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The Implementation of Indirect *Omotenashi* in Airline Passenger Service in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Omotenashi is a uniquely Japanese form of hospitality that emphasises sincerity, attention to detail, and the ability to anticipate customers' needs. In the aviation sector, particularly in airport passenger services, omotenashi has traditionally been expressed through direct interactions between staff and passengers. However, social and operational changes in Japan, such as the phenomenon of Kōreika Shakai (an ageing society) and the increasing adoption of automation technologies, have led to the emergence of a form of service known as indirect omotenashi. This study aims to examine the implementation of indirect omotenashi in passenger services at Japanese international airports. The study employs a qualitative approach using participant observation and in-depth interviews as data collection methods. Data were collected from September 2025 to March 2026 as part of the researcher's internship period at a major international aviation hub in Japan and analysed through triangulation by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and relevant literature. The research findings indicate that indirect omotenashi is manifested through the design of service facilities, information systems, and operational procedures capable of anticipating passengers' needs without always requiring direct interaction with staff, such as the provision of multilingual self-check-in kiosks, self-baggage-tagging systems, visual guides regarding the departure process, and operational coordination among staff behind the passengers. However, despite the increasing use of technology, staff remain essential for assisting passengers who encounter difficulties with self-service systems.

Keywords: *Omotenashi, Indirect Omotenashi, Passenger Services, Japanese Airports*

INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan's aviation industry has undergone significant changes in service systems at international airports. The implementation of *Omotenashi*, a symbol of Japan's unique service culture, no longer relies solely on direct interactions between staff and passengers, but also involves service systems and environments designed to ensure the comfort of service users. Direct service in the aviation sector has also undergone significant changes due to the increasing need to minimise human contact, as well as Japan's experience with the phenomenon of *Kōreika Shakai* (an ageing society), in which the proportion of elderly people continues to increase while the younger population declines.

This phenomenon has undoubtedly affected sectors that require large workforces, leading many of them to use machine technology as a substitute for workers. Advances in automation technology, such as self-check-in machines and Self Baggage Tag (SBT) systems, along with the growing number of international tourists, have shifted service delivery from a human-

centred approach to a technology-centred approach. Therefore, this phenomenon highlights the need for the study of the forms and functions of indirect hospitality in the hospitality sector to ensure that Japan's distinctive values of hospitality are preserved amid the modernisation and globalisation of services.

Conceptually, Japan's hospitality or *omotenashi* can be defined as a service that anticipates guests' needs and fulfils them with sincerity, creating comfort and satisfaction (Nagao & Umemuro, 2012; Rosliana, 2018; Osaki, 2020; Wijayanti & Saifudin, 2021). Furthermore, *omotenashi* is also understood as an effort to provide a positive experience through the service provider's full attention and sincerity toward the service recipient, so that guests feel valued (Morishita & Kosaka, 2017; Chairunnisa, Roosiani, & Puspitasari, 2022; Sato, 2025). Based on these definitions, *omotenashi* can be understood as a Japanese work culture that emphasises sincerity in providing service, without expecting any reward beyond guest satisfaction and a positive experience.

Omotenashi is practised as a team effort, with front-of-house and back-of-house staff collaborating to ensure seamless service across all departments. The primary goal is not merely transactional, but to build long-term relationships based on trust, sincerity, and memorable service that fosters customer loyalty (Aishima, 2019; Morishita, 2021; Sari & Kastuti, 2023; Chen, 2025). In practice, *omotenashi* is manifested through nonverbal communication, attention to detail, and the staff's ability to anticipate customers' needs before they are asked. The staff members are trained through observation and repetition. This approach ensures that every guest receives service tailored to their individual needs. This indicates that *omotenashi* reflects the sincerity and attentiveness of service providers (Al-Alsheikh & Sato, 2015; Carreón et al., 2021)

There are three main elements of *omotenashi*: *Shitsurai (しつらい), Furumai (ふるまい),* and *Shikake (しかけ)* (Al-Alsheikh, 2014; Leingpibul et al., 2025). Moreover, Al-Alsheikh (2014) explained in detail that *Shitsurai* refers to the preparation of the physical environment and service atmosphere, including cleanliness, spatial arrangement, and the readiness of facilities to ensure guest comfort. *Furumai* refers to staff behaviour and etiquette, including attentiveness, empathy, and the ability to anticipate guests' needs. Meanwhile, *Shikake* pertains to the mechanisms and service processes designed to ensure guests have a positive experience from arrival through the end of service. These three elements form a crucial framework for understanding the practice of *omotenashi* in the context of Japanese international airports.

