

Cross-Border Gatekeeper of Foreign Creative Industry Products: The Case of *Manga* (Japanese Comics) and *Sushi* in French Market

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Introduction

Needless to say, selling creative industry products in foreign markets is not easy. Exporter/importer always faces the gaps between two countries due to cultural, institutional (administrative), geographical, and economic barriers (Ghemawat 2007). To fill those gaps, exporter/importer of creative industry products needs to take various measures, including an adaptation to the local markets. Recent research has identified that there are key players, namely cross-border gatekeepers (CBGs), who function to better adapt foreign creative industry products to the local markets (Matsui, Uehara, and Washida 2014). However, there has been no research that explains the specific roles played by these CBGs. Hence, this paper aims to fill the gap in literature by clarifying the CBGs' roles. Based on the case study of two successful cases, *manga* (Japanese comic books) and *sushi* in France, we propose conceptual framework of CBG's roles in exporting creative industry products.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

To understand the roles of CBGs, we adopt the theory from sociology of culture, which has dealt with the production of creative industry products (cultural products in their terms). Hirsch (1972) defines cultural products as nonmaterial goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than a clear utilitarian function. He proposes theoretical frameworks to explain how cultural products are produced by many stakeholders. He highlights the role of gatekeepers, who are part of the "throughput sector," organizations that filter

information and materials for consumers. The throughput sector invests entrepreneurial capital into the creations of affiliated organizations and individuals at input (production) and output (marketing) boundaries (Hirsch 1972).

Hirsch's (1972) framework only covers the domestic market of cultural products; however, Matsui et al. (2014) expand the framework to a global level. They define CBGs as intermediate players who prompt export or import of cultural industry products by overcoming various gaps arising from cultural differences. Still, we do not yet know how these CBGs function to better adapt foreign creative industry products to the local markets. Thus, we raise two questions. First, what kind of people/organizations takes these roles? Second, what kind of roles do CBGs play? To explore these questions, we have conducted case studies.

Case Selection and Method

We selected two successful cases of Japanese creative industry product export: *manga* and *sushi* in French market. There are two reasons for this case selection. First, we chose France as a research site because it is culturally different from Japan (Hofstede 2001). If the gaps between two countries are big, CBGs should have a critical role in the adaptation of foreign creative industry products. Second, France is one of the major countries to accept Japanese creative industry products. For example, France is one of the biggest *manga* importers in the world: although French population is only one fifth of that of the United States, the *manga* market size is almost same in the two countries. Another example is *sushi*, which is very popular in France. We can find more than one thousand *sushi* restaurants in Paris and *sushi* is one of the popular menus.

Data was collected through expert interviews and field visits. As for *manga*, we conducted interviews with ten major publishers that publish *mangas* in France. One of the authors also visited Japan Expo, the largest exhibition for Japanese creative industry

products in Europe. As for *sushi*, we conducted interviews with the food critic, *sushi* restaurant owner and exporter of Japanese food ingredients. Also, we visited various kinds of Japanese restaurants in Paris.

Findings

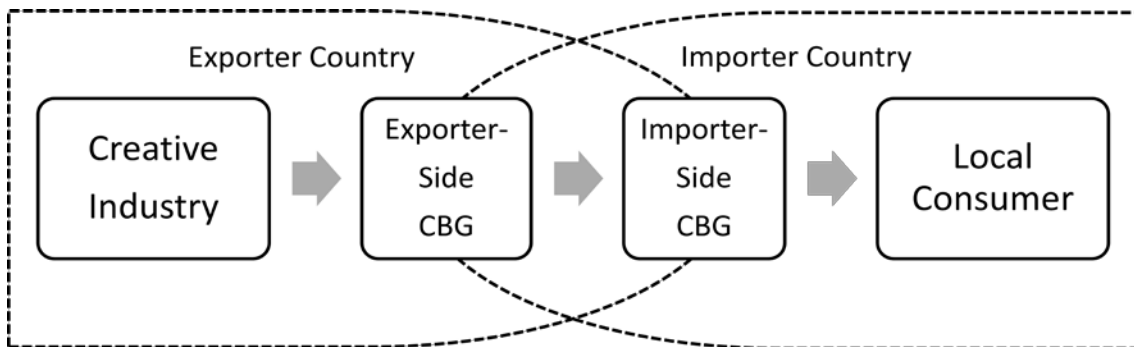
The answers to the two questions are as follows. First, the CBGs of *manga* and *sushi* in France were not Japanese (i.e., the exporter). French *manga* market was created by French and Belgian publishers since the 1980s. Young French people with an experience of studying abroad in Japan established new publishers. Japanese publishers did not invest any resources to cultivate the market; they entered the market only after 2009. Similarly, the CBGs of *sushi* were not Japanese. Most of *sushi* restaurants in Paris were owned by Chinese. Both the young French people establishing new *manga* publishers and Chinese people running *sushi* restaurants had a good understanding of French consumers.

Second, the major role of CBG was to achieve the ‘optimal’ localization of creative industry products. If the products are adapted too much, their attractiveness could disappear. Understanding this optimal adaptation (i.e., adapt what and to what extent) is critical to succeed in exporting/importing creative industry products. As for *manga*, the French publishers selected titles that would be popular among French readers. Some of the titles included those that were not necessarily popular in Japan. Moreover, the CBGs understood what was NOT acceptable in the market (e.g., titles that contain religious themes). As for *sushi*, the CBGs focused more on the image than taste or authenticity. The taste of French *sushi* is not as tasty as the one in Japan. In fact, many French consumers agree that *sushi* is tasteless. However, they do not care about it. Rather, they like *sushi* because they believe that it is a low-calorie, healthy food.

Furthermore, French consumers do not care whether the *sushi* was cooked by Japanese or not.

Conclusion and Discussion

The first finding suggests that CBGs are positioned between the creative industry in the exporter country and local consumers in the importer country, as is shown in Figure 1. The CBGs of *manga* and *sushi* in French market are at the importer-side. They understand the local consumers' demand better than the exporter-side CBG; hence, they could achieve the optimal adaptation. Often, the governments put emphasis on the exporter-side CBG (e.g., Japan's "Cool Japan" policy). However, our study suggests that the government should support *importer*-side CBG as well.



Remarks: CBG means "cross-border gatekeeper."
The arrow indicates the flow of creative industry products.

Figure 1: Cross-Border Gatekeeping of Creative Industry Products

The second finding suggests that CBGs do not have to completely fill the gaps between exporter and importer country. In fact, one of the reasons why local consumers prefer foreign creative industry products is their uniqueness. Hence, the products need to attain some cultural aspects. The cultural gaps in foreign creative industry products could have other positive effects such as influencing their counterpart products in the

local market. For example, *manga*'s drawing and storytelling style had considerable influence on *bande dessinée* (French traditional comics). The minimalism of *sushi* affected French food culture (e.g., nouvelle cuisine). Through such interactions between two country's creative industry products, new culture could emerge. CBG may have an important role in facilitating the emergence of new culture.

This paper, which is a part of the large project on the global marketing of creative industry products, shed light on the roles of CBG, which is not yet emphasized in the global marketing literature. However, the theoretical insights gained from this case study need to be checked by other cases and larger dataset. This should be considered as one of the future research directions.

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