) are influenced by the COO and vice versa. This finding calls for an
investigation of the interrelations between these COO cues, as they do not only influence the overall product evaluation but also influence each other.

**The Design-Food Intersection: Packaging**

When Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin in their evaluation of retail food products, they go beyond the topic of ‘food’ as the core product and speak about related attributes such as packaging and package design. Two interviewees (Kokona and Sara) even brought a book named “Cute things from Nordic Denmark” (Amazon, 2014), illustrating various package designs of Danish food products (fig. 11). An attraction towards Danish package design can be observed throughout the questionnaire responses as well as the interviews (Nanami, Sara, Yui, Yuna, Miyu and Kokona). This may indicate that packaging of products influence the way some female Japanese consumers make sense of Danish origin. For Yuna, package design is what makes Danish food products attractive, or as she expresses it:

> The packaging of the food is also very cute, and I noticed that it is very different from Japan. The cocoa [Mathilde] is very famous [in Japan], and down to every detail, the design is very cute. (Yuna)

In the quote, Yuna emphasises the cuteness of Danish food packaging and points out that it is different from Japanese package design. According to Clausen (2006), attraction towards cuteness is an integrated part of the *Nihonjin-ron* (feeling of Japanese). Yuna’s quote and Kokona and Sara’s presentation of the book indicate that Danish food packaging somehow speak to Japanese female consumers’ obsession with cuteness. This finding may indicate that Japanese consumers are not only concerned about the practical purpose of the product (eating it), but also the aesthetic/symbolic value it brings to buy a cute Danish product.

The attraction towards cute ‘Danish’ products, however, is a topic that goes far beyond food products. According to many of the interviewees (Kokona, Momoka, Himari, Rio and Yui), the concept of Danish and Nordic “zakka” (translated into English “general home goods”) are very popular right now, with the Danish chain store “Tiger” gaining increasing popularity. Himari relates to this topic as follows:
I think “zakka” is very hot right now and many people would jump right on it, if you say that it’s “Nordic”. Tiger is really popular right now and many people are waiting in line to get in. (Himari)

Many of the participants/interviewees have strong associations to Denmark as the country of cute “zakka” and design goods. Although cute “zakka” and design goods are not the focus of this thesis, associations to these two entities profoundly affect how these consumers perceive Danish food products, as they tend to assume that Danish food packaging is similarly fashionable (Appx. 1 & 3). According to Kokona, a “Danish zakka” enthusiast, people who are interested in Danish food products are people, who already have an interest in Danish/Nordic design, which is why she suggests that food packaging should be emphasised more:

I think a lot of those people who are interested in food from Denmark are also people who are very much into Nordic design, so it’s important to pay attention towards packaging. (Kokona)

Based on Kokona’s quote, it can be interpreted that a possible ‘carry-over effect’ (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Niss, 1994) can be identified, as the positive associations of Danish/Nordic “zakka” and design (Okamura & Heiberg, 2008) is used to make positive sense of Danish food products. In other words, the associations from one product category (design goods) are used to create new associations towards another product category (food). The ‘carry-over effect’ from design goods to food packaging may result in attracting consumers who have certain expectations to design and quality towards food packaging. Hence, it can be implied that ‘carry-over effects’ from product group B (e.g. design) may bring unexpected challenges for product group A (e.g. food), because consumers expect that product group A lives up to the same standard (e.g. quality of packaging design) as product group B.
Emotion-Based Images

When participants/interviewees were asked to put words on their images of Denmark, Danish origin and Danish food, they used their emotions to express themselves. This analysis captures major emotion-based images of Denmark that influences participants/interviewees’ evaluation of Danish retail food products, i.e.

1) Lack of images/emotions
2) Images of Northern Europe
3) Images of Denmark: nature and climate, political system, happiness, slow life and fairy tale
4) Ethnocentric emotions
5) Interest and sense making
6) Travel experience and sense making

Lack of Images: Does Denmark have a Blue Flag?

A number of participants and interviewees who do not have close ties to Denmark have a hard time speaking about Danish origin and Danish food because they have very few images, associations and perceptions of Denmark as a nation. This lack of images of Denmark means that some participants and interviewee do not make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their daily food evaluation. This is a very interesting observation as it does tell us that not all Japanese female consumers make sense of ‘Danish origin’.

This lack of image can be exemplified by Rin. Rin used to study at a folk high school in Funen for a year. Teaching Danish gymnastics on a daily level, she often face Japanese people who have very little knowledge about Denmark, or as expressed by herself:

(...) people have very little knowledge. They don’t know the location of the country, only that it’s one of the Nordic countries (...) I think because of this, because Japanese people do not have any images of Denmark, it’s difficult for them to buy it. (Rin)

Based on her own experiences of explaining ‘Denmark’ to Japanese people (Appx. 1), she is convinced that the lack of knowledge is the reason why consumers are reluctant to buy Danish products. In the light of the theory of halo/summary construct, it can be interpreted that some consumers do not hold an initial country image of Denmark; hence they may not create any ‘beliefs about attributes’ about
Danish products and nor will they purchase Danish products intentionally (Han, 1989; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). For some consumers, Denmark as a nation is so unfamiliar that they do not even know the location of the country (Rin, Himari) or the colour of the flag (Anna):

*My first image of the Danish flag was blue! I really don’t know anything!* (Anna)

A few participants/interviewees use the notion of ‘distance’ to rationalise the lack of images of Denmark. For some participants/interviewees, Denmark is so far away that they have a hard time defining the country. This can be exemplified by Akari, an accountant from Tokyo without relations to Denmark:

*And I guess compared to other countries, there is very little knowledge. There’s nothing in particular that comes into ones mind, when you say “Denmark”. I think there is a lot of distance in between [DK and JP], and I guess this has a negative impact somehow.* (Akari)

For Akari, her knowledge about Denmark is very limited compared to other countries and she therefore has a hard time imagining what ‘Denmark’ is. In the quote, Akari expresses that there is a ‘distance’ between Denmark and Japan. This notion of ‘distance’ can have multiple meanings; either it can mean *geographical* distance or *symbolic* distance, in the sense that information and knowledge about Denmark is distant for her. Both interpretations of the word ‘distance’ however indicate that for some consumers, Denmark is an unfamiliar destination that they have a hard time relating to.

Traditional COO studies tend to focus their research on large, well-known countries, e.g. USA, France, Germany and Japan (Maheswaran et al, 2013), however very few studies have conducted research of nation images/COO of small, less-known countries. This may therefore be the major reason why most COO research does not speak of ‘lack of images’ in their findings. As a small and political inferior country, Denmark may not be as ‘known’ in exporting markets as the neighbouring, large and well-known countries, e.g. Germany and France. This shows us that size and familiarity of a country may matter, when consumers in distant markets construct images of a country.

Even though this ‘lack of image’ is a minor theme among the responses in the questionnaire and interviews, it is relevant to consider that the majority of Japanese female consumers may share this feeling. This interpretation is based on the fact that the majority of the participants/interviewees who participated in the survey/interviews have relations (e.g. travel experience, interest) to Denmark;
hence their degree of knowledge about Denmark is likely to be much higher than the ‘typical’ Japanese female consumer. Seen from this perspective, it may be worth considering how Denmark can become more known among this segment in order to increase the number of consumers who do make sense of Danish origin.

The Hokuo Confusion: Is IKEA Danish?

The majority of the participants/interviewees who lacked in their images of Denmark were however capable of locating Denmark as a part of Northern Europe. In Japan, and among the participants and interviewees, the word “hokuo” (北方 = Northern Europe) is used, when referring to the Nordic countries as one entity. This word was used in the majority of the questionnaire responses (Appx. 3 & 9) and in all 22 interviews (Appx. 1 & 10), when participants/interviewees are asked to verbalise their images of Danish origin. This may indicate that some consumers have a clearer mental picture of ‘Northern Europe’, despite lacking in their images of Denmark. The trend may also indicate that some consumers simply use their mental images of ‘Northern Europe’, when making sense of Danish origin.