Furthermore, *omotenashi* in practice is divided into two categories: direct and indirect (Miyai & Nishio, 2018). Additionally, Miyai & Nishio (2018) clarified in detail that Direct *omotenashi* refers to service that is provided directly and involves human interaction, such as verbal attention, conversation, and staff assistance on the day of the event. Conversely, Indirect *omotenashi* refers to service practices, such as facilities and systems designed to anticipate customer needs, including comprehensive information boards, multilingual service guides, and a clear service workflow. The characteristic of indirect *omotenashi* lies more in anticipating what customers are likely to need while using the service (Miyai & Nishio, 2018). These results provide a theoretical basis for the notion that *omotenashi* is present not only in direct service but also through organizational planning and the service environment (indirect service).

In Japanese aviation services, the application of *omotenashi* involves four key factors that influence customers' perceptions of its quality: reliability, interaction, manners, and character (Manabu et al., 2021). Furthermore, Manabu et al. (2021) explain that reliability refers to staff's ability to provide clear, accurate, and easily understandable explanations to customers. An example of this is airport staff clearly explaining boarding procedures, directions to the gate, or flight information so that passengers feel assisted. Interaction is the ability of staff to respond to customers through appropriate communication and actions actively. Examples include

airport staff answering passengers' questions, assisting those who appear confused in the airport area, or adapting their communication style to the customer's situation—such as speaking slowly to older customers or using simpler language for younger customers. Manners refer to how staff express service through polite behavior, body language, and service etiquette. This includes how they speak, their gestures, facial expressions, and their respectful attitude toward customers. Examples include how staff greet passengers and how they use formal language during the service process. Character refers to the impression of service provided by staff, such as friendliness, and the service atmosphere experienced by customers. Examples include staff who smile, empathize with passengers, and create an atmosphere that makes customers feel comfortable during the service process. These results confirm that *omotenashi* in the aviation sector is a combination of direct service through verbal interaction and service that supports customer comfort.

In addition, Airlines' services are not limited to passenger services in the terminal area. During flight operations, cabin crew on board also apply the principle of *omotenashi* through direct interaction with passengers throughout the journey. This form of service is evident in the cabin crew's attention to passengers' well-being and their ability to adapt their communication style to meet each passenger's individual needs. This service practice, which involves direct interaction between staff and passengers, can be understood as a form of direct *omotenashi* within the context of airline service (Miyuki, 2022)

Although the concept of *omotenashi* has been extensively studied across various service sectors in Japan, most previous studies have focused on interpersonal interactions between staff and customers, including those occurring in aviation passenger services. In particular, the study by Manabu et al. (2021) highlighted factors such as reliability, interaction, manners, and character in aviation services, focusing on the staff's ability to provide direct service to passengers. Similarly, Miyuki (2022) showed that the practice of *omotenashi* in the aviation industry is largely manifested through interactions between cabin crew and passengers during flights.

On the other hand, the development of self-service technology at airports indicates that the passenger experience is no longer determined solely by direct interaction with staff, but also by the design of service systems, digital facilities, and the organization of operational workflows within the airport environment. However, research on self-service technology at airports has primarily focused on adoption, user satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Simarmata et al., 2025; Tyagi & Lodewijks, 2022). Despite the growing adoption of self-service technologies, existing literature has rarely engaged with service culture perspectives, particularly the concept of *omotenashi*. Consequently, there is a research gap between studies on *omotenashi* that focus on human interaction, studies on airport service technology that emphasize operational and technological aspects, and studies on indirect service forms that emphasize cultural aspects. In fact, there remains a limited body of research that specifically analyzes how *omotenashi* values are manifested through indirect service (indirect *omotenashi*).

In light of these research gaps, this study aims to examine how the concept of indirect *omotenashi* is implemented in passenger services at Japanese international airports. Particularly, this study examines how the values of *omotenashi* are manifested through:

1. airport service facility design (*shitsurai*); and
2. service operational mechanisms and procedures (shikake).

In this research, we did not examine the third pillar of *omotenashi*, namely *furumai*, because previous studies have defined it as the host's behavioral and interpersonal actions toward guests (Al-Alsheikh, 2014; Leingpibul et al., 2025) As *furumai* is manifested through direct interactions between service providers and customers, the present study instead focuses on the indirect dimensions of *omotenashi* represented by *shitsurai* and *shikake*.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using participant observation and in-depth interviews as data collection techniques. Participant observation was conducted by having the researcher directly engage in the passenger service environment at a Japanese international airport during an internship period, specifically during the check-in, boarding, and arrival processes. Data were collected from September 2025 to March 2026 as part of the researcher's internship period. Moreover, the informants for the in-depth interviews in this study were five airport staff members working in passenger handling, three Japanese and two Indonesians, who served as permanent staff in the major international Japanese airport's passenger handling operations.

All interviews were conducted in Japanese and subsequently translated into English by the researcher, who possesses Japanese language proficiency equivalent to JLPT levels N2–N1 (N1 being the highest level). To enhance the credibility of the findings, both the translations and the thematic interpretations were reviewed and cross-checked with the researcher's native Japanese-speaking supervisor, who is also proficient in English. These informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their responsibilities regarding airport facilities and service procedures. Data were collected through direct observation of service practices and in-depth interviews with airport staff based on the concepts of direct *omotenashi* and indirect *omotenashi* by Miyai & Nishio, (2018), as well as the concept of *omotenashi* by (Al-Alsheikh, 2014)

The research instruments included an observation sheet for documenting the service environment and staff behaviour, and a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore staff understanding and experiences regarding the application of *omotenashi* in passenger service. Both the observation sheet and the semi-structured interview guide were developed based on the concepts of direct *omotenashi* and indirect *omotenashi* proposed by Miyai & Nishio (2018), as well as passenger service procedures implemented at a major international airport in Japan serving both domestic and international passengers. For data collection, the researcher obtained approval from the internship supervisor to observe participants and obtained consent from interview informants after explaining the purpose, process, and methods of data collection, the informants' roles, and their right to refuse or withdraw from participation. In addition, the confidentiality of company data, airport security, and the personal identities of the informants were also secured on behalf of research ethics.

Furthermore, the data obtained were analysed qualitatively using triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and relevant literature reviews. The analysis focused on examining the forms of *omotenashi* application in passenger services at Japanese international airports, particularly indirect *omotenashi* in service practices. Subsequently, the discussion of the research findings was linked to the concepts of *omotenashi* and indirect *omotenashi*, which served as the study's framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of Indirect *Omotenashi* in Facilities (*Shitsurai*)

1. The Availability of Language Options at the Check-In Kiosk

The availability of language options on self-service check-in kiosks is one of the services provided to passengers at the major international Airport in Japan. On the check-in kiosk shown in Figure 1, passengers can select their preferred language before beginning the boarding pass printing process. Observation data reveal that the check-in machine offers five language options: Japanese, English, Korean, Mandarin (Simplified Chinese), and Traditional Chinese.