Even though the majority of the participants/interviewees seem to have stronger images of Northern Europe than of Denmark, they do still have difficulties identifying differences between the countries. An example that is mentioned several times throughout the interviews (Misa, Hina, Anna, Akari and Mei) is the confusion towards the origin of the Swedish furniture company, IKEA:

IKEA... that’s Finnish, right? (Akari)

IKEA is.... Sweden, right? I don’t think people think about Sweden specifically but more of “hokuo”. (Hina)

In these two quotes, Akari and Hina are confused about the origin of IKEA. According to Hina, Japanese consumers do not perceive IKEA as a Swedish brand, but rather as a “hokuo” brand. These quotes illustrate how consumers have difficulties distinguishing between brands/products from Nordic countries, but rather perceive the brands/products as a Nordic brand/product. The same feeling of confusion can be identified for other Nordic characteristics, e.g. similarities of the flags (Kokona, Anna), geographical location (Anna, Momoka, Himari) and the origin of the Finish character, Moomin (Miyu, Kokona, Haruka, Yui and Hina). The feeling of confusion also dominates images of food cultures
in the Nordic countries, as participants/interviewees tend to believe that Danish food is similar, if not equal to foods from fellow Nordic countries. This is expressed by Ayaka, an office assistant from Tokyo:

_I also have the impression that they are eating sort of the same things? Similar ways of serving food?_ (Ayaka)

Ayaka believes that Danes have similar food culture as the rest of the Nordic countries. Hence, for Ayaka, it is difficult to define ‘food with Danish origin’, as her images are blurry and cover the entire region of Northern Europe. Ayaka’s feeling of confusion regarding Nordic/Danish foods may be explained by the fact that Japanese opinion makers often approach Nordic countries as one location.

According to Haruka, the majority of guidebooks contain travels guides for all Nordic countries,

_If you try to buy guidebooks, all the Nordic countries are put in one book. It’s difficult to find a book only for Denmark. And for TV programmes, it’s often you see a programme about “hokuo”. So even though you have Moomin, I don’t really know if it’s Norwegian or Danish, it’s a “Nordic” character._ (Haruka)

In this quote, Haruka shares a frustration towards the difficulties of finding a guidebook for Denmark alone. She furthermore emphasises that even TV programmes tend to tell stories from “hokuo” rather than each Nordic country. Finally, she underlines the fact that even the origin of the Finish character, Moomin, is difficult to identify. Another interviewee, Kokona, participated at a “Nordic Christmas Food Seminar” at the prestigious Japanese department store, Isetan, where home-cooked meals from all Nordic countries were presented in a mixture (Appx. 1). Harika and Kokonas’ experiences shows how Japanese opinion makers (book publishers, TV stations, retail stores) send out messages of one ‘Nordic’ country rather than pointing out the distinctive characteristics of each Nordic countries.

The findings in this analysis demonstrate how some consumers make sense of a country’s origin (Denmark) based on his/her perceptions of surrounding or similar countries (Northern Europe). The strong images and representation of “hokuo” in Japan is a very interesting observation, as this may imply that national images not only account for nations, but also for regions. In the stream of COO research, most studies tend to examine the effects of countries and not regions. For future research, it would therefore be very interesting to examine Region-of Origin in comparison with Country-of Origin, in order to provide some more clearance about how images of countries influence the images of a region and vice versa.
Images of Denmark: From Nature to Fairy Tale

When participants and interviewees make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their every-day food evaluation, they use their images of Denmark. All these images create emotions for the participants/interviewees and affects how they evaluate Denmark and Danish retail food products. In the next four sections, the following images/themes and their influence on the sense-making process is analysed: 1) Nature and Climate, 2) Political System, 3) Lifestyle and 4) The Happiest Land of Fairy Tales.

Nature and Climate

Many participants and interviewees have strong associations to ‘nature’ when they are asked to put words on their images of Danish origin and Denmark as a country. The image of Denmark as a ‘natural’ country does not only remain as an initial nation image, but it bring up emotions among some participants/interviewees. These emotions are then eventually transferred into actual beliefs about attributes for Danish retail food products (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). More specifically, the image of Denmark (nature) creates emotions (peace of mind, curiosity) that are transferred into believes about attributes (safe, tasty, good).

Several participants and interviewees believe that countries with rich nature are capable of producing ‘good food’, as expressed by Misa:

(...) beautiful natural scenery (...) If there is a lot of nature, and for countries that care about their nature, I think that good food can be produced in countries like these. If it has too much an image of cities, then I don't think it brings out an image of good food production. (Misa)

For Misa, images of natural scenery and care for nature brings forward positive feelings towards Danish food production, while images of cities brings forward negative emotions. Misa’s positive feelings towards Denmark’s image of ‘nature’ are transferred into the belief, that Denmark produces ‘good food’. But ‘good food’ is not the only belief that is brought forward by the image of nature. Other interviewees, like Haruka, believes that natural surroundings has a positive impact on taste of the food:
The wide spaces, fields with cows… I imagine that these cows are raised in wide green spaces. And I really think this is a good thing, and then I think that it must be tasty. (Haruka)

For Haruka, images of wide green spaces and fields assure her that livestock are brought up in ideal surroundings, and she furthermore assumes that such livestock are tasty. Hence, for Haruka, the image of ‘nature’ makes her believe that Danish food products (dairy products or beef) are tasty. According to Haddock-Fraser et al. (2009), taste acts as an indicator for food quality. Transferred to the context of the image of ‘nature’, it can be implied that believes such as ‘taste’ and ‘good food’ may act as an indicator for the quality of Danish food. Hence, is can be interpreted that the image of nature appeals to Japanese consumers’ obsession with quality (Jonke & Takahashi, 2002; Martin & Herbig, 2002).

Other participants/interviewees tend to believe that Danes’ care for nature has a positive impact on food production. Several participants and interviewees believe that food with Danish/Nordic origin contains much less additives than foods from other countries (Appx. 1 & 9b). Some participants and interviewees furthermore believe that majority of Danish/Nordic foods are organic (Appx. 1 & 9b). These beliefs are exemplified by Haruka and a participant from Tokyo:

I've always had an image of “hokuo” as being safe and filled with nature: beautiful green areas, clean lakes… (...) People are also really nice and there is a good environment, so taking all these things into consideration, I don’t think that anyone [of these people] would do anything bad. So, if the food is made in this place with care and without bad additives, it must be good. (Haruka)

I feel peace of mind, because it’s a country that strongly values organic production. (Age group 55-64, Tokyo Prefecture, Appx. 9b)

Haruka expresses a great trust towards the people who produces the food products; she assumes that “nice people” and the care given by these people assure the quality of the products. As expressed by Haruka and the participant from Tokyo, the images of ‘natural’ production (i.e. less “bad” additives, organic) brings up emotions such as safety and peace of mind. According to Haddock-Fraser et al. (2009) and Ashkenazi and Jacob (2000) both safety (anshin) and peace of mind (anzen) are fundamental emotions for Japanese consumers; feelings that have only become more important after
recent years’ food scandals and concerns towards radioactivity (Assmann, 2013). Considering these theoretical findings in Japanese consumer behaviour, it is even more noteworthy that participants and interviewees feel safe and peace of mind, when they evaluate food products with Danish origin.