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Figure 1. Check-in Kiosk with Multilingual Capabilities

Based on the in-depth interview, the staff stated

「お客様は韓国と中国と台北からけっこいっぱい来るので、日本語もあまりできなくて、だからあの三つの言語が必要になります。英語はだいたい、ヨーロッパとアメリカからの人ができますし、大丈夫。」

"Since most of the passengers are from East Asia (Korea, China, Taiwan) and don't speak Japanese, those three languages are the main languages used besides English. (Informant X2)

This interview finding is consistent with JNTO (2026) statistics, which indicate that 73.6% of tourists visiting Japan come from East Asia, including Korea, China, and Taiwan. In addition, information from in-depth interviews' result explains the reasons for offering those five languages:

「。。。タイペイのインターがありますので、なんか中国語が必要になります。お客様はだいたいそこから。。。.」

"…. Since we also have international operations in Taipei (Taiwan), Mandarin (Simplified Chinese) is quite important. We also have many customers from there……" (Informant X1)

Findings on the provision of five language options at check-in kiosks indicate that the implementation of *omotenashi* depends not only on interpersonal interactions but also on service system designs that accommodate user diversity. At Japanese international airports that receive many tourists from East Asia, the provision of Japanese, English, Korean, Mandarin (Simplified Chinese), and Traditional Chinese language options reflects proactive efforts to meet the communication needs of international passengers.

2. Availability of Check-In Procedure Flowchart

Figure 2. Check-In Procedure Flowchart

In the airport lobby, three informational banners are arranged in sequence and numbered 1, 2, and 3 to explain the passenger departure process. On the sign shown in Figure 2, passengers can view the information and follow the instructions to complete their check-in process. The data from in-depth interviews explain why these posters were provided:

「お客様がどこに行くとわかるように。」

"So that customers know where to go." (Informant X2)

Providing banners that display the check-in procedure sequence demonstrates that the arrangement of visual information is a crucial component in creating a service experience that passengers can easily understand. The sequential placement of banners allows passengers to intuitively grasp the stages of the departure process without needing to ask staff for assistance.

3. Check-in Wait Time Settings

Figure 3. Poster with Check-in Wait Times

At the airport self-service check-in kiosks, the system is configured to allow tickets to be printed only within a specific time frame before departure. Based on observation results, the check-in machines can only issue boarding passes starting 90 minutes before departure time. If a passenger attempts to check in before that time, the machine will issue a receipt with an error message and display a message on the screen stating that tickets can only be printed 90 minutes before departure. Furthermore, near the counter area, there is an informational poster stating that check-in time for flights is between 30 and 90 minutes before departure (shown in Figure 3). This information is provided to help passengers understand when to check in, so they can complete departure procedures without delays.

The findings above are consistent with the interview data, which explain the rationale for providing this poster:

「時々は遅れたお客様がこの譲歩がわかりませんって言われました。そいうことはならないように、システムはワーニング見たいな情報をあげます。そして、お年寄りのお客様はウェブがあまりわからなくて、だからチラシを入口にあります。」

"Sometimes, many late customers say they were not informed (about the check-in cutoff time) and go to the counter. To prevent this from happening again, the system displays a small warning if a customer checks in too early or too late. Also, since older passengers often are not very familiar with the website, small flyers are posted at the entrance" (Informant X3)

The timing settings on the check-in machines and the provision of informational posters regarding check-in deadlines demonstrate how the airport's operational mechanisms are designed to support the smooth flow of service. A system that allows boarding passes to be

printed only within a specific time window helps ensure the departure process proceeds on schedule.

4. Final Steps of the Check-In Process

Figure 4. Settings on the Self Baggage Tag (SBT) Machine

The Self Baggage Tag (SBT) machines, displayed in Figure 4, used for printing baggage tags independently offer five language options for passengers to choose from: Japanese, English, Korean, Mandarin (Simplified Chinese), and Traditional Chinese. These language options make it easier for international passengers to understand the machine's instructions. After a passenger finish using the machine, airport staff will immediately reset the machine's language settings to the initial screen, which is the language selection menu. After the system is reset manually, the next passenger can immediately select a language they understand before using the machine.

Additionally, data from in-depth interviews explain the reasons why this facility is provided:

「外国人のかたは機械の使い方があまりわからなくて、言語オプションがあればもっとわかりやすいになります。」

"Many people from other countries are not familiar with how to use the machine. So if they're given a language selection option, it will be much easier for them to understand." (Informant X2)

The provision of language options on self-service baggage-tagging machines and the system's reset by staff after use indicate that the design of service technology at the airport is intended to facilitate passengers' independent use of the facilities. Providing language options allows international passengers to understand the machine's instructions without encountering language barriers.

Implementation of Indirect *Omotenashi* in Procedures (*Shikake*)

1. The Procedures for Providing Buses to the Waiting Area

If the aircraft is not parked directly at the boarding gate, passengers will be transported to the aircraft by an airport-provided bus. Based on observations, before the boarding process begins, staff stationed at the gate first confirm the number of passengers to be transported with the bus service provider.

In-depth interviews with staff also highlight the importance of the bus provision procedure, as illustrated by the following data:

「バスはね、限られています. お客様の情報が必要になりますので。一バスは５０ぐらいできるので。たとえば、１５０のお客様だったら２－３バスができる。もし満席だったら３－

４バスができる。そして、もし車いすを使っているお客様があれば、人数もかわりますので。たとえば１５０にんだけど一人はくるまいすなので、PBLをつかって。そいう見たいね。」

"Since each bus has a specific capacity, we need to know how many people will be boarding so we can estimate how many buses are needed. For example, if one bus can carry only 50 passengers, then 2–3 buses are needed to transport 150 people. If the trip is a full-flight, 3-4 buses will be required. It must also be confirmed whether any of the 150 passengers have special needs or use wheelchairs so that accommodations can be made. This is because wheelchair users require a PBL (Passenger Boarding Lift)." (Informant X3)

Based on the interview results, this information is used to determine how many buses are needed so that all passengers can be transported to the aircraft smoothly without waiting too long. This coordination occurs before passengers are directed to the buses, ensuring the transfer from the terminal to the aircraft proceeds efficiently.

2. Self-baggage tag procedure

Every piece of luggage that has been tagged must be rechecked by staff to ensure that the tag is securely attached and not loose. Staff must also check whether any old tags or tags from previous flights are still attached to the suitcase. If an old tag is found, it must be removed immediately to avoid interfering with the baggage scanning process during the sorting stage. This inspection is conducted to ensure that each piece of baggage can be correctly identified throughout the baggage handling process until it reaches its destination.

In-depth interviews with staff members also highlight the importance of checking Self-Baggage Tags (SBT) on passenger luggage, as indicated in the following data:

「だいたいルールなんですけれども、なんかね、タグがナイスーツケースそのまま流しちゃったあったよ。それはまったく大変なので、誰のスーツケース分からないし。だからタグを必ず押し付けください。」

"There have been instances where tags came loose, making it impossible to identify the luggage. This posed a safety hazard and caused problems, leading to the implementation of a regulation requiring SBT tags to be securely fastened to prevent such incidents from happening again." (Informant X1)

「ベルトはね、もし２－３便の出発だったら大変ですので。タグでどことどちらの便を描いてますので、ソーティングの所は間違いようになります」

"This ensures the tags don't come off while on the conveyor belt. There can be 2–3 flights per hour with different destinations. This makes it easier for the sorting staff to sort and load the luggage according to its destination." (Informant X2)

3. Procedures for Assisting Passengers with Special Needs

If a passenger is seen wearing a Help Mark Badge but declines assistance from staff, the staff will still record important information such as the passenger's name and seat number. This information is then relayed to the gate supervisor and to the flight attendants on the relevant flight. This information is recorded and relayed as a precautionary measure in case the passenger suddenly needs assistance or experiences a specific health condition during the flight, so that the cabin crew can immediately provide appropriate care.

In-depth interviews with staff revealed key reasons underlying the necessity of these precautionary procedures, as reflected in the following data.