Besides nature, the climate of Denmark also brings forwards emotions among few participants and interviewees (Appx. 1 & 9b). According to Yui and Shiori, images of Denmark as a country with cold climate lead to beliefs such as ‘good taste’ and ‘safety’:

*I think that food from colder places has a more delicate taste. Food from south is more strong in taste, that’s also good, but still sometimes I think it’s too spicy. (Yui)*

*I think what concerns me the most are warm countries. The further north I go, I think the more ‘peace of mind’ I get. If it’s a warm country, how is has it then been preserved? (…) From countries that are warm, I do have concerns towards the preservations, especially towards additives. (Shiori)*

Yui believes that Denmark with its cold climate produces foods that have a delicate taste. Shiori, on the other hand believes that foods from cold countries provides her the feeling of “peace of mind” because it is preserved in cold surroundings with low risk of contamination. Hence, for consumers like Yui and Shiori the initial country image (cold climate) brings forward emotions (taste sensation, peace of mind) that are transferred into believes about attributes (tasty, safe).

As demonstrated above, nature and climate as initial nation images of Denmark influence how participants/interviewees make sense of ‘Danish origin’ in their food evaluation. According to Maheswaran et al. (2013), emotions towards a country can be influenced by political, military, religious, historical or cultural factors. However, geography as a factor (land use, climate) is not mentioned in their literature. The findings of this analysis may imply that geography may create emotions related to a COO, hence it is suggested that geography should be considered as an influential factor in the construction of emotion equity on equal basis with the other factors.

**Political System**

As mentioned above, political factors are one of the influential factors behind emotion equity (Maheswaran et al., 2013). Similar to the Danish image of ‘nature’, images of the Danish political system brings up emotions among some participants/interviewees (e.g. peace of mind, admiration)
leading to actual beliefs about attributes of food products (e.g. safe, trustworthy), thus influencing participants and interviewees’ sense-making of Danish origin.

First of all, the image of high food safety and hygienic standards in Denmark seem to dominate participants and interviewees’ images, when they make sense of Danish origin, as Anna, a housewife from Tokyo puts it:

**But when I hear about Denmark, then I have an image of a stable government so I think that the food safety system must be well-established.** (Anna)

For Anna, the image of a “stable government” provides her assurance about a well-established food safety system. Hence, it can be said that her image of the Danish political system brings forward beliefs about food safety and trustworthiness. Similar to Anna, Sakura also believes that Danish food products are safe, or as she puts it,

**I kind of have the image that Northern Europe is very similar to Germany and has the same strictness and seriousness, so I think that there is a good hygienic standard. This is probably why I also think that it may be safe.** (Sakura)

In this quote, Sakura compares the image of Northern Europe with the image of Germany, indicating that both regions have strict and serious hygienic standards. According to her, these images of good hygienic standard makes her believe, that foods with Danish origin are safe. For both Anna and Sakura, the Danish origin is perceived as a reliable origin, because they trust the political system of Denmark. According to Verlegh & Steenkamp (1999) and Shooter (1971), Western consumers tend to evaluate products from developed countries more favourable due to the stringent control and well-educated workforce. Despite the fact that Japan is not a Western country, the examples with Anna and Sakura demonstrate how political aspects of developed countries (e.g. stable political system, high standards) appeal to their emotions.

Many participants and interviewees (e.g. Saki, Himari and Nanami) mention ‘welfare’ when asked about their general images towards Denmark (Appx. 1 & 9b). However, these images of ‘welfare’ also play an influential role when evaluating Danish retail food products. Some consumers tend to believe that the Danish welfare system is the fundament of reliable food safety standards, as Anna puts it:
Taxes are high, but you have a high standard of welfare (...) And also because of this transparency, I think you’ll have increased food safety. I think you can have peace in mind and consume it. (Anna)

According to Anna, the Danish welfare system provides transparency and increased food safety. For Anna, this gives her the feeling of ‘peace of mind’. Similarly, Sara believes that the Danish image of welfare system makes Denmark stand out as a trustworthy country:

I think many people know about Denmark; it’s known for the welfare system, happy and proud citizens. So I think there is a general perception that Denmark is trustworthy and gives you peace of mind. (Sara)

In the quote, Sara emphasises that Denmark as a trustworthy country brings up the feeling of ‘peace of mind’. Anna and Sara’s quotes illustrate how images of a welfare system influence consumers’ evaluation of food products. The welfare system somehow brings up one of the most fundamental, culturally embedded emotions among Japanese consumers, i.e. the feeling of peace of mind (Assmann, 2011). As previously mentioned, both safety (anzen) and peace of mind (anshin) are crucial attributes for food evaluation in Japan (Assmann, 2011; Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000), which may explain why the participants/interviewees value images that brings forward such emotions.

Images of Denmark and welfare do not only appeal to some Japanese consumers’ concerns for food safety, but it may also appeal to their personal political stance. The fact that Denmark represents a political system that is radically different from the Japanese model has caught the attention of some participants/interviewees (Appx. 1 & 9b). Even though these emotions do not directly relate to their evaluation of food products, it may still be considered as an important symbolic factor that may indirectly influence consumers’ attraction towards foods with Danish origin. After reading books about the Danish society and welfare system, and visiting Denmark herself, Hina comes to the conclusion that she holds a feeling of admiration towards Denmark:

The system is quite different compared to Japan. For instance if there is child with a heart disease, then the country takes care of all the expenses. So everyone have the same equal rights, opportunities. I really think this is admirable. (Hina)
For Hina, the welfare system is admirable because it gives people equal rights and opportunities. As a medical professional, Hina see the advantages of free medical care. As mentioned before, feelings as these may not directly influence the evaluation of Danish retail foods. Yet, for Hina, the admiration towards the Danish welfare system is incorporated in her image and perception of Denmark. Hence, when she makes sense of ‘Danish origin’, regardless of the product, she is likely to use her emotions towards the country in the evaluation process. After her visit in Denmark, Hina frequently purchases Danish food products in Japan, as expressed by herself:

*Personally, it is a place that I'm much interested in, so I am curious about the tastes.*

(Hina)

For Hina, it may be her recent visit in Denmark, her interest in Danish music and movies (Appx. 1) or even her admiration towards the welfare system that is the main driver behind her attraction towards Danish food products. Nevertheless, the example of Hina demonstrates how various non-performance related factors influence the attraction towards Danish food products. This example emphasise the fact that more COO research should focus on emotion-based images, as consumers do draw on their emotions when making sense of the COO of products (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Maheswaran & Chen, 2009).

*The Happiest Land of Fairy tales*

Besides political aspects (i.e. welfare), a number of participants and interviewees are also attracted to the cultural aspects of Denmark. Similar to the above topic of the ‘admiration towards welfare’, the cultural aspects that participants/interviewees admire may not directly affect their evaluation of food products; yet, the admiration may create emotions that influence their sense making of food with Danish origin.

For some participants/interviewees (Appx. 1 & 9e), Denmark’s title as the “*Happiest Country in the World*” (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2013) is an admirable title that creates curiosity and attraction. This tendency can be exemplified by Sara, a psychology student from Kyoto:

*The fact that Denmark has such a high percentage of happiness. If you made the same questionnaire in Japan, I think very little people would define themselves as being happy.*
Japanese people tend to be very negative. But Danes having so much confidence about their happiness – I really admire that. (Sara)

Sara’s example demonstrates how Denmark’s title as the “Happiest Country in the World” may create emotions, such as admiration and curiosity towards Denmark as a nation.

Many participants and interviewees expressed an attraction towards the “slow” lifestyle in Denmark (Appx. 1, 9b & 9e). Some interviewees (Rio, Sara and Misa) highlight that the ‘flow of life’ in Denmark is much more natural and calm than in Japan. Rio works at a design goods (zakka) company that mainly imports products from Nordic countries, and faces many customers who are attracted by the Nordic ‘slow life’:

The lifestyle in Japan is very busy and the homes are very small and cramped. So the slow-life of the Nordic countries, or the down-to-earth enjoyable lifestyle is very appealing to people here. That kind of people, with admiration towards Nordic life style is also our customers. (Rio)

As expressed in the above quote, Rio believes that the Nordic lifestyle (slow life, down-to-earth, enjoyable) is appealing to Japanese consumers because it stands out as a contrast to the busy and cramped Japanese lifestyle. According to Rio, the Nordic lifestyle creates admiration amongst Japanese consumers. Rio’s experiences acquired through her work align with the research findings of Clausen (2006b), which showed that Japanese consumers are attracted to the Danish image of ‘slow life’ because of its contrast to the hectic life of Japanese cosmopolitans. Based on Rio’s quote, it can be argued that the Danish image of ‘slow life’ appeals to some consumers because of radical cultural differences (slow/hectic lifestyle) between Denmark and Japan.