「ヘルプマークのお客様はね、きっと、対処しなければならない病気や何かあるに違いない。確認したあとは、ゲートの係んさんは何かお手伝う下とか何かが必要とかがわかるになります。もし、お客様が薬をのむのが必要だったら、ゲートの係んさんはCAの人に声をかけができる。そいうことです。」

"Passengers with a Help Mark likely have a medical condition or other special needs. Once staff have verified this, the agents at the departure gate will be informed of any specific needs the passenger may have or whether the passenger requires assistance. For example, if a passenger needs to take medication, the agents at the departure gate can notify the flight attendants so that the passenger can be assisted." (Informant X4)

「もし断りだったら、お客様の座席番号とお名前で社員さんだけのウェブにお伝えて、そのあとは説明して。〇〇名前のお客様がヘルプマークございましたが大丈夫って言われました。そのあとはCAさんたちと行先の空港でのスタッフさんがお客様の具合わかりますようになります。もし、お客様の具合いきなり悪くなったら、お手伝うができます。」

"If the passenger declines, the staff must look up their seat number and name. This information is then entered into a staff-only website, with a note indicating that the passenger has a help mark but does not require assistance. Once this information is uploaded, flight attendants and staff at the destination airport will be aware of the passenger's situation. If, for example, the passenger suddenly becomes ill, they can be provided with the appropriate assistance." (Informant X5)

4. Procedure for Checking Baggage with the Ground Handling Department

Before departure, each gate supervisor (*tantō*) must confirm the details with the ground-handling staff assigned to the baggage sorting area. During this confirmation process, the supervisor will provide information on the total number of bags, the number of departing passengers, the number of passengers who have cancelled their trip, and details about passengers with special needs, such as passengers who use wheelchairs or carrying specific items. This information is used by staff in the sorting area to arrange baggage so that baggage belonging to passengers with special needs can be placed in the right order that allows it to be unloaded first upon arrival.

In-depth interviews with staff revealed key reasons why these verification procedures are necessary, as indicated in the following data:

「システムはスーツケースの額は取ってます。で、ソーティング人とICも額は取ってますので、システムとソーティングとICも皆は確認して、額は正解かどうか必要です。ミスマッチがあれば、早めに確認してます。たとえば、システムで６０スーツケースですがソーティングの所が６４スーツケースがあれば、その四つのスーツケースはどこから来たか早めに探してます。横持からとか、遅れたのお客様とか、それを確認して、で飛行機が出発できます。Pbagと Special Handlingのスーツケースは自分のタグがありますので、必ず最後の横持ちになります。」

"The system records the total number, after which the sorting staff and the In-Charge must verify that the data matches the system's records. If a discrepancy occurs, it must be resolved immediately. For example, if the system shows 60 bags but there are actually 64 at the sorting area, the source of the 4 extra bags must be identified, whether they belong to a late passenger or are designated as *Yokomochi* (oversized baggage such as; snowboards, surfboards, wheelchairs, and golf bags, which are too large to be loaded onto the conveyor belt.) This must be confirmed immediately to ensure all customers' luggage is definitely loaded into the cargo hold and that it departs. Pbag (Priority Bag or the Bag of those who are flying with Priority Plan. Equal First Class on other airlines) or Special Handling also has its own tags and must be loaded last so they are unloaded first at the destination airport." (Informant X3)

5. Procedures for Handling Items Left on the Aircraft

If any items are left behind on the aircraft, the cabin crew will hand them over to the person in charge of the flight's arrival. The cabin crew must also provide information regarding the row and seat number where the item was found. Next, the person in charge will take the item to the arrivals lobby and record important information, such as the item type, flight number, and a description of the item found. If no passenger claims the item by the end of the arrival process, it will be taken to the main office and placed in a special storage box. A list of lost items is maintained in a system accessible to all staff (open access), so that if a passenger files a claim for a lost item, the staff member on duty can immediately verify the claim without contacting the staff member who first found the item.