The majority of the participants and interviewees associate Denmark with the world of fairy tales (Appx. 1, 9b & 9e). According to Hina, this is a general among Japanese consumers:

The thing that first pops up to my mind, or I think for all Japanese people, is probably H. C. Andersen. (Hina)

For Hina, H.C. Andersen is embedded in her metal image as something very ‘Danish’, and she argues that ‘all Japanese people’ hold the same images as her. For Hina, the fairy tales of H.C. Andersen is just
one of many images of Denmark, however, for other interviewees the image of fairy tales is an admirable image, as Rio puts it,

*The [fairy tale] image sort of comes up to the surface. It’s not too showy, but still simple and warm, close to the nature and it kind of sparkles.* (Rio)

For Rio, the Danish images of fairy tales go beyond H.C. Andersen and the Little Mermaid. Because of her admiration towards the fairy tale image of Denmark (apx. 1), she is able to describe her images down to every detail. The participants and interviewees’ strong images towards fairy tales may be because of the long distance between Denmark and Japan. According to Niss (1994) consumers in distant markets tend to hold a fairy-tale like image of Denmark, compared to consumers in Europe who have a more realistic image of Denmark. The long distance between Denmark and Japan may result in this positive but fuzzy image of Denmark.

In this analysis section, it has been demonstrated how many participants/interviewees have strong cultural images of Denmark as ‘the happiest nation’, ‘slow life’ and ‘fairy tale’. However, there are no evidence in the data indicating that cultural images and emotions (admiration) towards these images are transferred into specific believes about attributes. Although these images may not create believes about attributes of food products, an admirable nation image will most likely not harm the images of Danish origin. Perhaps, future marketers can find a solution to somehow incorporate images of happiness, slow life and fairy tale into the food products (e.g. branding or packaging), and enjoy the advantages of a positive nation image?

**Danish Food and Ethnocentric Emotions**

When participants and interviewees make sense of Danish origin in their every-day food evaluation, some do not only use their emotions towards Denmark, but towards their own country, Japan (Apnx. 1 & 9c). In all cases, emotions toward Japan are positive and overrule any positive emotions participants/interviewees may have towards Denmark. Such consumption behaviour is called *ethnocentrism* (Dinnie, 2008; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001) and is found to be very common among Japanese consumers (Assmann, 2011; Haghirian, 2011; Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000; Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000). After observing several ethnocentric statements among the questionnaire responses, it was decided to include a question in the interview guide, which asked interviewees to
compare their feelings towards domestic and foreign food products (Appx. 7). This analysis section will shed light on the most predominant themes among the responses: *Taste, Food Safety* and *Support*.

Some interviewees (Sakura, Saki, Misa, Shiori and Sara) prefer domestic food products to Danish food products, because they believe that domestic products are more suited for the ‘Japanese taste’. This can be exemplified by Saki, a university student majoring in Russian,

_I think that it’s only Japanese people who can produce food that fits the Japanese taste._

(Saki)

Saki believes that only domestic food producers can produce food that is fitted to the ‘Japanese taste’. Saki’s quote may imply that she doesn’t believe that Danish food products fits the Japanese taste/flavour preferences. This idea of a mismatch between Danish/foreign foods and Japanese products is also emphasised by Sakura, a university student from Kyoto who majors in education:

_Also if the country of origin is non-Japanese, it means that they are using other cows than in Japan, and if they are using other cows, the taste is probably different. I think that the cheeses made from the cows in your own country are probably more fitted for your body._

(Sakura)

Sakura believes that cheese made out of milk from Japanese cows are more fitted for the Japanese body and taste. Similar to Saki, this may imply that Danish cheese simply is not fitted to the Japanese taste, because it is not ‘Japanese’. Saki and Sakura’s ethnocentric emotions towards Japanese produced foods can be explained by the cultural phenomenon of ‘nihonjin-ron’ (feeling of Japanese). As mentioned in the theory section, ‘nihonjin-ron’ is a feeling deeply embedded in the Japanese culture, and characterises the emotion of uniqueness (Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000). Hence, Japanese consumers tend to identify themselves as unique people, in terms of culture, race and mentality. Saki and Sakura’s statements both indicate that they feel that the ‘Japanese taste’ is a unique taste that only Japanese people (Saki) and cows (Sakura) can provide. It can therefore be argued that the feeling of Japanese (nihonjin-ron) highly influence how Saki and Sakura make sense of foods with Danish origin, as their feeling of uniqueness is a barrier in creating attraction towards foreign food products.

For other interviewees (Yui, Yuna, Ayaka and Ichika), food safety is the main reason why they favour domestic food products to Danish/foreign products. Contrary to the ethnocentric emotions towards
the taste of the food, emotions towards food safety is not grounded in the ‘nihonjin-ron’. Interviewees’ concerns towards the safety of imported products is not related to the transportation of the foods, as Yui puts it,

(...) because it’s far away, something may occur during the transportation. (...) It brings up huge requirements for the freezing technology, and food that may have been safe before could become un-safe because of this process. (Yui)

Yui has concerns about possible contaminations during transportation of the food products, and she emphasises that even safe foreign food may become unsafe because of the transportation. For Yui, the lack of trust is not directed towards any countries, but rather the transportation technology, e.g. methods of freezing during transportation. Yui and other interviewees’ (Yuna, Ayaka and Ichika) concerns towards food safety of foreign products reinforce their positive emotions towards domestic products. Concerns for the safety of imported food products make them believe that Japanese food products are safer and better for them. According to several researchers, (Assmann, 2011, Ashkenazi and Jacob, 2000), Japanese consumers consider domestic products as safer than imported food products, as it has high traceability and transparency (Assmann, 2011). Based on this theoretical knowledge, it can be argued that interviewees as Yui, Yuna, Ayaka and Ichika may favour Japanese products because of the short duration of transportation which makes is easier to trace the products and provides them a higher degree of transparency. Thus it can be implied that distance has a negative impact on how consumers make sense of food products with Danish origin.

According to Maheswaran et al. (2013), some consumers may believe that by purchasing foreign products, they may contribute to harming the national economy. This is how few of the interviewees (Nanami and Ichika) feel, when they express their feelings towards purchasing Danish food products. For both Nanami and Ichika, the preference towards Japanese food products is not a question of mistrust towards the quality of Danish food products, but rather to support their country. This support towards Japan as a nation can be exemplified by Ichika’s statement:

I want to support Japan! Imported products tend to be more popular. US origin is usually cheaper. Even though everyone says that domestic is the best, people tend to buy the imported ones. So for me, even though the Japanese one is a bit more expensive, I think I’ll buy that one. Japan really needs support right now. I think the Japanese agricultural
Ichika refers to the suffering agricultural sector in Japan and shows concerns towards the future of the sector. This may imply that Ichika somehow feels responsible for contributing to help domestic farmers preserve their businesses. It can be argued that Ichika feels that it is her patriotic duty to support the growth of her nation (Maheswaran et al., 2013).

In this analysis section, different aspects of Japanese consumers’ ethnocentric emotions have been examined. The findings show us that some Japanese female consumers are reluctant to buy foreign food products, including Danish products, because they have strong emotions towards their home country. These emotions create a barrier that keeps consumers from purchasing foreign/Danish food products. According to Maheswaran et al. (2013), cultural aspects of ethnocentrism is relatively undiscovered. This analysis demonstrates how cultural phenomena (e.g. nihonjin-ron, obsession with safety) affects ethnocentric emotions among consumers, in their evaluation of food products. However, it is important to acknowledge that the results would most likely have been different, if other product groups had been examined; perhaps, Japanese consumers will have different ethnocentric emotions when evaluating other products categories from Denmark, e.g. medicine or design goods?

**Denmark-Fan: From Interest to Emotions**

Because of the segmentation of the questionnaire, majority of participants (69.3 pct., 402 participants) have relation to Denmark. Roughly half of these participants (32.4 pct., 188 participants) specified in the questionnaire, that they have an interest in Denmark. While reviewing the quantitative data from the questionnaire, it became clear how interest had a noteworthy impact on the positive attitudes towards the evaluation of ‘Danish origin’ (Appx. 9f). Figure 12 illustrates the percentage of participants who have/have not purchased Danish food products in Japan; the red column show the participants with no relation to Denmark, while the blue column show the participants with interest in Denmark. The figure illustrates how participants with an interest in Denmark tend to have product experience, while participants with no relation to Denmark tend to have less product experience. Figure 13, illustrates the percentage of participants who believe/do not believe that ‘Danish origin’ has an impact on their evaluation of imported food products. The figure shows how participants with an interest in Denmark also tend to believe that ‘Danish origin’ has an impact, while participants without any
relations tend to believe that ‘Danish origin’ does not have an impact on their evaluation of imported food products.

The findings illustrated in fig. 12. and fig. 13 may imply that interest for a country increases, not only purchases of products from the country, but also consumers’ believes towards the impact of the COO in their every-day food evaluation. In order to gain a deeper understanding about this theme, eight interviewees with an interest for Denmark were asked about various aspects of their interest.

**HETALIA**

Two interviewees, Yui and Sakura started to become interested in Denmark because of a Japanese anime named “Hetalia”. According to Yui and Sakura, Hetalia personifies countries from all over the world in different historical and cultural contexts (Appx. 1). Denmark is personified in the anime, represented by a character named “Den” (see below pictures).

In the following quotes, Yui express how their interest for Danish food and Denmark started with their interest in Hetalia:
And they also tell stories about food, so it caught my interest. And since then, I became more aware about it [Danish food]. I was really drawn to these characters and became very fascinated by the Nordic countries. (Yui)

Yui found her interest for Danish food through the stories about foods in Hetalia, while Sakura was motivated to start following the Nordic embassies on social media (Appx. 1). For both interviewees, the interest for Hetalia has developed into a deep interest for Denmark as a country. According to Yui, when she sees a Danish food product in a Japanese supermarket, she feels happy, or as she puts it:

I guess I feel happy? I think about the Danish character from the anime, “Den”. So I think: “Oh! It’s Den!” (Yui)

Based on this quote, it can be interpreted that Yui’s interest for Hetalia has a great impact on her feelings, not only towards Denmark, but also towards Danish food products. In the interview, Yui elaborates how she cannot afford to travel to Denmark herself. In order to compensate for this on an emotional level, she uses illustrations in guidebooks to find inspirations for new ways of preparing dishes using Danish food products (Appx. 1). This way, she imitates how Danes cook Danish food and sets a mood by creating a moment of “make-believe”, as she puts it:

When I bring home a special Danish food item, we usually try to set a mood (...) try to change the space for one moment. “Game of make-believe” is important. (Yui)

For Yui, her interest in the Japanese anime has led her, not only to Danish food products, but also to imitating Danish lifestyle and food culture. This moment of “game of make-believe” is Yui’s way of compensating for her lack of travels and to create excitement in her daily life. While Yui’s interest for Hetalia has brought her on a journey of exploring Danish food cultures, Sakura’s interest for the anime has created a curiosity towards Danish society and culture, or as she expresses herself:

In the begging it was of course the characters that were my interest; but after doing some research about the countries then suddenly I became interested in several aspects. Bicycles, ecology etc. I also found that Denmark has a very old Royal family! (Sakura)

After watching Hetalia, Sakura started to research several aspects of the Danish society (bicycle, ecology) and culture (Royal Family). Hence, it can be said that for Sakura, her interest for Hetalia has evoked an interest for Denmark. Because of her interest, Sakura is also more open towards Danish
food products: “Denmark is basically on the other side of the world, so I just want to say welcome” (Sakura). As demonstrated above, for both Yui and Sakura, Hetalia creates a positive initial country image of Denmark in different ways and on different levels. These positive images create positive emotions towards Denmark that are transferred into believe about attributes: for Yui about food safety and for Sakura about rareness (Appx. 1).

These examples with Yui, Sakura and their interest in the Japanese anime, Hetalia support a previous interpretation. As mentioned before, Japanese produced food companies as Andersen Bakery and Fukushima Dairy influence consumers’ images of foods with a Danish origin. Similarly, the Japanese anime, Hetalia, is another example of how something non-Danish can influence images of Denmark and Danish food products. These examples once again imply that consumers in a country (e.g. Japan) use foreign-inspired domestic objects (products, anime) to make sense of a COO.

**Cultural Scene of Denmark: Music and Film**

Three interviewees, Rio, Miyu and Hina all became interested in Denmark and Danish food because of the cultural scenes of Denmark. Even though Rio and Hina go under the category of participants with travel experience, their motivation for travelling to Denmark arose from their interest for the cultural scenes of Denmark (Appx. 1). The following example with Miyu demonstrates how interest for Danish music can lead to an interest for Denmark and Danish food products.

Miyu started to study Swedish at evening classes because she was frustrated about not being able to read the website for a Swedish rock concert event. At the language school, Miyu met other students who studied Danish language and learned about the annual Danish rock festival in Roskilde (Appx. 1). Because of Miyu’s interest, she is motivated to purchase Danish food products, or as expressed by herself:

*Well, I do have an interest, so I do feel that I want to try it.* (Miyu)

Miyu’s example again shows how an interest in Denmark leads to actual purchase of Danish food products. The examples with Miyu’s interest for music and Yui/Sakura’s interest for Hetalia, demonstrates how different interests for Denmark influence attitudes towards Danish origin as well as purchase decisions. These examples also show different degrees of interests, e.g. Miyu with a broader interest in Nordic music (mainly Swedish) and Yui with a specific interest towards Denmark. This may
also imply that the degrees of interest in a country may influence the degree of emotions that a consumer holds towards the COO; hence, consumers with a light interest or consumers with an interest in a region (e.g. Miyu and hokuo) may demonstrate a foreignness-effect while consumers with a strong interest in Denmark (e.g. Yui and Hetalia) may demonstrate a friends-effect (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). Based on these interpretations, it can be argued that the more interest a consumers has for a COO, the more will she demonstrate a friends-effect, rather than a foreignness-effect.

Travelling and Making Sense of Danish Origin

Among all participants in the questionnaire, 27.8 pct. (161 participants) specified that they have visited Denmark. Similar to the observations with participants, who had specified that they have an interest in Denmark, the observations of the participants with travel experiences showed a very interesting tendency. When participants with travel experience were asked if they had ever purchased Danish food products, 86 pct. had answered yes (Appx. 2). As illustrated in fig 15, when compared with other participant groups, only 43 pct. of participant without any relations and 69 pct. of the participant with an interest in Denmark had purchase experience with Danish food products. These numbers and fig. 15 illustrate a clear connection between travel and purchase decisions.