In-depth interviews with staff revealed key reasons why this procedure is necessary, as outlined in the following data:

「そうですね、お忘れ物の場合はちょっと違います。もし、お客様が見つかりましたら、そのお客様に確認して。例えば、お客様の座席バン後とかお忘れ物の特徴とか。正解だったら、お迎えします。で、見つからないの場合はお忘れ物フォームで書いて。そのあとは社員さんだけ

のウェブで書きます、。最後はお忘れ物は曜日ボックスにはいります。そのボックスはOICにあげます。OICからの人はそのお忘れ物をキープします。そうしましたら、お客様がお忘れ物をクレームを欲しいしたら、皆はすぐわかるになります。」

"If an item is left behind, the procedure is slightly different. For example, if you manage to locate the passenger, you must ask detailed questions and confirm whether the item truly belongs to them. You must verify the seat number and the specific characteristics of the left-behind item. If the information matches what was provided, the item can be returned. But if, for example, you don't meet the passenger at all, then the item must be recorded on a special form. After that, the item's type, model, and color will be posted on a staff-only website. Finally, the item is stored in a Yobi Box for transport to the Main Office. The item will be stored at the Main Office, so that if a customer wants to claim a lost item, all staff will be aware of it." (Informant X4)

Discussions

The findings indicate that various self-service facilities implemented at the airport, including multilingual interfaces, visual guidance systems, informational posters, and automated machine settings, reflect the concept of *shitsurai* within the *omotenashi* framework. *Shitsurai* refers to the arrangement of the service environment to create customer comfort and convenience before direct interaction occurs (Al-Alsheikh, 2014; Leingpibul et al., 2025). Through these facilities, passengers are able to access information independently, understand operational procedures, and navigate the service process with reduced uncertainty.

Furthermore, these practices demonstrate the characteristics of indirect *omotenashi*, whereby customer needs are anticipated through the design of systems and facilities *rather* than direct interpersonal interaction (Miyai & Nishio, 2018). By providing multilingual support, clear visual information, warning systems, and user-friendly service designs, the airport seeks to accommodate diverse passenger needs while maintaining operational efficiency. The findings suggest that *omotenashi* can be embedded not only in human interaction but also in service technologies and physical environments that support a seamless customer experience. This highlights how indirect *omotenashi* enables airports to extend Japanese hospitality principles within increasingly digitalised service settings.

Second, the findings reveal that *omotenashi* in Japanese airport passenger services is not only implemented through the arrangement of physical service environments (*shitsurai*), but also through operational systems and coordination mechanisms categorised as *shikake*. The findings demonstrate how service providers anticipate passengers' needs through backstage processes, information management, and interdepartmental coordination that support service continuity, safety, and efficiency.

The findings indicate that various operational practices, including baggage verification procedures, staff coordination regarding passengers with special needs, baggage sorting verification, and lost-and-found management systems, can be understood as forms of *shikake* within the concept of *omotenashi*. *Shikake* refers to the establishment of systems and procedures designed to facilitate the smooth delivery of services (Al-Alsheikh, 2014; Leingpibul et al., 2025). In this study, these mechanisms function as operational support systems that help prevent service disruptions and ensure that passengers receive a seamless travel experience.

Furthermore, these findings reflect the characteristics of indirect *omotenashi*, in which customer needs are anticipated through organisational systems and operational arrangements rather than direct interpersonal interactions (Miyai & Nishio, 2018). Although passengers are often unaware of these backstage processes, they play a crucial role in ensuring operational efficiency, safety, and service continuity. For example, baggage verification procedures help prevent baggage mishandling, coordination among staff enables continuous support for passengers with special needs, and lost-and-found systems facilitate the prompt return of passengers' belongings. These mechanisms demonstrate how *omotenashi* can be embedded within service systems that proactively address customer needs before service problems occur (Nagao & Umemuro, 2012; Osaki, 2020)

The findings also suggest that contemporary airport services increasingly integrate technology, information management, and interdepartmental coordination into the practice of *omotenashi*. Rather than relying solely on direct interactions between staff and passengers, hospitality is also realized through operational procedures and organizational systems that support seamless service delivery. Consequently, *shikake* serves as an important mechanism through which indirect *omotenashi* is operationalized in modern airport environments, ensuring passenger comfort, safety, and convenience throughout the service experience.

Collectively, the research findings indicate that the practice of *omotenashi* in passenger services at Japanese airports is increasingly integrating service technology and operational system design. Specifically, facilities such as multilingual self-check-in kiosks, self-baggage-tagging systems, and visual guides for the departure process, constitute forms of indirect *omotenashi* that anticipate passengers' needs without always requiring direct interaction with staff.

The results expand our understanding of *omotenashi*, which has traditionally been more closely associated with interpersonal interactions between staff and customers. As noted by Manabu et al. (2021), the quality of *omotenashi* service is often measured by factors such as communication and staff interactions with customers. However, the results of this study indicate that the value of *omotenashi* can also be realized through the design of intuitive and informative service systems.

Despite this, observations indicate that the implementation of self-service technology has not yet fully replaced staff roles in airport services. Some passengers still require assistance when using check-in kiosks or self-service baggage tagging machines. This suggests that in complex service environments such as airports, technology and human interaction remain complementary. For this reason, the practice of *omotenashi* in passenger services at Japanese airports can be understood as a combination of direct and indirect *omotenashi*, in which a systematically designed service system supports staff in delivering a comfortable, efficient service experience for passengers.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the *omotenashi* concept in passenger service in Japan are practised not only through direct interactions between staff and passengers but also through service systems designed to anticipate users' needs. This form of service can be understood as "indirect *omotenashi*", that is, hospitality practices implemented through facility design, operational procedures, and technology that make it easier for passengers to use airport services.

Research findings indicate that indirect *omotenashi* is evident in various aspects of airport services, such as multilingual self-check-in kiosks, self-baggage-tagging systems, clear visual guides for the departure process, and systematic operational coordination among airport staff. These systems enable passengers to receive efficient and comfortable service without always having to rely on direct interaction with staff.

Furthermore, the adoption of these technology-based service systems is also linked to changing social conditions in Japan, including the phenomenon of *Kōreika Shakai*, which has led to a decline in the working-age population. Even so, staff remain essential in assisting passengers who encounter difficulties using self-service options. As a result, the practice of *omotenashi* in passenger services in Japan is evolving toward a service model that integrates technology with human interaction to maintain service quality and passenger comfort.

This study makes a theoretical contribution to the development of research based on *omotenashi* in the context of modern service, which is becoming increasingly digitized. The results indicate that *omotenashi* is manifested not only through direct interactions between staff and customers but also through service systems systematically designed to anticipate user

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needs. Thus, the concept of indirect *omotenashi* can be understood as an adaptation of Japanese service culture to technological advancements and changes in social structures.

In practice, the findings of this study indicate that integrating self-service technology with staff support can enhance operational efficiency without compromising service quality. In the context of airport passenger services in Japan, implementing facilities such as multilingual self-check-in kiosks, self-baggage-tagging systems, and systematic visual guides can streamline the passenger service process. These service systems reflect the practice of indirect *omotenashi*, allowing passengers to enjoy a comfortable service experience even when direct interaction with staff is relatively limited.

However, this study also has several limitations that should be noted. First, the study was conducted within the context of passenger service environments at specific Japanese airports; therefore, the findings cannot be fully generalized to all airports in Japan or to aviation service contexts in other countries. Second, the research data were obtained through participant observation and interviews during an internship period; consequently, the scope of observation was limited to operational situations that occurred during that period. Third, this study focuses more on the service provider's perspective and thus has not thoroughly examined passengers' perceptions as service users regarding the implemented practices of indirect *omotenashi*.

Given these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the scope by involving several international airports in Japan to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of indirect *omotenashi* in airport service. In addition, future research could examine passengers' experiences and perceptions of technology-based service systems to understand the extent to which indirect *omotenashi* is experienced by service users.

Comparative research on airport services in Japan and other countries is also important for examining how culturally based service values, such as *omotenashi*, are adapted within the context of an increasingly digitized global service landscape and in the face of demographic changes, such as the phenomenon of *Kōreika Shakai.*

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