![Figure 15: Relation to Denmark & Purchase of Danish Food Products](image)

When participants were asked if ‘Danish origin’ had an impact on their evaluation of imported food products, a similar tendency was observed. For the participants with travel experience, 84 pct. responded that the Danish origin had an impact, while the percentage for the participants with no relations to Denmark was 25 pct. (Appx. 2), as illustrated in fig. 16.
This observation may indicate that consumers with a relation to a COO (travel, know people, interest) tend to be attentive to products from the country, both in terms of purchase and evaluation, while consumers with no relation to a COO tend to show less attentive behaviour towards the country. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the connection between travel experience and the Japanese female consumers’ sense-making of Danish origin, eight interviewees who had visited Denmark were asked to speak about their experiences with Danish food. The interviewees were asked to reflect upon their evaluation behaviour both prior to and after their visit in Denmark, in order to fully understand how their travel experiences affected their evaluation of food products with Danish origin.

**A Week of Danish Hotdogs: Haruka**

Haruka travelled to Denmark one year ago to visit her Japanese friend who was staying at a design school in Kolding as an exchange student. Before her visit in Denmark, she had never purchased any Danish food products, except for cheesecake made with Danish cream cheese. During her stay, she came to love the Danish hotdogs and found dairy products to be tastier than the products in Japan (Appx. 1). According to Haruka, she believes that her positive image of Danish food products became even more positive after her trip to Denmark, or as she expresses:

*I went on my travel with this positive image and it became even more positive.* (Haruka)

Before her trip, Haruka had not paid attention to food products with Danish origin, but after her travel she started to hold emotions towards Danish food products, i.e. feeling of peace and peace of mind, as she puts it:
I went, I ate, so I have this feeling of peace? It’s something I feel internally. It’s okay. I’ve seen it with my own eyes, not that I went to the production sites, but when I think about the country and the standards, then I do feel peace of mind. (Haruka)

For Haruka, the fact that she has seen the destination with her own eyes and the fact that she ate the foods at the destination provides her with a feeling of “peace of mind”. Furthermore, Haruka’s quote implies that the knowledge (e.g. about the country, standards) acquired in relation to her trip also influence the creation of the feeling of peace of mind. However, it can be argued that her newly acquired knowledge and emotions only influence her image of Denmark, as she does not mention any purchase of Danish food products in Japan. This may be because of the short duration of her stay or simply because of her lack of interest. Nevertheless, this example may demonstrate how travel experience creates both positive emotions and increased knowledge about a country, which then influences the consumer’s image of the country in a positive direction. Yet, these positive images may not necessarily lead to actual purchase of the products upon return to the home country. In the context of the halo/summary construct, it can be interpreted that Haruka’s initial nation image of Denmark was revised based on her travel experiences. Based on this, it can be argued that a consumer will most likely use his/her travel experience and travel purchase to revise the nation image of the destination, even though he/she has not purchased any products in the home country. Hence, a consumer may construct the nation image as a summary without actual purchase experience in the home country.

The Repeater Experience: Momoka

Momoka’s journey with Denmark started over 30 years ago, when she began working as an organist at the Danish church in Tokyo (Appx. 1). In this job, she made friends with Danes and started to gain interest for Denmark, which resulted in her taking Danish language lessons and going to Denmark 4 times (Appx. 1). For Momoka, her experiences in Denmark has created strong emotions and solid knowledge about the country, or as she puts it,

For me, I love Denmark so I know everything about it [Danish Food]. (Momoka)

In this quote, Momoka states an emotion of “love” for Denmark and implies that these emotions are the reason behind her extensive knowledge about Danish food. For Momoka, her travel experience
have not only created positive emotions towards the country, but her experiences and emotions have been transferred into actual believes about product attributes, or as she expresses it:

*It’s not because I’ve been observing statistics, but I know it’s safe. And then it’s of course tasty. I have a very favourable impression of Denmark; I’ve been there myself and I remember how everything was delicious.* (Momoka)

It can be argued that Momoka’s “favourable impression of Denmark” and the fact that she has “been there” herself, create strong emotions towards Denmark, that are transferred into believes about attributes (food safety, taste), hence using her emotions to make sense of Danish origin. Furthermore, Momoka’s strong emotions towards Denmark and Danish food products dominate her evaluation of food products with other origin, i.e. US, Australian and Japanese products, as she states,

*I went myself, so that’s why. In recent years, many people have started to avoid US meat or Australian meat, but for me, if there is a Danish option, I’ll definitely choose it.* (Momoka)

*I think if the choice is between Japanese [origin] and Danish [origin] (...) But I’m pretty sure that I’ll choose the Danish one, without doubting it.* (Momoka)

In the first quote, Momoka express how her travel experience has influenced her evaluation of food products from other countries, as she prefers the Danish option. In the second quote, Momoka acknowledges that she prefers food products with a Danish origin rather than products with a Japanese origin. These above quotes demonstrate how Momoka’s strong emotions towards Denmark not only lead to positive evaluation and actual purchase decision, but also an exclusion of products from other countries, including her home country. According to Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) such behaviour, where consumers hold affective emotions towards one specific country is called the “friends-effect”. Such consumers will buy products from the specific country, even though other products with other COO may offer better quality, price or taste (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001). The example with Momoka shows how continuous travel experiences can create strong emotions towards the country; these emotions furthermore have significant influence on how products from other COOs are evaluated. Hence, it can be interpreted that for some consumers with extensive travel experience (e.g. Momoka) in one specific country may tend to demonstrate the “friends-effect”, while other consumers with short stay travel experiences (e.g. Haruka) may not necessarily act upon their positive
images. The examples with Haruka and Momoka could imply that the more travel experience a consumer has in one specific country, the more he/she gets attached emotionally to the country, and the more he/she purchases imported products from the travel destination.

Tourism and Country-of-Origin

Both the quantitative observations in the questionnaire responses and the examples from the interviews (Haruka and Momoka) indicate how travel experiences affect how some Japanese female consumers make sense of Danish origin in their daily food evaluation. While the quantitative observations indicate the frequency of the tendency (86 pct. and 84 pct.), the qualitative interviews indicate how different degrees of emotional affections towards a COO have different influences on product evaluation and purchase.

The examples with Haruka and Momoka demonstrate how travel experiences are used, when revising the image and performance equity of a nation. It can be argued that both Haruka and Momoka use their familiarity with the country and product experience from their visits to make sense of imported Danish food products. As a result of continuous travel experiences in Denmark, Momoka has a much more extensive knowledge about Denmark. Consequently, Momoka’s emotions towards Denmark are much stronger than for Haruka, who only stayed in the country for a week. While Momoka’s affective emotions highly affects her willingness to purchase Danish food products in Japan, Haruka’s travel experience has mainly lead to a positive evaluation of Danish food products. Based on these observations, it can be argued that Momoka use travel experience as well as product familiarity and experience to revise her image of Denmark as a COO, while Haruka only use her travel experience to revise her image of Denmark. The multi-stage dynamic model (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001) only captures product familiarity- and experience. As it has been demonstrated that both country familiarity (interest) and travel experience are used as a summary in constructing a new and revised image of Denmark, it may be suggested to include these factors in the model.

The findings in this analysis show how travel experience change attitudes, images and emotions towards a COO. It is important to underline that the findings in this analysis show how travel experience change attitudes, images and emotions positively. Consequently, it can be interpreted that for some Japanese consumers and in most cases, tourism in Denmark has a positive impact on product evaluation after their return to the home country. Compared to countries like Egypt, where tourism is
a disadvantage for export activities (Dinnie, 2008), the findings of this analysis indicate that tourism may be an advantage for the Danish export of food products. Finally, the empirical findings in this section does emphasise the fact that more research within the area of ‘tourism and COO’ is needed in order to fully understand how tourism influence the evaluation of a COO (Elliot et al., 2011; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). Even though the results of Japanese female consumers and Danish origin has turned out be very positive, it would be highly interesting to examine other destinations that provide completely different travel experiences than Denmark. For instance, would Japanese female consumers with travel experience in China evaluate Chinese food products more positively, considering the animosity effects (Maheswaran et al., 2013) and the number of food scandals (Assmann, 2013; 2011)?
Making Sense of Danish Origin

This analysis has demonstrated various images, associations and emotions that 580 participants and 22 interviewees use to make sense of the phenomenon, *Danish origin*, when they evaluate retail food products in their daily lives. On a conceptual level, the analysis has shown how Japanese female consumers use both *performance-based images* and *emotion-based images* to make sense of Denmark as a COO for food products; consequently, both levels of images create the total nation equity of Denmark. Figure 17, illustrates all the different performance-based and emotion-based images that participants and interviewees use to make sense of Danish origin:

![Diagram of Danish Origin in Daily Food Evaluation]

Figure 17: Overview of the Findings (own creation)
Both the entire analysis and the above figure illustrate how emotion-based images dominate the sense-making process. It seems that participants and interviewees tend to use more emotion-based images than performance-based images, when making sense of Danish origin. The small variety and quantity of Danish products in the Japanese retail food market (Appx. 11) is most likely the explanation behind this tendency; if consumers do not have the opportunity to evaluate actual Danish food products, they will most likely try to use non-performance related images to make sense of the phenomena. Perhaps for other countries where Denmark has larger retail food export activities, the performance-based images may dominate emotion-based images? Nevertheless, in the context of Japanese female consumers, Danish origin and retail foods as a product category, it can be emphasised that emotion-based images play an important role for the sense-making process.

Emotion-based Images to Make Sense of Danish Origin
As it has been mentioned before, emotion equity has been identified as a neglected research area as the majority of previous COO research has drawn attention to performance equity (Maheswaran et al., 2013). The findings in this analysis have demonstrated the importance of emotion equity in COO research. Even though contextual factors (Denmark as the COO, Japan as a market) may reinforce the tendency even more, it is a still noteworthy observation that may be found in similar cultural contexts, e.g. Norway as the COO and Korea as a market. As it is a neglected area of research, there are few studies that indicate how emotion equity is created. According to Maheswaran et al. (2013) emotional factors such as political, military, religious, historical or cultural factors facilitate emotion equity. However, in this analysis only political and cultural factor have been proven to exist. Based on this analysis, several factors can be added to the listing of influential factors in emotion equity, i.e. geography (Northern Europe, Nature/Land use and Climate), interest, travel experience (in the COO as well as neighbouring countries), and finally, lack of images/emotions.

Sense-Making as a Circumstantial Process
This analysis furthermore shows how emotion equity and performance equity influence each other. The participants and interviewees use their performance-based images and emotion-based images simultaneously, when making sense of Danish origin. More specific, factors such as product experience, country knowledge, interest and travel experience highly influence the image(s) that a consumer uses to make sense of a COO. Hence, it can be argued that the sense-making process is circumstantial and differs from consumer to consumer (Maheswaran et al., 2013; Niss, 1994), as the sense-making process highly depends on the individual experiences. The multi-stage dynamic model of halo-
summary construct (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001) can be criticized for simplifying the COO effects (country image and purchase decision). The model does not account for consumers, who purchase Danish food products despite the lack of country images and brand attitudes, or consumers, who revise their country image of Denmark without product experience or product familiarity. Finally, the model does not account for any non-product related factors that influence country image, e.g. travel experience, interest, ethnocentrism or other affective emotions. Based on this, it can be argued that it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop a model that captures all the nuances of consumers’ sense-making of a COO, as each consumer creates his/her own unique image of a country based on his/her unique life experiences and emotions.

**Made-in-Denmark**

Comparing the results of this analysis with the findings of previous research on Danish origin, some interesting observations can be made. According to Niss (1994; 1995), agricultural- and food products are one of the few product categories (design, environment), where the COO cue can be a competitive advantage. The findings of this analysis do not correspond directly with this finding, as food as a product category does not dominate the images of Denmark among participants and interviewees. Only design products, or “zakka” as a product category tend to dominate the images among participants and interviewees, supporting the findings of Okamura & Heiberg (2008) and Niss (1994; 1995). Even though images of ‘Danish/Scandinavian designs’ are used to make sense of food products (carry-over effect), participants and interviewees tend to have stronger associations to design as product category rather than food.
Chapter 5
Conclusion
Based on an analysis of questionnaire responses from 580 participants and interviews with 22 interviewees, it can be concluded that these Japanese female consumers use both performance-based images and emotion-based images to make sense of Danish origin, when they evaluate retail food products in their daily lives. Both types of images (performance/emotion) are used simultaneously and in interrelation with one another. However, the analysis does illustrate how emotion-based images tend to dominate the sense-making process. The current availability of Danish retail food products in Japan forces consumers to use their emotion-based images rather than performance-based images to make sense of Danish origin in the context of food evaluation. The sense-making process is furthermore circumstantial and based on each consumer’s unique life experience and emotions. Factors such as product familiarity, product experience, knowledge of the country, interest for the country and travel experience in the country influence how consumers make sense of Danish origin.

Using Performance-Based Images to Make Sense of Danish Origin

A few consumers do not think about food as a product category, when they make sense of Danish origin. In some cases, this leads to negative evaluations of Danish food products. However, the majority of participants/interviewees do use food product types (not specific brands or products) to make sense of Danish, i.e. dairy, pork and Danish pastry. The products are thought of in different ways: dairy for its authenticity, pork for its safety and quality and Danish pastry for its name. Hence, it can be concluded that performance-based images differ even within the same product category (food). Findings also indicate how consumers not only use imported Danish food products to make sense of Danish origin, but also use domestically produced, Danish-inspired products (i.e. Andersen Bakery and Fukushima Dairy) in the sense-making process. Some consumers furthermore believe that food products with Danish origin are rare; for some consumers, the rareness-dimension creates curiosity, quality-assurance and attraction, while for others, the rareness-dimension is the source of rejection. Some consumers tend to perceive Danish food products as being expensive, rationalising the high price using logical explanations such as rareness, transportation expenses, distance and quality. It can furthermore be concluded that food products with Danish origin are not an integrated part of some consumers’ daily lives. Because of the high prices and unfamiliar tastes, in most cases, consumers prefer to use it for special occasions, making it a luxurious purchase. Finally, positive associations towards Danish/Nordic “zakka” (design goods) are used to make sense of Danish food products, as many consumers assume that Danish food packaging are equally fashionable.
Using Emotion-Based Images to Make Sense of Danish Origin

Some Japanese female consumers do simply not make sense of Danish origin in their daily lives, because of a lack of images, knowledge and emotions towards Denmark. Many consumers make sense of Danish origin based on their perceptions of Northern Europe (hokuo). These consumers have difficulties distinguishing between the characteristics of Nordic countries, because Japanese opinion makers (book publishers, TV stations, retail stores) tend to present the countries as one entity. Findings furthermore indicate that consumers’ images of Denmark create emotions that affect the evaluation of retail food products. Images of nature (rich nature, wide spaces, care for nature) makes consumers believe that Danish food products are safe, tasty and good, while images of a cold climate also make consumers believe that foods are safe and tasty. Images of the political system (food safety & hygienic standards, stable political system, welfare system) make consumers believe that Denmark is reliable as a COO. National image such as welfare system, happiness, slow lifestyle and fairy tale appeal to some consumers, as they are create admirable emotions towards these images; however, these images do not directly create any believes about food products. Some Japanese female consumers also use their emotions towards their own country, Japan, to make sense of Danish origin. This is based on the fact that participants/intervieweees show ethnocentric emotions, e.g. preferences towards the taste of Japanese-produced foods, reliability towards the food safety of domestic products and desire to support domestic agricultural activities. The findings also indicate how Japanese female consumers with an interest in Denmark (initiated through anime and music) create strong emotions towards the country. These emotions have different degrees of positive influence on their evaluation of Danish food products. Finally, it can be concluded that travel experience in Denmark have a positive influence on Japanese female consumers’ sense-making of Danish origin in the context of food evaluation. However, the analysis also indicate that different characteristics of travels (duration, number of visits) influence the degree of emotions to Denmark; the more travel experience consumers have in Denmark, the more emotionally attached she gets to the country and the more positive she evaluates Danish food products. Hence, it can be concluded that tourism in Denmark may be an advantage for Danish export of food products.

Theoretical Contribution and Implications for Future Research

Responses to the research question have been provided in the above sections. However, this thesis has also contributed with new theoretical knowledge. Because of the scope of this thesis, not every
single literature within the concept of Country-of-Origin have been reviewed, therefore, it should be acknowledged that these theoretical contributions are only based on the researchers’ judgements.

First of all, previous research in COO (Pappu et al., 2005; Niss; 1994; 1995; Hooley et al, 1988; Nagashima, 1970; 1977) tends to analyse the effect of COO across product categories. However, the findings of this thesis show how consumers tend to make sense of product types differently (dairy, pork and pastry) even within the same product category (food). These findings show how a generalisation of a product category may mislead research. Secondly, the findings show how consumers use domestically produced products (Andersen Bakery, Fukushima Dairy, Hetalia) to make sense of a foreign COO. Hence, these findings indicate how the notion of COO not only points towards imported products from foreign countries, but also foreign-inspired domestically produced products. Third, as Japanese female consumers tend to use rareness as a cue in evaluating Danish food products, it should be considered to be included as a cue in future research. Fourth, product evaluation cues (price, quality, taste, context) tend to influence and be influenced by the COO cue; hence, future multicue studies may find it interesting to examine the interrelations of these cues. Fifth, as Japanese female consumers tend to use the region (Northern Europe) to make sense of the country (Denmark), the existence of a Region-of-Origin should be considered. Sixth, geography as a factor (land use, climate) should be considered as an influencing factor in emotion equity, in line with political, military, religious, historical and cultural factors. Seventh, the findings of this thesis indicate how cultural phenomena (nihonjin-ron, obsession with safety) influence ethnocentrism. Finally, this thesis demonstrates how consumers’ interests and travel experiences in a COO highly influences product evaluation and purchase. These findings emphasises the need for further research, examining the links between tourism and COO effects.
Chapter 6
Reflection
Mission “thesis” has now been accomplished; but has it been accomplished in the best possible manner? In this final chapter, I will look back at the entire research process and reflect on various research limitations, weaknesses and evaluate trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln et al., 2011; Hirschman, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Questionnaire for Qualitative Data Collection**

The intention with relying on open-ended questions in the questionnaire was primarily to collect data that represents participants’ own associations, interpretation of events, understandings and feelings (Byrne, 2012; Schiffman et al., 2008), rather than the researchers’ pre-fixed categories of responses (Neuman, 2006). After the analysis-process, it has been acknowledged that collecting ‘qualitative’ content from questionnaire perhaps is not more useful than simply conducting qualitative interviews. The responses I received from the interviews turned out to be a much more in-depth and detailed data set, which made me select responses from the interviews rather than the questionnaire in the analysis situation. However, the quantitative data in the questionnaire set turned out to be very useful as the data could support the qualitative data from the interviews. Hence, it can be argued that qualitative interviews serves much better as a method for generating qualitative data. Retrospectively, it would have been the most optimal solution to focus more on generating quantitative data, still without comprising on bringing forward participants’ multiple realities, e.g. by using qualitative content analysis methods and convert the qualitative responses (to open-ended questions) to quantifiable data (Brbich, 2013; Krippendorff, 2013).

**Bias in Interaction: Sampling, Gatekeeper and Politeness**

Despite the effort of including several questions, asking participants and interviewees about their negative images, attitudes and emotions towards Denmark and Danish origin, the majority of the findings have turned out to be positive, in the sense that Danish origin is presented as a positive COO throughout most of the findings. This observation requires some critical reflection. First of all, the sampling of participants/interviewees may be the main reason behind the positive responses. The existing positive attitudes towards the country have most likely created a bias for these participants/interviewees. Second, using the Royal Danish Embassy in Tokyo as the gatekeeper and communicator may have made participants/interviewees reluctant to respond negatively to the questions; they may have felt that it would be too offensive to reveal their negative attitudes. And finally, as politeness is an important custom in Japan (Hagrian, 2011; Clausen, 2010), some
participants/interviewee may have felt that it was inappropriate to mention negative attitudes and
opinions. Conversely, the possibility that participants/interviewees mostly had positive things to say
about Danish origin does also exist. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide an answer to the above
speculative scenarios. However, it should be acknowledged that the dominance of positive responses
should be seen as a weakness for this study, if the first two scenarios (sampling and Embassy) have
found place.

Evaluation of a Constructivist Research

In this final section, this thesis is evaluation based on the evaluation criteria in humanistic inquiry,
credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln et al., 2011; Hirschman, 1985;
Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility is concerned with the researchers’ ability to adequately represent the original multiple
constructions of the subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a humanist, I trust that the participants and
interviewees have been honest about their opinions, images and emotions that they shared with me
(Hirschman, 1986). Yet, my interpretations and choice of themes can be critically questioned. The
optimal solution would have been to submit my interpretations to the participants/interviewees (ibid.)
and seek their approval for its authenticity. Because of the time scope of this thesis, this has not been
completed, making it a weakness in the constructivist inquiry.

As mentioned previously, the intention with this thesis is not to generalise findings, hence concerning
the transferability of the thesis, it should be acknowledged that the findings only represent the
multiple realities of the participants/interviewees in the data set, even though other Japanese female
consumers may be likely to hold similar images, opinions and emotions. As detailed descriptions of this
inquiry have been provided, it is up to the reader to determine if and how the findings can be
transferred into and are acceptable in a different context (Hirschman, 1985).

Dependability is concerned with the evaluation of the “instruments” used in inquiry, in this case the
researcher, while confirmability is concerned with the judgment of superior auditors (Hirschman,
1985). Both criteria can be reached by the including multiple researchers in the inquiry: dependability
by the use of multiple investigators and confirmability by the use of a superior researcher (professor)
(Lincoln et al., 2011; Hirschman, 1985). Even though several people (fellow students, supervisor) have
followed the inquiry process, none of these are familiar with the data, making it impossible for these auditors to evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of my interpretations (Hirschman, 1985). However, transparency about the methods used, theories applied and the different interpretations should compensate for some of the loss, even though using multiple investigators and including more auditors would have been the optimal choice to increase dependability and conformability (ibid.).
References


Hesse-Biber, Sharlene (2010). *Qualitative Approaches to Mixed Methods Practice*. Qualitative Inquiry, Vol. 16(6), pp.455-468


Appendices
Overview of Appendices

Pamphlet: Overview of Participants and Interviewees

Appendix 1-16 can be found on the attached CD

1. Matrix (Interviews)
2. Graphs from Quantitative Data
3. Matrix (Questionnaire)
4. Questionnaire English
5. Questionnaire Japanese
6. Questionnaire Theoretical
7. Interview guide English/Japanese
8. Interview guide Theoretical
9. Data from Questionnaire
   a. Images of Danish Food
   b. Plus Impact
   c. Negative Impact
   d. Suggestions for future marketing
   e. Images of Denmark
   f. Relation to Denmark
   g. Background Information
10. Recordings of Interviews
    a. Yui
    b. Rio
    c. Yuna
    d. Hina
    e. Koharu
    f. Anna
11. Recording of Interview with Katja Goodhew
12. Pamphlet: Overview of Participants and Interviewees
13. Informed Consent
14. Summaries of Interviews
15. Aktuelle politiske og økonomiske forhold (confidential)